Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Thursday 27 August 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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Thursday 27 August 2026

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

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Notices given.

Petitions

Architects Registration Board of Victoria

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) presented a petition bearing 1879 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that the Government has proposed to absorb the Architects Registration Board of Victoria (ARBV) – the statutory authority responsible for registering and regulating architects – into a licensing body under the Business Licensing Authority (BLA). If the ARBV is not retained as a distinct entity and its functions are absorbed into a Business and Professions Regulator, it would effectively abolish the ARBV and risk negative consequences under current legislation in Victoria and nationally. The ARBV maintains the register of architects, sets and enforces standards, investigates complaints, and supports consumer protection. It is self-funded through registration fees and does not draw on the government budget. Petitioners are concerned that abolishing the Board would remove independent, profession-specific oversight and may reduce transparency, accountability and public confidence in regulation in Victoria. There are concerns this change could affect architects' ability to practise interstate or overseas, an important export for Victoria. It may also impact architectural education and the future workforce. Victoria produces ~43% of Australia's Master of Architecture graduates across five accredited programs, including many international students. Misalignment with the national system risks uncertainty in recognition, mobility, registration, and accreditation.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly 1. Oppose any legislation or administrative action that would abolish the Architects Registration Board of Victoria; 2. Ensure that any reform to the regulation of architects in Victoria retains independent, profession-specific oversight to protect consumers and maintain professional standards; 3. Ensure that any reform does not impact Exports of Services overseas and interstate; 4. Ensure that any reforms do not impact the education sector and future workforce.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

West Gippsland Hospital

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) presented a petition bearing 932 signatures:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the state of the West Gippsland Hospital and call on the Victorian Government to urgently commit to the planning, funding and construction of a new West Gippsland Hospital.

We believe the people of West Gippsland deserve access to a modern hospital that is safe, fit for purpose and capable of meeting the growing needs of our community now and into the future. The current hospital facilities are under increasing pressure due to population growth, ageing infrastructure, increasing demand for health services and the need to provide appropriate care close to home.

A new Hospital would;

- Provide improved access to essential health services for residents.
- Support emergency care, medical services and specialist treatment.
- Provide a safer and more suitable environment for patients, families and healthcare workers.
- Support the recruitment and retention of skilled health professionals.
- Ensure West Gippsland has healthcare facilities that match the needs of our growing region.

Many residents currently face long travel distances to access services that should be available locally. Delays in providing a new hospital risks placing further pressure on patients, families and healthcare workers.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Mirboo North-Trafalgar Road

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) presented a petition bearing 646 signatures:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the state of the Mirboo North-Trafalgar Road and that the area known as the "Thorpdale slip" continues to worsen due to a lack of investment in a permanent solution. The area is subject to constant movement which is pushing the critical road down the hill. Consequently, VicRoads are constantly required to rebuild the road using gravel and temporary solutions. This is a dangerous area for local road users, school buses, heavy vehicles and primary production vehicles that have no alternative route through the area. Thorpdale and the surrounding area is one of the most important primary production areas in our state with more than 70 per cent of brushed potatoes being transported through the area annually. The failure to permanently repair and upgrade this section of road is placing countless Victorians at risk every day.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the Government to take immediate action by providing funding to deliver a permanent infrastructure solution to the area known as the "Thorpdale slip" on the Mirboo North-Trafalgar Road to ensure safety for road users and the local community.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Mirboo North-Trafalgar Road

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) presented a petition bearing 59 signatures:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the state of the Mirboo North-Trafalgar Road and that the area known as the "Thorpdale slip" continues to worsen due to a lack of investment in a permanent solution.

The area is subject to constant movement which is pushing the critical road down the hill. Consequently, VicRoads are constantly required to rebuild the road using gravel and temporary solutions. This is a dangerous area for local road users, school buses, heavy vehicles and primary production vehicles that have no alternative route through the area.

Thorpdale and the surrounding area is one of the most important primary production areas in our state with more than 70 per cent of brushed potatoes being transported through the area annually. The failure to permanently repair and upgrade this section of road is placing countless Victorians at risk every day.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the Government to take immediate action to provide funding to deliver a permanent infrastructure solution to ensure safety for road users and the local community.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

The SPEAKER (09:36): General business, notices of motion 1, 8, 9 and 74 to 76, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Gender Equality Act 2020:

Review of the operation of the Act under s 52

State Gender Equality Action Plan – Progress Report August 2023 to August 2025

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission – Report from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2024 to the Minister under s 17B of the *Firearms Act 1996* – Ordered to be published

Statutory Rule 115 under the *Building Act 1993*

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 111, 112, 115.

Motions

Motions by leave

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that Zomi Frankcom was an Australian delivering aid in Gaza when she was followed by and murdered by an Israeli drone missile, notes that Australia has done nothing to hold Israel to account for this murder of an Australian and calls on the government to join with other countries in a proper independent investigation –

Leave refused.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that last week the Israel Defense Forces cleared themselves of any wrongdoing for the murder of Zomi Frankcom –

Leave refused.

Members statements

Health system

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Education, Minister for Skills and Training, Minister for First Peoples, Minister for Women and Gender Equality) (09:38): Since coming to government, Labor has made record investment in health care to ensure that families in Melbourne's south-east can access the services that they need closer to home. We have already opened Australia's first heart hospital in the south-east, and works will soon commence on a redevelopment of Dandenong Hospital, which will deliver nine new operating theatres, a 16-bed intensive care unit and an upgraded day surgery admission space, among other things. This redevelopment will mean shorter wait times, more treatment capacity and access to high-quality care when and where people need it most. The new facilities will also improve working environments for our healthcare workers and create additional frontline healthcare jobs.

Only Labor governments invest in the services that Victorians rely on. Labor has rolled out the mental health and wellbeing locals to support Victorians through their toughest times. Urgent care clinics are operating across the state, including in Dandenong, making it easier for families to get care in non-emergency situations and for free. Smile Squad has been expanded, and now we are making sure that all Victorians can access the dental care they need for free through a commitment to 10 free dental clinics. You will never see Jess Wilson and her Liberal–One Nation coalition building or opening new hospitals. They will sell them off, they will sack workers and they will cut funding to health services, as they have always done. My community cannot afford that, and that is why Labor will keep fighting for working people.

The SPEAKER: I remind members about correct titles in the chamber.

Protective services officers

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:40): What happens when you take PSOs off train stations? Surprise, surprise, crime goes up. Only a Wilson Liberal–National government will reintroduce PSOs on all train stations, including those in Glenhuntly, Ormond and Ripponlea, to ensure commuters are safe.

Kilvington Grammar School

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:40): It was a great pleasure to join parents and friends at Kilvington Grammar – I am wearing the Kilvington Grammar tie today – supporting 30 years of their early learning centre. It was a great tribute to the Swann family. Frederick Swann moved to Ormond and bought a house there to ensure that his two children could go to that school and many years later sold the family house to the school, and it then became the early learning centre. To see Victoria and Janine at the school on the 30-year celebration was a real tribute. It is a great school. One of the things I particularly like about the school is that grade 5 kids are mentoring those in the early learning centre, which is setting those kids up for life. It is a model that we should see in all schools. Thank you to principal Rob French and to Lyn Pewtress, who is the early learning centre head and who many call Lyn the lunch lady.

State election

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:41): Unlike Labor, we have preselected some great candidates going into this election to ensure we get the fresh start that Victorians deserve.

Warringal Private Hospital

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy, Minister for Major Events, Minister for Medical Research, Minister for Racing, Minister for Economic Development) (09:41): Happy 50th birthday to Warringal Private Hospital. I was pleased to join them at the 50th anniversary, because at the heart of that celebration was a brand new, purpose-built, 16-bay emergency department in Heidelberg, the centrepiece of Warringal's $198 million redevelopment. It has been designed to care for adults and children alike, with dedicated paediatric treatment bays, fast-track areas for less complex cases, resuscitation rooms, acute treatment bays and an isolation room. It is backed by the full strength of this wonderful hospital and its specialised medical, surgical, intensive care and diagnostic services. This all means patients can move seamlessly into care if they need to be admitted. Walk-in patients are already welcome at Warringal Private Hospital. The ambulance arrivals will begin from next month. It is up and running. The department is expected to care for some 19,000 patients every year. That is a phenomenal number. Not only that, it means jobs – around 30 nursing roles and a number of support positions, adding to a Warringal workforce that is already close to 1000-strong.

Ivanhoe electorate health services

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy, Minister for Major Events, Minister for Medical Research, Minister for Racing, Minister for Economic Development) (09:42): We know that across the north-eastern suburbs our combination of the Austin Hospital, the Mercy Hospital for Women in Heidelberg, Warringal Private Hospital and of course the Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Centre means we have got a massive medical precinct for the north-east. It employs many people, it cares for many people and it is also boosted by a $275 million investment in the new Austin Hospital emergency department. That construction is underway. It will see an extra 30,000 people treated at the ED every year.

Mildura basketball

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (09:43): In Mildura we put food on your plate and champions on racetracks, as I have said dozens of times in this place. On the weekend, the King Construction Mildura Heat division 2 men were crowned Big V champions in an absolute thriller – on an away court, I might add. Nowhere during the game, to be honest, did it look like we were going anywhere near winning, until the last few minutes, winning by one point – the best possible way – and we did it on the home court of the Sherbrooke Suns. As a huge supporter of Mildura basketball and self-appointed president of the Jack Saunders fan club, I want to send a huge congrats to Jack, Taz, AT, Taiga, Dru, Noah, Lachie, Jye, Will, Riley, the coaches, the volunteers, the families and everyone at the Mildura Basketball Association who made it possible.

Blake Schlein

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (09:43): Then there is Blake. At just 12 years old, Blake Schlein has become a world champion on two wheels, winning the SGP4 world championship in Sweden last month. And today he turns 13. Happy birthday, Blake. Not many kids can say they have entered their teenage years already with a world championship under their belt. He is a legend of a kid too. We know that keeping kids on the straight and narrow is made a lot easier when you get them involved in motorsport, because they have to go and get a job to pay for it and that is where all their money goes. Imagine what we could do if we got our fair share in Mildura; that is what the Nationals will guarantee. With our fair share of education funding we could win mathletics championships. With our fair share of infrastructure funding we could finally build that Mildura motorplex and keep putting world champions on track.

Madelene and Sean Rich

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (09:44): I want to acknowledge Madelene Rich and her son Sean, whom I have known for many years. I first met Sean as a student at the Nepean School in Seaford, and it has been a privilege to watch him grow into an incredible young man. Sean has CHARGE syndrome, a rare genetic condition affecting hearing, vision and development. For babies with CHARGE, life often begins in neonatal intensive care surrounded by unfamiliar medical procedures, without the ability to hear a reassuring voice or see a familiar face. Madelene has spoken powerfully about how terrifying this is and how simple changes like touch cues and extra communication time make health care predictable and comforting. This is not just about babies; over 100,000 Australians live with deafblindness. Madelene, alongside CHARGE Syndrome Australia, Able Australia, Deafblind Australia and Vision Australia, is calling for a national standard of care for deafblind patients, starting from the very beginning of life in our NICUs and continuing through every stage. Thank you, Madelene, for turning your experience as a mother into fierce advocacy. And Sean, you are such a wonderful reminder of why this work matters. Everyone deserves to be seen, heard and supported, especially when they are at their most vulnerable.

Jordan Kinniburgh

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (09:45): I also want to give a big shout-out to local constituent Jordan Kinniburgh. He is just finishing his first children's book *Jordan's Big Goal*, inspired by his own disability and his father. Well done, Jordan.

Suburban Rail Loop

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:46): We all know that everyone in Victoria, including us, never likes a new tax. We all do not like a new tax, but what we especially do not like is a new secret tax, one that is sneakily put through that the community do not get told about to fund a project that we know that a government, maybe Labor, have actually decided to go through with when they know that it is going to be so over budget. They thought to themselves, 'How are we going to get some more money out of this? How are we going to get the money out of the Victorian people? You know what we'll do? We'll go to the people in Warrnambool, who'll probably never use suburban rail, and we'll increase their train fares. We'll cut their services as well, because we can probably save some money there. We'll go up to the people in Shepparton and we'll say to them, "We're going to actually take some money off you as well. We're going to get a little bit out of your pocket to put into the Suburban Rail Loop."' They are even coming out into areas in Casey and Cardinia and saying to them, 'We're going to take a bit of money out of your pocket.' Up in Wyndham and all the areas that are not getting the electrified rail – the ones that are not getting the extensions on the things that have been promised in the future, like Mildura, which does not have it at all – they are having to pay now a new tax. What is worse is that the Deputy Premier came out today and said, 'I didn't speak about it, because I didn't know it was a secret.' How could you not know it was a secret? The Premier of this state signed off on a new tax –

John Pesutto: Because she only leaks.

Brad BATTIN: That is right. They signed off on a new tax to make sure that Victorians had to pay more, but the only thing she forgot to sign was the media release, and let us be honest, Labor is best at media releases to hide things.

Brimbank Tech School

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Minister for Small and Family Business, Minister for Veterans) (09:47): I recently walked through the new Brimbank Tech School in Sunny North, and what a fantastic facility – over $13 million invested from the Carroll Labor government. This incredible facility ensures students from every secondary college in Brimbank have access to hands-on training for the jobs of the future.

St Albans electorate community safety

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Minister for Small and Family Business, Minister for Veterans) (09:48): On another matter, I recently hosted my second round table with the St Albans traders. We had the opportunity of listening to local businesses, which is why we have announced more PSOs to patrol St Albans station and of course the business district, alongside community connectors providing real support and real action in St Albans. Thank you to the mayor of Brimbank City Council Virginia Tachos for attending and hearing firsthand how Brimbank council can access the $10 million local safety infrastructure fund.

Quang Minh Temple

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Minister for Small and Family Business, Minister for Veterans) (09:48): Also on Sunday 23 August I was honoured to join thousands of families at Quang Minh Temple. Only a re-elected Carroll Labor government will invest $4 million in Quang Minh Temple, a temple that is more than just a temple, providing opportunity and support for the wider community.

Klabb Ghannejja Maltin

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Minister for Small and Family Business, Minister for Veterans) (09:48): On another matter, happy 25 years to Klabb Ghannejja Maltin Maltese club, under the leadership of George Aquilina and his committee – 25 years, going strong. Thank you again for the support and the vital input you have in our community.

Naloxone dispensing machines

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (09:49): Under pressure from the mayor of Yarra Stephen Jolly, this Labor government has abandoned its plans for a life-saving naloxone dispensing machine on Victoria Street in Richmond. This medication reverses the effects of opioid overdose. It does not facilitate drug use, it is non-addictive, it is suitable for people of all ages and it cannot be misused. It is literally like having a defibrillator on the street, and this decision of the Yarra mayor and the Labor government will literally see people die. Victoria Street was one of the government's 10 proposed sites around Melbourne based on the data and showing a high existing need for this life-saving medication. But in June the Yarra mayor wrote to the government requesting that a machine not be placed on Victoria Street. Now, due to this request, the Labor government is abandoning its plans for Victoria Street dispensing machines. Essential services should not be decided on politics; they should be decided on evidence. It is deeply concerning that Yarra mayor Stephen Jolly would use his position to stand in the way yet again of drug harm minimisation. We need more harm minimisation initiatives across the state, including medically supervised injecting rooms and more naloxone dispensing machines, not less.

RDA Victoria

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations) (09:50): I rise today to recognise the wonderful work of the Bundoora Park Riding for the Disabled centre and particularly its president Jenny Field. It was lovely to recently meet with Jenny and hear about the incredible work she and the team are doing to support riders, families, carers and volunteers in the community. Jenny has been involved with RDA Victoria for 25 years, since her son first started riding, and has been a part of the Bundoora Park RDA since its beginning almost 20 years ago. She has volunteered at the centre for more than 16 years and is now president. While president is her official role, Jenny does so much more: supporting riders and volunteers, connecting with families in the community and simply being there to make sure the centre continues to thrive.

The centre is supported by more than 25 dedicated volunteers, who help with everything from horse care to administration, horse welfare and occupational health and safety. Their coach Brittany has also been with the centre for seven years, beginning her journey as a volunteer. What really stood out to me when speaking with Jenny was the sense of community at Bundoora Park RDA. Volunteers find it incredibly rewarding, riders build friendships and confidence and families get to see their loved ones enjoying an activity that provides both physical and cognitive benefits. It is clear that Jenny and the entire team have created a welcoming and supportive place for so many people. It was a pleasure to meet with Jenny and hear about the passion and dedication that makes Bundoora Park Riding for the Disabled such a special part of our local community.

Government performance

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (09:51): The Victorian Labor government's latest $230 million announcement has all the hallmarks of a big, desperate promise before an election. Labor calls it free dental, but nobody believes it is free. Victorian taxpayers will be paying a $230 million bill for it. After more than a decade of Labor, people in South-West Coast are already facing dental waitlists of more than three years, so before Labor promises dental care to every Victorian, there is a pretty basic question: who is going to provide it? The Australian Dental Association has raised exactly that concern, warning that public dental without dentists could increase wait times significantly. The public dental system is only treating 15 per cent of the patients now. With the $230 million budget it has, Labor says it will establish 10 clinics – seven in Melbourne and three across regional Victoria – treating more than 100,000 people a year. That is impossible. It has not even said where these regional clinics will be.

South-West Coast has heard big promises from Labor before. We were promised a PET scanner – still not delivered. We were promised the Warrnambool Base Hospital redevelopment, only to see delays and what the community was promised cut back. Before the last election we also had the promise of the Commonwealth Games; we all know how that ended. Perhaps Labor is hoping for the tooth fairy to deliver the dentists as well, because after a decade of broken promises South-West Coast knows the difference between a Labor announcement and something getting delivered.

Women in sport

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Jobs, Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Defence Industry) (09:53): It has been a great few weeks for women in sport in my electorate. The Newport Power Netball Club recently announced that two players from their under-17 Vixens team have been selected for the state's top 25 under-17s squad. Congratulations to Amelie Connelly and Mieke Pretorius. It was also really exciting to see the under-14 Altona Junior Football Club girls and the under-16 Williamstown Juniors Football Club girls both take wins in the 2026 premiership grand finals just last weekend at Donald McLean Reserve – thanks to Spotswood football club for hosting. This weekend the Williamstown Football Club's women will close out the season, and a win will take them to the premiership. Good luck, women. Not so long ago girls who wanted to play sports often had no opportunity to grow. Now we have clubs and leagues – and grand finals – that our young girls represent. These spaces matter because they teach girls that

they belong on the field, that they can be strong and competitive and that they can take up space without apology.

Gendered violence

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Jobs, Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Defence Industry) (09:54): This week I joined the launch of Respect Victoria's coercive control campaign, to be released for the global 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence from 25 November. We were joined by Mitch Brown, who spoke about what it means for men to show courage, accountability and care – courage to speak up when something is not right and accountability for our own behaviour and that of our mates. Community clubs and elite players alike have a real part to play here in showing the next generation of men what respect looks like.

Suburban Rail Loop

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:55): During a cost-of-living crisis in Victoria, the Carroll Labor government has been caught out with yet another massive deception, this time fleecing public transport users to prop up its underfunded and overpriced Suburban Rail Loop. No matter where you live in Victoria and no matter what your income is, being fleeced by Labor hurts us all. At what stage can we expect an apology from Premier Carroll for keeping these secrets from hardworking Victorians? Labor's credibility was at an all-time low, and now they have stooped even lower by their standards. While families cannot afford their grocery bills in my communities, they are now being slugged to catch a train or a bus to seek basic services. Saying sorry would be a significant start. Stop deceiving Victorians.

Mental health system

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:55): Mental health support continues to be at the bottom of Labor's agenda. Throughout my communities in the Ovens Valley, we continue to be failed by the Carroll Labor government as revelations of suicide clusters exist. Mental health support has not been properly addressed, and Victorians are paying the price. This week marks 2000 days since the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System report was handed down, and still our farmers, our youth and our regional communities have been abandoned. Labor has admitted that the mental health system is broken in Victoria yet still refuses to support and properly fund our mental health needs. Labor has failed us again.

Victoria Police deaths

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:56): This week marks the one-year anniversary of the horrific Porepunkah incident where two brave Victoria Police officers were murdered. Full credit to both the Wangaratta and the Bright communities and surrounding communities who came together to honour their legacy. I attended both services to pay my respects and to show support to the families of both men. The memorials at Wangaratta and Bright police stations will ensure these men are never forgotten.

Vietnam Veterans Day

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Creative Industries) (09:56): Something incredible happens in our community every August – Lower Plenty Football & Netball Club hosts a Vietnam Veterans Day round honouring those who served in that very difficult war, those who came home and those who never will. The respect and warmth shown to our veterans on this day is extraordinary, and I thank Grant Barden, everyone at the Bears and the Montmorency Eltham RSL for their continued commitment to making sure this day is special. It is very moving to see veterans walk out onto the ground and have their hands shaken by every player and umpire while those watching applaud. The event began a number of years ago through Grant Barden's determination to support Vietnam veterans, and I thank him for making this game day such an annual institution, which will continue to grow in strength and popularity.

I also want to thank Montmorency Eltham RSL for their Vietnam veterans remembrance service with the Diamond Valley Vietnam Veterans, affectionately known in my community as the DViets. This year marks 60 years since the Battle of Long Tan, with 18 Australians killed and 24 wounded. We remember the more than 60,000 Australians who served in the Vietnam War and the 523 who never came home. To our Vietnam veterans, their families and all those who continue to honour their stories, I say thank you. To the Montmorency Eltham RSL, to their president Ash Graham and to their leadership and every volunteer and worker at the RSL I also offer my thanks. Every year they undertake these incredible, moving services, which show absolute respect to those who have served our country. Lest we forget.

Richard O'Toole

David HODGETT (Croydon) (09:58): Today I rise to acknowledge the outstanding contribution Richard O'Toole has made to the Australian Youth Band during his 20-plus years as musical director. On Sunday I once again had the privilege of seeing the Australian Youth Band in concert, an event I have been fortunate to enjoy on several occasions over the years. Richard was appointed the musical director in February 2005, with a clear vision to raise the band's profile in Melbourne, across Australia and on the international stage. Over 20 years later Richard has well and truly brought that vision to life. Under his direction the Australian Youth Band has built a strong international reputation, earning regular invitations to perform at festivals around the world. Its high standard of performance, professionalism and musicianship is a testament to Richard's energy, dedication and leadership.

Alongside his work with the band, Richard is also the instrumental music director at Yarra Hills Secondary College, where he teaches clarinet, saxophone, voice and piano and directs the college's ensembles. This year marks the final chapter of an extraordinary 45-year career in education, as he prepares to retire from teaching. Throughout his career Richard has made an enormous contribution to school and community music, inspiring generations of young musicians with his knowledge, enthusiasm and passion. As a teacher, conductor and musical director he has provided countless opportunities to perform, travel and be part of something special. Some of the standout highlights of Richard's career have been the Australian Youth Band's memorable performances in Shanghai and Penang, the Singapore Botanic Gardens concert and, most recently, its performances in Malaysia, where the band performed to an exceptional standard. I congratulate Richard on an extraordinary career in music and education.

Community safety

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit – Minister for Youth, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (09:59): As we know, crime and public safety are a growing concern, and the Carroll Labor government is taking real action to ensure that people feel safe in our community. Operation Pulse has put PSO patrols in shopping centres across Victoria. The results have been promising. Watergardens shopping centre, a major centre near my electorate, has seen a 73 per cent decrease in retail theft and a 50 per cent decrease in violent behaviour, and 84 per cent of people tell us that they feel safe in centres with PSOs around. Those figures are good news for shoppers and good news for local businesses. I will continue to advocate for expanding this to more places where safety is a concern. Based on expert advice, we are also recruiting an additional 200 police reservists to allow stations to be open longer and free up more frontline officers to be out on the beat. Labor's strong, practical action on crime contrasts with that of the Liberal–One Nation coalition, who like to talk a big game but use dodgy accounting to claim that they will spend more on fighting crime while also cutting $40 billion out of services to reduce it. This Labor government, the Carroll Labor government, is serious about fighting crime, and I will continue to push the government to do more to make our state a safer place to live, to work and to invest.

Epilepsy Foundation

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (10:00): Recently I visited the Epilepsy Foundation in Canterbury, led by CEO Nicole Coulthard and general manager of services and projects Bernadette Zappa. The

Epilepsy Foundation provides vital advice, training and education to people living with epilepsy and their families, helping them better understand and manage the condition. One in 25 Australians will experience epilepsy at some point in their lifetime. Epilepsy can happen to anyone at any time and not always in the way we might expect. It is important to know how to recognise a seizure and what to do when someone is experiencing one. I encourage all Victorians to support the important work of the Epilepsy Foundation, whether through a donation, supporting one of its op shops or helping raise awareness through their networks.

Camberwell Sunday market

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (10:01): The iconic Camberwell Sunday market is a much-loved and longstanding institution in my electorate. Every weekend it draws thousands of people from the local community, across Melbourne and beyond to Camberwell Junction, and this Sunday marks the 50th anniversary of the market's operation by the Rotary Club of Balwyn, with the support of other local rotary clubs. For five decades this market has housed hundreds of stalls for vendors to sell handmade items, vintage clothing, preloved goods, collectables and bric-a-brac. It has been a destination for social connection and friendship, and incredibly since 1976 it has raised more than $26 million for community and humanitarian causes. Congratulations to the Rotary Club of Balwyn and everyone involved who has made this such a fantastic local icon.

Allanah Collett and Prabhnoor Dhaliwal

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Victim Support, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Community Sport) (10:02): I would like to recognise two outstanding young people whose achievements reflect the talent, dedication and potential of our growing community.

Firstly, I congratulate Allanah Collett and GKR Karate Wallan on their exceptional success at the GKR Karate World Cup in England. Allanah delivered an outstanding performance, winning a gold medal and two silver medals, including a world championship title. Her achievement reflects an extraordinary level of dedication, perseverance and commitment to her sport. It is also a testament to the strong support provided by GKR Karate Wallan, whose coaches, volunteers and members continue to nurture local talent and create opportunities for young people to excel on the international stage.

I also wish to acknowledge Prabhnoor Dhaliwal from Mickleham Secondary College, who is undertaking work experience in my electorate office this week. During his placement Prabhnoor has demonstrated enthusiasm, professionalism and a genuine interest in learning about government, community engagement and public service. Prabhnoor has a strong interest in studying law at university after completing high school, and I have been impressed by his thoughtful approach and eagerness to learn.

Both Allanah and Prabhnoor have represented themselves in our community with distinction. I congratulate them on their achievements and wish them every success in their future endeavours.

Kalkallo electorate community

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Victim Support, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Community Sport) (10:03): Finally, thank you to Nikkie and Jimmie for hosting me at their house for some engaging discussions with local community members. Their passion for small business and supporting others in the community is always inspiring, and I look forward to continuing these chats.

Box Hill electorate sports clubs

Paul HAMER (Box Hill – Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (10:03): It is coming to the end of another local football and winter netball season, and I want to give a shout-out to a couple of great local clubs in the Box Hill electorate. Congratulations to the Whitehorse Pioneers netball team, which won the Eastern Football Netball League division 8 premiership with a decisive 31–16 victory over

Vermont last weekend. A special shout-out to Hannah Smart, who was named best on court. Congratulations, Hannah. I know the club's purpose-built training court at Springfield Park in Box Hill North, fully funded by our Labor government, has been pivotal to the success of the club and hopefully this is the start of many more successes. In the footy, the Pioneers under-19s division 3 team has moved past Rowville and will now face Upper Ferntree Gully in the preliminary final this weekend. Good luck to all involved. I recently visited the club to announce that it will receive training and safety equipment as part of the North East Link community grant to boost on-field performance, which I am sure will lead to more success in the future. Congratulations to the mighty Surrey Park Panthers football and netball teams for their fantastic seasons. The Surrey Black netball team are through to the division 2 grand final this Friday against Vermont, while their under-19s development men's and senior men's footy teams are through to the division 2 semi-finals. To have all three football teams play finals this year is an outstanding result given that it is only the second year that the club has been in division 2. Best luck to everyone.

Lachlan McLaren

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc – Minister for Local Government, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Renters) (10:05): I rise to recognise the life and legacy of Lachlan McLaren. Lachie was a 16-year-old boy when he was tragically killed on his birthday on 15 August 2021. A kind, caring and bright year 10 Mentone Grammar student and Parkdale Pacers basketballer, Lachie was a much-loved young person in our community. His final act of bravery, pushing his girlfriend out of the path of a car and saving her life, was extraordinary. His bravery was recognised posthumously with the Royal Humane Society of Australasia Gold Medal, awarded by the Governor of Victoria at Government House on 19 August. This medal is a special honour, giving recognition to someone who died while risking their life to save others, and only 35 people have been awarded this medal.

Lachlan's magnificent parents Michelle and Carey have done extraordinary work in the years since Lachlan's death, turning unimaginable grief into something positive for young people, with the establishment of the Lachlan McLaren Foundation. We get together each year for Lachie's Walk, continuing to bring the community together each and every year to support young people. We walked from Mentone Grammar to the Mentone foreshore with hundreds of people that loved Lachlan and were touched by his life and contribution, raising tens of thousands of dollars. I want to acknowledge Michelle, Carey, Lewis, Lachie's family and friends, and the work of the foundation. Lachie was only 16, but his courage will be remembered for a lifetime to come.

Friends of Hillcroft Park

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park) (10:06): On Sunday I joined the Friends of Hillcroft Park for their annual community planting day alongside Elizabeth Nealy, Labor's candidate for Mill Park. Since forming in February 2025, the group, led by president Kyoko Imazu, has met on the fourth Sunday of most months to restore indigenous habitat in South Morang. Forty-seven volunteers planted 440 indigenous grasses, wildflowers and shrubs. We also heard from Katrina Forstner of Buzz and Dig, who deepened our understanding of native pollinators and ran a bee hotel workshop. I was especially pleased to announce $30,000 from the Carroll Labor government for a community garden at Hillcroft Park and a further $30,000 for a second community garden at The Lakes Boulevard, South Morang. Both have been long advocated for by local communities, and I know we have some keen local gardeners who are eager to see them completed.

South Morang Scout Group

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park) (10:07): On Monday night I attended the South Morang Scout Group's annual report and presentation at The Lakes South Morang College. Scouting thrives there because of volunteers like group leader Nicole Black, treasurer Belinda Hooper and commissioner Tim Purdy, whose commitment I have seen firsthand. The group has more than doubled in size in the past year, helping more young people learn values like courage and resilience. Congratulations to the

South Morang Scouts on a successful year and to all the volunteers, parents and kids who made it possible.

Nepal and Tibet floods

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (10:08): The thoughts of the government are with the people of Nepal and Tibet during these deeply distressing times. We stand with you, and we also pass on our thoughts and prayers for those who are thinking about lost ones, both here in Australia –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The time for making statements has ended.

Bills

Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Gabrielle Williams:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (10:08): The Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026 arises from recommendations of the Apprenticeships Taskforce that this Labor government has sat on for two years. Now, in the second-last sitting week of the Parliament, this government is seeking to ram through massive and significant changes that run to 217 pages of amendments to Victoria's apprenticeship and traineeship system that have industry groups seriously concerned that this will only make it harder for apprentices and trainees to get a successful start. You do have to question why the government has waited until the second-last sitting week of the Parliament to debate such significant legislation, without proper scrutiny or proper community and industry consultation, especially when the main provisions of the bill are not due to commence for another three years, in 2029. The bill is only being rushed through now for political expediency rather than seeking to actually achieve better outcomes for apprentices and trainees.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the 55,000 Victorians who are currently undertaking an apprenticeship or traineeship. These young Victorians are essential to Victoria's economy and future growth. I would also like to acknowledge the some 35,000 Victorian employers who are providing opportunities for apprentices and trainees to learn a trade and receive invaluable on-the-job experience. Not only do we need to incentivise more young Victorians to take up an apprenticeship or traineeship, we need more employers who are willing to impart their experience and knowledge and help skill up the next generation of Victorians.

If we want Victoria to build more homes, manufacture more goods, support economic growth and increase exports to the world, we need a skilled workforce to do it. Yet this tired Labor government is failing to address the significant skills shortages in Victoria that are crippling industry and economic growth, and this bill will do nothing to improve that situation. Whilst we currently have 55,000 Victorians undertaking an apprenticeship or traineeship, this is nowhere near enough to meet the skills demands of the future. Back in 2022 we had 77,000 apprentices and trainees undertaking an apprenticeship. So in the space of four years the number of apprentices and trainees that are in training has plummeted by 22,000. That is a 28 per cent decline on the Labor government's watch.

Under Labor Victorian apprentices and trainee commencements have fallen to the lowest level in decades. The last National Centre for Vocational Education Research data shows trade apprenticeship commencements were down 11.8 per cent and non-trade commencements were down 20.8 per cent. There have been falling apprenticeship commencements across a range of important high-demand occupations, including plumbers, down 15.5 per cent; carpenters, down 16 per cent; sheet metal

workers, down 19 per cent; child care, down 23 per cent; and aged and disability carers, down 17 per cent. In 2025 Victoria only had 11,990 skilled trade apprentices complete their training compared to 14,445 in New South Wales and 13,265 in Queensland. These numbers tell a depressing story. At a time when Victoria is needing to build more homes and infrastructure, we need skilled workers more than ever. But the drastic decline in apprentices and trainees really highlights that for years this Labor government has had its priorities all wrong, resulting in a skills shortage crisis and economic decline. I fear the provisions in this bill will only add further to the decline of apprentice and trainee numbers by making it harder for employers to hire them.

This bill is a product of recommendations made by the Apprenticeships Taskforce. In July 2023 the Labor government established an Apprenticeships Taskforce at a cost of $1.5 million. The taskforce was led by Sharan Burrow, former president of the ACTU. The taskforce was given a broad remit to improve safety in workplaces across the state, ensuring more apprentices and trainees have a successful start to their careers and industry continues to support the apprenticeship and traineeship system. It was also suggested that the review was required in response to increasing evidence of harms to apprentices and trainees from bullying, harassment, unsafe workplaces and workplace fatalities.

Can I say at this point, to make it plain and unambiguous, the Victorian Liberals and Nationals will always support measures and reforms that improve the safety, training, quality and workplace culture of apprentices and trainees. The safety of our apprentices and trainees is paramount whilst undertaking their training. It is absolutely non-negotiable. We should do everything possible to make sure that apprentices and trainees are undertaking their training in safe and secure environments. Gone are the days where it was considered fair game to subject apprentices and trainees to practical jokes in the workplace. As many members in this place will know, some of these practical jokes resulted in tragic consequences. I cannot even imagine the sorrow and the pain that must have been suffered by the families of these poor workers, and I know that all members in this chamber would send them our collective condolences. No-one should be subjected to hostile work environments or degrading abuse or unsafe work environments. That has no place in our vocational education and training system. But regrettably, there is not a single measure contained in this bill that will have any direct effect in keeping apprentices and trainees safe.

Other than including objectives in the act about ensuring the health and safety of apprentices and trainees, which really goes without saying, none of the provisions in this bill have any direct connection to worker safety. The taskforce delivered its report to government in March 2024, with 16 recommendations and three supporting actions. In October 2024 the government announced it would support seven recommendations in full and support the remaining nine recommendations in principle. In its response the government said it would undertake further consultation before acting on recommendations. But from my discussions with various industry stakeholders, a majority of them were not consulted before this bill was introduced to Parliament two weeks ago, and some were only offered a briefing after they requested one of the department when they learned of the bill.

For over two years the government has had the taskforce's recommendations sitting on its desk, and only on the eve of a state election has it decided to do something, albeit half-baked. The two-year delay is emblematic of Labor's mismanagement, which has led to the decline in apprentice and trainee numbers and a skills workforce crisis on Labor's watch.

One of the principal reforms contained in the bill is the establishment of a new regulator to oversee the apprenticeship and traineeship system. In its report the Apprenticeships Taskforce recommended the government should:

> … establish a new regulator with a dedicated focus on apprenticeship, traineeship and VET-related regulation …

The taskforce went on to state:

> This would create a new body with a clear role and mandate to focus on safeguarding apprentices and trainees.

And the taskforce concluded by stating:

> … the Taskforce recommends this work commence immediately to ensure it is delivered within this term of government.

Those are pretty clear statements from the Apprenticeships Taskforce. Regrettably, they were not taken seriously by the Carroll Labor government, or even acted on. This last statement is most telling. The government failed to commence this work immediately and failed to deliver within this term of government. With its priority being the corrupt Big Build, the government failed to act on the Apprenticeships Taskforce's report for two years. Then at the end of its term it has thought, 'Oh, gosh, we're sort of running out of time; we might introduce a bill,' but it is only half-baked. It is embarrassing on the part of the Labor government and demonstrates how little respect Labor actually has for apprentices and trainees and the employers who hire them.

The government always likes to talk a big game about its reform agenda but always fails to deliver on the substance, which means people like apprentices and trainees suffer the most. But when you look at this bill, the government has even failed to establish the type of regulator that was recommended. The taskforce said the sector required 'a new regulator with a dedicated focus on apprenticeships and traineeships' – a direct quote. The government has completely ignored this recommendation and instead, without any real explanation or consultation, determined to transfer all responsibility for apprenticeships and traineeships to the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria. The workforce inspectorate is not a new regulator. It has in fact been around since 2020, when it used to be known as the Wage Inspectorate Victoria. The taskforce did not recommend the workforce inspectorate become the new regulator. Instead, the government has decided to cut corners and go with the cheap and nasty option of lumping our apprentices and trainees with a B-grade regulator that does not have any experience in the vocational education and training sector and will not have a dedicated focus on apprentices and trainees. It is completely unfit for purpose.

In addition, the workforce inspectorate has a pretty poor record when it comes to regulation. Back when it was first set up as the wages inspectorate, it was given powers to criminally prosecute employers for wage theft. These employers faced jail time if they were found guilty, which the government proudly promoted at the time as nation leading. However, at its very first attempt at prosecuting an employer for wage theft, it collapsed like a stack of cards. The employer argued these laws were completely unconstitutional and sought to fight the charges in the High Court. Rather than hold its ground and fight the case, the workforce inspectorate withdrew all charges against the employer on the eve of the hearing, causing the entire case to be withdrawn. The workforce inspectorate knew it had no constitutional leg to stand on and did not want to incur the same results that occurred when the High Court struck down the Labor government's electric vehicle taxes and electoral donation laws.

After that disaster Wage Inspectorate Victoria was rebadged as Workforce Inspectorate Victoria and had most of its powers repealed. The workforce inspectorate now regulates areas including child employment and long service leave obligations. Instead of establishing a new regulator with a dedicated focus on apprenticeships and traineeships, which the taskforce recommended, the government has chosen to transfer all responsibility for apprentices and trainees to an existing regulator which is already required to be focused on completely different fields of regulation. This is ludicrous. The government has completely rejected the taskforce's recommendation of a dedicated regulator and has instead tried to retrofit an existing regulator that has a pretty ordinary record of enforcement outcomes. How is the workforce inspectorate supposed to be able to have a dedicated focus on 55,000 current apprentices and trainees as well as 35,000 employers who are responsible for the workplace conditions of these workers when it is also required to be investigating long service leave underpayments and child employment law breaches all at the same time? The workforce inspectorate is being set up by this Labor government to completely fail, which means our apprentices and our trainees will only be worse off.

You would think that with all this additional work and regulation to support Victoria's 55,000 apprentices and trainees, a new dedicated position would be created to oversee and focus solely on this work. Under this bill a new apprenticeship and traineeship commissioner will be appointed to be responsible for direct enforcement under this new regulatory regime. However, like with all legislation introduced by this Labor government, there is a catch. The minister in her second-reading speech expressly acknowledged that the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria commissioner will be appointed to the role in addition to their existing role. So not only has this government refused to establish a dedicated regulator to support apprentices and trainees, as recommended by the Apprenticeships Taskforce, but it is also forcing the existing workforce inspectorate commissioner to take on the huge additional responsibilities of the new apprenticeship and traineeship commissioner role. This decision is even crazier when you consider the current workforce inspectorate commissioner does not have any previous experience in relation to the apprenticeship and traineeship sector. Given the huge impact these reforms are likely to have on the apprentice and traineeship scheme, why is the government in effect appointing a complete novice to be in charge of this new scheme? These actions fly in the face of everything the Apprenticeships Taskforce recommended.

When I asked during the bill briefing about how much it will cost to stand up this new regulator, no-one from the minister's office or department could tell me. All we know is that it is not funded. 'It is still subject to a budget bid,' the ministerial adviser said. This is just so typical of Labor. Here we are being required to debate far-reaching reforms on one of the most important sectors in the Victorian economy, and the government has not allocated any funding and refuses to tell taxpayers how much it will cost. If this supposed new regulator is to have any chance of being successful in its new remit, it will be required to have significantly more staff who are trained in the requirements of the system to ensure apprentices and trainees are kept safe.

Under Labor's bill Victorian apprentices and trainees will not only be denied access to a dedicated and experienced regulator but will be required to settle for a second-rate solution. The bill does not in any way resemble the regulator that was proposed by the Apprenticeships Taskforce. Instead the government has completely disregarded the carefully considered and researched observations of the taskforce. It is disgraceful that this government is demonstrating so much contempt and disrespect for the importance of our VET sector and the safety of our apprentices and trainees.

Another major change sought to be introduced by this bill is a new requirement that every employer in Victoria who wants to employ an apprentice or trainee must first hold a licence. In her second-reading speech the minister said:

> The new licensing system will enable regulatory oversight over the lifecycle of the apprenticeship or traineeship.

The workforce inspectorate will be given the powers to issue licences once an employer has satisfied the necessary licensing requirements, including a fit and proper person test. Incredibly, employers will be required to renew their licence on an annual basis. Under this bill an employer will be required every single year to lodge an application with the workforce inspectorate, even if their circumstances have not changed. This bill only seeks to create more bureaucracy for employers if they wish to stay within the apprenticeship and traineeship system.

When I raised at the bill briefing that this new provision would mean that approximately 35,000 employers would be lodging applications for a renewal every single year in order to maintain their licence, I asked how the workforce inspectorate expected to manage this new, incredible workload. In response I was told by ministerial advisers that the renewal of licences would likely become an automated process. This begs the question: why have a process at all if it is going to be reduced to a mere farcical tick-and-flick exercise? Why would anyone impose such an unnecessary burden? How does an automated tick-and-flick licence renewal protect apprentices and trainees and ensure they are safe at work? There is no rigour whatsoever. I can appreciate the regulator may want to get further insights as to whether an employer is adequately complying with their duties and

obligations, but how is this going to be achieved if it becomes purely a rubber stamp process? It completely defeats the very purpose it is supposed to achieve.

An annual licence renewal is likely to be cost-prohibitive for some employers, especially very small businesses. It will likely act as a huge disincentive to many employers who are considering employing apprentices and trainees but do not have the time or resources to cope with the increasingly bureaucratic nature of the scheme. Peak bodies have told me about their complete shock at these changes and the lack of consultation with them. The Housing Industry Association has called on the government to withdraw the bill, warning the scheme will add to red tape, increase costs and reduce apprenticeship opportunities at a time of a severe skills shortage. The HIA said the new licensing system will discourage participation in the apprenticeship system and worsen workforce shortages, with executive director Keith Ryan saying:

> Before introducing another layer of regulation, the Government must demonstrate that current arrangements are failing and that a licensing scheme will improve apprentice outcomes. To date, no such evidence has been presented that licensing would deliver any material benefit …

Another peak body, the Victorian Automotive Chamber of Commerce, was also scathing in its criticism of the bill and said the bill effectively imports a labour hire licensing model into apprenticeships. CEO of VACC Peter Jones said:

> Victoria's skills shortage is real, and it is biting – in workshops, on worksites and in service centres right across the state. But it will not be fixed with licences, renewals and inspectors. It will be fixed by more employers, in more businesses, choosing to train the next generation.

These are just two peak bodies united in their absolute opposition to the provisions in the bill that will only make it harder for employers to employ more apprentices and trainees.

Under the labour hire legislation, licences are issued for a period of three years. In order to have consistent regulatory outcomes, why doesn't the government adopt a similar approach? It would certainly alleviate the bureaucratic burden on employers to submit a new application every 12 months. Such an extended period would lead to more certainty in the scheme and would not prevent the workforce inspectorate from undertaking random audits of employers during the relevant period to assess whether employers remained compliant with their obligations. If noncompliance were identified, then the workforce inspectorate would still have the ability to use its new powers to either suspend or cancel a licence if it considered it appropriate to do so. That is why we will move amendments in the upper house to extend the periods of licences to make them consistent with labour hire licences and to create more certainty for employers. This government should be trying to make it easier for employers to employ apprentices and trainees, not harder. However, Labor's reforms seek to introduce further complexity and uncertainty into a sector that desperately needs positive growth.

At this point it is worth noting one of the key reasons why the Apprenticeships Taskforce argued for reforms to the training of apprentices and trainees. A direct finding of the taskforce says:

> Victoria has low rates of apprenticeship completion compared with the Australian average … reflective of an ongoing trend of underperformance in Victorian apprenticeship completion rates, which have been below the national average each year for at least 13 years.

This finding by the taskforce presents a pretty depressing picture of the VET sector in Victoria under Labor and confirms that for over a decade Victoria has underperformed when it comes to apprenticeship completions and delivering skilled workers. This finding was also recently backed up by Helen Silver AO when she undertook her independent review of the Victorian public service, stating in her findings:

> Performance of the VET system is mixed, with continued skills shortages in priority industries, completion levels lower than the national average, and student satisfaction at or below national averages.

Both the taskforce and Helen Silver made it clear that Victoria has unacceptably low apprenticeship completion rates under the Labor government. Yet instead of putting measures in place to both

incentivise employers to offer more positions for apprenticeships and traineeships and incentivise more young people to take up an apprenticeship or traineeship, this Labor government remains hell-bent on making it harder. The measures in this bill will do nothing to achieve better completion rates. They will only drive more employers away, meaning less opportunity for young people to be hired in an apprenticeship or traineeship.

How much will all this cost? There is no doubt these changes will also result in significant compliance costs. The taskforce made this point and said:

> The updated regulatory framework proposed … will create additional costs to implement and administer which will require additional funding.
>
> The Taskforce recommends that the Victorian Government engage with industry partners to develop an appropriate and affordable funding policy …

In response to accepting this recommendation the government said:

> A funding model will therefore be considered in parallel with developing options for the regulator and new legislation. This work will include examining the viability of a co-contribution model, as well as best practice approaches in other jurisdictions.

Co-contribution is code for a new tax. In black and white the Labor government said it was prepared to tax employers for their new apprenticeship and traineeship regulatory scheme through either licence or registration fees. That is this Labor government's position. When I asked in the bill briefing whether there was any intention of charging employers a fee in order to obtain a licence, I was informed there was nothing in the bill that provided for a licence fee. Whilst that is correct, it was not exactly an answer to my question. While there may be nothing in the bill that says a fee will be charged, there is also nothing in the bill that says a fee cannot be charged. It does not mean that fees will not be payable, because there is absolutely nothing in this bill to stop this Labor government from introducing licensing fees through subsequent regulations, which will only hit employers harder and cause greater disincentives for employers to hire and train apprentices.

Every Victorian knows that Labor cannot be trusted at their word, given that the Labor government have added or increased taxes and charges 71 times after promising Victorians that they would not do so, the latest being Labor's secret tax on all train, bus and tram travel for Victorians just to fund their unfunded Suburban Rail Loop. There is every likelihood that this Labor government will make employers pay a tax for a licence to hire apprentices and trainees, which is frankly disgraceful. That is why we will move amendments to this bill in the upper house to insert a provision that prohibits this government from requiring any fee to be paid by any employer for a new licence. Employers should be celebrated for hiring and training apprentices and trainees, not made to pay the price of the regulatory burdens Labor will create under this bill. As sure as night follows day, Labor will always find a way to tax Victorians more. That is why we will move the amendment to stop this tax-addicted government from hurting employers more and stifling opportunities for apprentices and trainees. If Labor have no plan for any such licence fee to be imposed, then they should not have any problem in supporting our amendment. I guess only time will tell.

As part of the new regime, employers will also be expected to comply with new employer standards as part of their licence conditions. The standards are expected to set minimum expectations about the behaviours and the level of training expected from employers when training an apprentice or trainee, but yet again these standards are not included in this bill. We were told at the bill briefing that these standards would be developed as part of the consultation process with applicable stakeholders. Again, this is another demonstration about how half-baked this proposed legislation is. We have provisions in this bill that expose employers to penalties of $125,000 if they fail to comply with the standards, but we do not know what the standards are. There is every reason to suspect that these yet unknown standards will impose additional compliance costs on employers.

Employers deserve to be consulted and to know what the new standards will be now rather than wait months or even years after this bill has passed. This is just more sneaky behaviour from this

untrustworthy Labor government and a further demonstration of how this bill is a complete rush job. Why Labor is trying to make it harder for apprentices and trainees to get hired is utterly beyond me. This bill is a complete rush job because these changes to the apprenticeships and traineeships system are not expected to commence operation until 1 July 2029. That is right, none of these changes are expected to start operating for another three years. So why the rush with only two sitting weeks in Parliament to go? The explanatory memorandum for the bill states that the reason for the prolonged commencement period is:

> A new ICT system will be required to be built, and this will require a significant lead time for implementation due to the complexity and scale of the reforms.

Not only has the government admitted it does not have an ICT system to support these reforms, requiring another three years before the changes can come into effect, but these reforms will not come into effect until five years after the Apprenticeships Taskforce handed down its report. This is just more mismanagement from this Labor government. Whether it is because they are out of money or they were simply incompetent in preparing ahead, who knows? It would not make a difference if this bill was introduced in six or 12 months time, as there still would not be an ICT system available to allow the new scheme to come online, during which time the government could perhaps consult more broadly with industry. During the bill briefing I was advised the government was working towards an earlier commencement date, but then again, we know this Labor government is absolutely rotten when it comes to being able to deliver IT systems. They have never completed a project ahead or on time, and Victorians have absolutely no trust that the Labor government can deliver this project within the next two years, especially when they are still unable to tell Victorians how much it will cost.

This bill represents a missed opportunity by the government to introduce real reforms to arrest the serious decline of Victoria's VET sector and to unequivocally ensure apprentices and trainees are safe at work. Currently Victoria has an unemployment rate of 5.1 per cent, the highest unemployment rate of any state in the country. Youth unemployment in Victoria is rising and is now a staggering 11.8 per cent, the highest in the country and higher than the Australian average of 10.7 per cent. That means today 74,000 young Victorians do not have jobs. Sadly, as of May this year, nearly 9 per cent of Victorians aged between 15 and 24 were not in education or work. Youth unemployment in Melbourne's west is the most troubling at 15.6 per cent, closely followed by Melbourne's south-east at 14.3 per cent. Under 12 years of Labor, Victoria is suffering rising unemployment and a skills crisis, and this bill will do nothing to fix it.

Victoria's apprenticeship challenge is not a shortage of regulators; it is a shortage of apprentices. Apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities only exist if employers are willing to create them. The Liberals and Nationals will oppose this bill because it does not align with what the taskforce recommended and will only make it harder for employers to employ more apprentices and trainees. The answer to a skills shortage is employers employing more apprentices and trainees, not regulators regulating them. Victoria needs a government that is serious about skills, a government that works, with an economic plan that drives confidence and makes it easier to employ apprentices and trainees, not one that puts a bill forward that is anti-business and will result in apprentices and trainee numbers declining even further. The Liberals and Nationals will oppose this bill.

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (10:38): I rise today to speak in strong support of the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026. I do so not only as a member of this house but as someone whose life has been shaped profoundly and permanently by our public education system here in Victoria. I am so proud to stand here as a product of that system, but I also stand here with a clear memory of what it was like when that system was not given the support that it deserved.

I grew up in central Victoria, attending public schools during the Kennett years, when investment in education simply did not exist. I remember learning in portable classrooms that were freezing cold in winter and boiling hot in summer, making learning so much harder than it should have been. I

remember my family struggling each January to afford the basics like school uniforms, textbooks and stationery. These are not luxuries but essentials for students, yet we received no support at that time. I remember friends who could not see what was written on the board because their families could not afford glasses. And most painfully, I remember students who struggled with their mental health and several who died by suicide while I was in high school, who needed care and professional help but found none in the school system. Instead the only support available was a religious chaplain put in our secular school by John Howard's government. These are experiences that have stayed with me forever and that lit a fire in me to make sure the next generation of country kids did not face the same barriers. That is what drives me as the member for Ripon every single day.

I am incredibly proud to represent 54 schools across my electorate and even prouder of what we have been able to achieve for so many of them over recent years because our Labor government knows that when you invest in education you invest in the future. Across Ripon that investment is visible everywhere you go. We have delivered over $2 million to upgrade Tarnagulla Primary School; almost $500,000 for Bridgewater Primary School; a transformative $13 million redevelopment of Wedderburn College; over $400,000 for St Mary's Primary School in Inglewood; almost $200,000 for maintenance at Inglewood Primary School; a $5 million upgrade to Beaufort Secondary College; almost $500,000 for a new undercover basketball court at Beaufort Primary School; a $10 million transformation of St Arnaud Secondary College; a $500,000 upgrade at St Patrick's Primary School in St Arnaud; over $200,000 for upgrades at Avoca Primary School; almost $88,000 for Creswick North Primary School; an $11.1 million transformation of Woady Yaloak Primary School at their Snake Valley, Scarsdale, Smythesdale and Ross Creek campuses; almost $400,000 to upgrade Haddon Primary School; over $400,000 for upgrades at Invermay Primary School; an almost $20 million transformation of Miners Rest Primary School; over $17 million for a new primary school in Lucas; an $18 million upgrade of Maryborough Education Centre; a $4.6 million upgrade of Ararat College that is almost complete; $2 million for Ararat's Marian College; $2 million for Ararat's St Mary's Primary School; over $1 million to upgrade Ararat North Primary School; over $9 million to transform Ararat 800 Primary School; over $340,000 for Ararat West Primary School; almost $2 million for upgrades at Linton Primary School; over $800,000 for upgrades at Little Bendigo Primary School and almost $300,000 for upgrades at Talbot Primary School. We have delivered better school bus connections for kids in Cardigan Village, Lucas and Miners Rest. We have delivered brand new childcare centres in Wedderburn and Clunes, with two more on the way in Avoca and Maryborough, and brand new and expanded kindergartens in Napoleons, Haddon, Lucas and St Arnaud, with more on the way in Ararat and Beaufort.

This is what delivery of our education system looks like. This is what it means to back our communities. This is what Labor does, and this bill continues that work. The education and training reform amendment bill introduces important practical reforms that will strengthen our education and training systems and provide greater support and protection for Victorians at every stage of their learning journey. A key focus of this bill is strengthening protections for Victoria's apprentices and trainees, who play such an important role in our economy, our workforce and our regional communities. It will establish stronger oversight and protections for apprentices and trainees, including a new licensing scheme for employers, expanded compliance and enforcement powers, stronger safeguards for those employed through labour hire providers and improved training plans to support quality learning experiences. These reforms are about making sure that apprentices and trainees are safe, that they are treated fairly and that they are supported to complete their training and build successful careers. The bill also strengthens the teaching workforce by improving Victoria's permission-to-teach framework, which will become known as conditional authority to teach. These changes will make sure that aspiring teachers receive the supervision, mentoring and support they need while they are studying and that they gain classroom experience, helping build a stronger and more sustainable teaching workforce for the future. Importantly, the bill also reinforces the expectation that every Victorian school should be a safe and respectful place to learn and work. It strengthens school community safety orders, giving schools more effective tools to respond to threatening, abusive or

harmful behaviour, including harmful conduct carried out through social media and other digital platforms.

These reforms matter. They are thoughtful, they are necessary and they will make a real difference in classrooms across our state. But they are also part of a much bigger story, because over the past decade we have fundamentally transformed education in Victoria. Since 2014 we have invested over $20 billion into upgrading and modernising our schools and into building new ones. We have grown our teacher workforce every single year. We now have mental health professionals in schools – real qualified support that simply did not exist when I was a student. We have doctors in schools providing accessible health care where it is needed most. We have dental vans, free glasses for students and breakfast clubs, because a child cannot learn if they are hungry or unwell. We provide free period products, removing stigma and ensuring dignity. We support families through the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund and affordable uniform programs. We have delivered free kinder, giving every child the best possible start in life. We have delivered an incredible pay rise for our principals, teachers and education support staff, and we have strengthened funding for students with disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, making sure that we have a truly inclusive education system.

When I reflect on my own schooling and then look at what exists today, I am blown away by the progress – real, meaningful, life-changing progress. But I also know that progress is never guaranteed, because the alternative is clear and is truly terrifying. We have seen what happens when education is not prioritised: cuts to programs, closures of regional schools, billions of dollars stripped from the system and supports for families and students like the School Start bonus, reading programs, Free Fruit Fridays and financial assistance cut away. If given the opportunity, history tells us those decisions could be made again. That is why this matters, that is why this bill matters and that is why the continued investment in our education system is so critical. Because education is not just another policy area, it is the foundation of everything. It is the key to stronger rural and regional communities and a stronger future.

I stand here today not just as a member of Parliament but as someone who has lived through the consequences of underinvestment and who has seen firsthand the power of getting it right. This bill is part of getting it right, and I strongly commend it to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (10:47): It gives me great pleasure to stand here this morning to talk on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026, and I do so following the member for Ripon. I was listening to her talk about her grounding in having people that work in trades being a huge influence on her life. It will be no surprise that I stand up having that same grounding, as many know. I was lucky enough that my father started his own plumbing business way back in the 1970s. My first recollection as a small boy was wanting to go to work with my father, and it is probably the reason that I ended up doing a trade and being a plumber and gasfitter. Making the journey to here where I am now in Parliament probably was not something that was on my mind when I started my trade. I talk about the grounding of being in people's houses working with them and in their lives listening to them. It was a great tool that I never thought I would be using inside Parliament. You do need to engage with and talk to people from all walks of life and listen to them and their concerns, whether you agree with them or disagree with them. It was that grounding that has enabled me to take on the information and find a pathway forward to fix their problems.

My education finished in year 10, because what I wanted to do was be a plumber. That was going to be my life. When you decide you want to go into a trade, there is that other little bonus that you still have to continue and do four years of education in our TAFE system to be moved from being an apprentice to being a tradesperson. I talk with a lot of our builders, plumbers and electricians around the Latrobe Valley, and it certainly has changed, though the structure of how the apprenticeship runs is very similar. The trades have changed over the journey with what they are now teaching in the TAFE courses.

There is also the difficulty these days of trying to engage with young people moving through the school system and retaining them once they decide that they want to move down the path of having a trade. It is very difficult to get them from being a first-year apprentice all the way through to where they are working in your business. Some of the issues around that rely on being able to retain them, but on the flip side it is around the educators that are teaching these students the values and the pathway forward to becoming good tradespeople. A lot of the teachers, especially in my time in TAFE, were former plumbers. They were people that had run their own businesses, and they were in charge of teaching students as they came through. That continues on today, but these people are ageing, and the new generation coming through to fill their spots and be able to teach the apprentices as they come through is something that we do need to keep an eye on.

We talk regularly in the chamber here – it does not matter what side of Parliament you are on or where you are situated around regional Victoria – about the lack of tradespeople that are out and about in regional Victoria. Whether it be that they have been in Melbourne on the Big Build or they have gone interstate on big builds there, trades are highly sought after, especially the good ones. If you are a good tradesperson, your skills are very much valued. We talk often here about our housing crisis, which is at the forefront of everybody's mind when we talk on most bills in here, and it is reliant on having these apprentices coming through to build the next generation's houses, whether they be carpenters, plumbers or tilers. It does not matter who they are, we need that process to make sure that we are building enough houses and manufacturing.

Touching on that, the buzzwords that we all hear about at the moment are about data centres and building data centres. It is inevitable at the end of the day, but we need to make sure that we are getting in front of these builds, because the one thing about data centres and how big they are is that they are going to need a lot of electricians and a lot of plumbers to build them. These constructions can take up to four years, and some of the numbers divvied out are that there might be up to 700 electricians needed in the build of these data centres, so we need to be on the front foot and making sure that we have that production line coming through TAFE and other educational places that are putting these tradespeople in and making sure that they are highly skilled. But we do not want to have a drain on the flip side and an unintended consequence of not having enough people in the day-to-day trades for general maintenance or the building of houses. That is what we really need to keep an eye on.

Going back to when I first started, most apprentices in their first year were 16 or 17 years of age, so there was a reliance on having a parent that could get them to that TAFE college or jumping on a bus in regional Victoria to get there. That is a real issue as well, and that really has not changed a lot over the journey. I know that there has been talk about lowering the age at which people can get their drivers licence from 18 to 17. In rural and regional Victoria that would make a huge difference to the trades and these apprentices being able to get themselves around. It is a really big area, and we have to look outside that box of being an apprentice and qualifying for a trade and how we can keep the numbers up at a constant level.

We are going to have to grow those numbers, as I said, to have these data centres that we need to build. Another aspect is we have an Olympic Games in a few years time up in Brisbane, and there is going to be a concerted push for tradespeople. They are going to be looking right around Australia for tradies and apprentices to go up for this massive build before the Olympics. We need to make sure that we are covering the possible loss of trades that will be exiting the state and moving up there. That is why we need to be on the front foot in all trades, but in particular on the electrical side, the plumbing side and the building side, because when all is said and done, we need to make sure that we have this workforce available for the day-to-day needs of the Victorian public.

In this bill we are putting more regulation on the business owners. There are some huge businesses in the trades, but most are mums and dads that are trying to do the right thing by their apprentices. In putting more regulatory reform and impost on these young families that are trying to do the right thing and provide a pathway through to the trades, we do need to make sure that we are incentivising them to still be tradespeople and employ apprentices and not making it all too hard for them.

As I close, we have concerns for that production line coming through, but we must not forget the education side as well. People who have been in the trades are the ones we need to actually teach the next generation of our apprentices, so I would welcome the government keeping that in mind as we move forward in this area.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (10:57): I am delighted to rise today to speak in support of the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026. It is good to speak after the member for Morwell, who has his own experience and perspective in this space. This is another important bill, one that introduces reforms to the regulation of apprenticeships and traineeships as well as reforms to the permission-to-teach scheme administered by the Victorian Institute of Teaching, the school community safety order scheme and other matters.

We have seen a strong focus from the government on education and cost of living, which is right at the heart of our government, supporting apprentices and supporting schools and family. We saw that front and centre recently with free TAFE. Free TAFE has been such an important initiative in my community, a really crucial cost-of-living support, saving my constituents and Victorians more broadly an average of $3000 per course. Cost of living is front and centre, as I said, for so many of my constituents. Balancing the family budget, with utility bills and everyday expenses, is a constant in the minds of many in the Clarinda district and of many across the state. Free TAFE is another way the Carroll Labor government is supporting Victorians, providing relief and support in both big and small ways.

In fact there are many initiatives that I have been really proud to see delivered in our schools and education institutions. We have given out free pairs of glasses to hundreds if not thousands of the students who need them most. We have also seen more than 60 million free meals provided under the school breakfast clubs. It is simply amazing. I have been to many of those schools to see firsthand the benefit to our younger students at primary school and at secondary school. There really has been a lot happening in our schools and our education settings to support our young people and families with the cost of living.

We have seen that commitment across schools this year, and there are also many fantastic schools in Clarinda district where there is a lot happening this year, particularly Clayton South Primary School, which received funding of $12.45 million for a new administration and learning building, consisting of a general-purpose classroom and a science space, and a new playground and landscaping. The minister at the table, the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, was with me at the time to make that announcement for Clayton South Primary School. You could not believe the face on the former principal, who could not believe it, because he knew that improvement to his school would be transformative for younger students at the primary school and also in my neighbouring local schools. It was great to be out and about late last year to catch up with principal Craig Pauwels, students and the construction team and to see the great progress that has taken place and is happening right there. I am really looking forward to the months ahead and to visiting again when we open the school. It will be truly special. Students at Clayton South Primary School will have an even better place to learn, to grow and to thrive in this building that will serve generations to come. So congratulations to everyone involved, and I am really looking forward to returning to the school and seeing our young people and staff using the building for the first time.

I am really proud of the work that is being done in support of our young people and young families in Clarinda with the cost of living and education. Again, there are a lot of initiatives that are important for my community, big and small cost-of-living measures, from the breakfast clubs to Glasses for Kids, free dental check-ups at Smile Squad, free swimming lessons, free public transport for kids and of course free TAFE. We have heard that more than 225,000 students have benefited from free TAFE already, saving students an average of $3000 per course and making it easier and more affordable to train, reskill or upskill to get a well-paid job that leads to a rewarding career. Free TAFE currently offers 80 qualifications and short courses without tuition fees for Victorians, and this includes the

diploma of nursing and certificates in information technology, accounting, bookkeeping, individual support, training and assessment and so much more. This is simply amazing.

We can see clearly here this government's commitment to supporting apprentices and supporting schools and families, and that continues here with this bill. This bill introduces reform to regulations of apprenticeships and traineeships in chapter 2. Namely, it strengthens and modernises the regulation framework for apprenticeships and traineeships, prioritising their safety and support. Key measures in the bill include a greater range of enforcement tools for the regulator, introducing a licensing system for employers of apprentices and trainees, and embedding an education-first approach to support employers to comply. The regulation of apprenticeships and traineeships will also move from the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority to Workforce Inspectorate Victoria, complementing the inspectorate's existing functions and capability as an industry-focused regulator.

These are important changes enhancing safety and support for apprentices and trainees. We know, and we heard from the previous speaker the member for Morwell, that many of our younger students might start at a very young age – 16, 17, 18 or thereabouts – and their safety and their returning, keeping an interest in their apprenticeship or traineeship, are very, very important for our future workforce. Further, these reforms acquit the government's responsibility for the recommendations of the Apprenticeships Taskforce in relation to the regulatory framework for apprentices and trainees. The taskforce consulted with apprentices and trainees from priority cohorts such as First Peoples apprentices and trainees to inform its work.

Schools and other matters are addressed in chapter 3; namely, the amendments to the Education and Training Reform Act 2006. These amendments are directed at the government's commitment to ensuring that Victorian schools are safe and respectful places of learning for students and workplaces for staff. On that point I would like to thank all of the Clarinda district teachers, principals and education support staff for the work that they do, some of the most important work in our state. They show up every day for our kids, and I am very proud to be part of a government that recognises and values that work, delivering a pay rise and making Victorian teachers the best paid in Australia with the best conditions. I commend the Premier and the minister on that. On this side of the house we recognise that great public education starts with valuing the people who deliver it. I am really glad to see the new agreement and better pay, better conditions and better time. I am also glad to see that this bill improves and strengthens the permission-to-teach registration scheme administered by the Victorian Institute of Teaching, as well as implementing recommendations from the statutory review of the school community safety order scheme and making other amendments to the scheme.

Finally, the bill introduces a new statutory principle which enshrines the expectation and intention that all Victorian schools are safe and respectful places to learn and to work. With that strong focus on education and on cost of living that is right at the heart of our Carroll Labor government, we are supporting apprentices, supporting schools and supporting families. I commend the bill to the house.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (11:07): I rise to address the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026. I do so as the shadow minister, the alternative Minister for Education, and I am grateful to be working with my colleague the member for Evelyn on this particular matter. The member for Evelyn has responsibility for parts of this bill, and my portfolio responsibilities cover elements of this bill as well. I am grateful to her and to her office for cooperatively working together with my office to draw these matters together. I am also grateful to the government for providing a bill briefing and for the time that they have spent to assist us to understand the implications of this legislation we are considering.

Specifically in relation to education, this bill seeks to insert a statutory principle that schools should be safe and respectful places of learning and work; rename 'permission to teach' to 'conditional authority to teach' and require a supervision and support agreement before it can be granted; amend the school community safety order regime, including the threshold and review process for existing exclusion orders; and introduce a new digital content school community safety order, empowering

schools to require removal of, or restrict, online content about the school. On face value, if you just look at that part of the bill, there are certainly elements that make sense, things that are reasonable.

Whenever people are interacting with anyone they should be respectful in their engagement. I think that is fundamental. I think we can all agree on that. I am aware that on occasion that respect cannot always be guaranteed. In the midst of a crisis where teacher retention and attraction in this state is an ongoing issue – the last time I checked there were about 700 full-time equivalent teaching roles in this state unfilled – I am very mindful of the impact that that has on students and their learning in classrooms right around this state. The fact that there are not permanent teachers in Victorian government schools, to the order of at least 700 the last time I checked, means we need to do better to better support teachers.

I am mindful also of the issues in this state with attracting and retaining school principals. I want to acknowledge the work that school principals do as educational leaders of their community. I say to them, from an alternative government perspective, we are not only grateful for the work that they do but we are respectful of them and their position. Fundamentally, we believe that if they are asked to do a job as educational leaders of their community, they should have the trust of the state's education department; they should have the trust of the minister in order to fulfil that role to the best of their ability. So we want to protect our teachers. We want to protect principals from being subjected to behaviour which is, frankly, wrong. I understand that part of the bill, and as I said, if the bill we were considering today was just about this, I think it would be a very different conversation.

I do draw the house's attention to the contribution of my colleague the member for Evelyn insofar as she addressed and outlined a number of concerns – deep concerns – that the opposition has with this bill, specifically through the skills and training lens. I will address the background of the bill's education portfolio-related provisions, which respond to two distinct pressures, the first being the growing concern about the adequacy of school community safety order powers following reports of abuse and harassment directed at schools, school staff and students online. The second is the change from permission to teach to, as I said earlier, conditional authority to teach. My understanding is that that is simply a name change and not a substantial change in the provisions around that circumstance, which I know is of great benefit to schools and great benefit to principals – to have that freedom and autonomy to work with the Victorian Institute of Teaching to achieve the conditions and meet the conditions required for an individual to have permission to teach and to contribute to a school community as we would expect them to do. On the basis that it is simply a name change, there are no real issues there.

I am aware of some of the responses from stakeholders, which I would like to share briefly with the house. Some shared that the new digital content order may be hard to enforce in practice, since it can only be directed at the person who makes the online post or is the author of the online post, and groups or pages, with no details of the admins, who will not be able to be punished. So there is potential there for the intent of the law that is being proposed in this bill to not be fully realised because of the structures of social media platforms. Breaching an order is a civil penalty provision, not a criminal offence. This would require a court order for further action, which would be resource intensive and potentially slow. The bill removes the requirement that a risk be imminent before an exclusion order can be made and abolishes the current process by which a person may formally respond and have that response reviewed. In its place, the person will be afforded a fair opportunity to respond where reasonable, with the substance of that stated standard set by ministerial guidelines.

I am grateful to those organisations and stakeholders that have contributed to the opposition forming its view on this particular bill, including Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools; Independent Schools Victoria; the Australian Education Union – I am looking forward to catching up with Justin tomorrow, actually, if memory serves me correctly; the Victorian Principals Association; the Victorian Catholic Education Authority; the Australian Principals Federation; the Australian Catholic Primary Principals Association; Country Education Partnerships; and the Australian Christian Lobby.

I did want to, in the time remaining, just address some of the concerns raised with me about this bill by Parents Victoria. In essence they have made, through a constructive lens, some suggestions, which I place on record and suggest that the government may wish to consider as the bill progresses from this place to the next: retaining a high threshold for immediate orders, preserving meaningful procedural fairness and independent review, limiting repeated renewal of ongoing orders, explicitly protecting good faith parent advocacy and complaints, requiring consideration of disability and communication adjustments, requiring consideration of the school's contribution to the conflict, ensuring access to independent advocates and support people and establishing a pathway for relationship repair and restoration of constructive parent–school communication after an order concludes. That is the perspective of Parents Victoria on behalf of parents of students in schools in our state, and perhaps there is an opportunity for the government to consider, not necessarily through an amendment as this bill progresses to the other place but perhaps through a ministerial order, to be able to take on in good faith some of the concerns, many legitimate, of Parents Victoria.

I hate to say it, but the reality of the circumstance that I find myself in is that I have done my level best to make a worthy contribution today, specifically referencing the part of the bill that is within my portfolio area of education, and the position of the opposition in this instance is to oppose the bill because of the concerns we have outlined through the member for Evelyn. If the government had chosen to bring two separate bills, for example, there may very well be a different conversation to be had. But as is the case with many bills in this place, there is a bit of Frankenstein activity going on, where a few different thoughts are plugged together. I understand that through an efficiency lens, and I regretfully say that we will oppose the bill on the basis that I have outlined.

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (11:17): I rise to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026, and I think this is a really important bill. It is something that matters enormously for the future of our state, in making sure that people who choose apprenticeships or traineeships have an opportunity to learn, to work, to build a career and also to come home safely at the end of their working day. Absolutely traineeships and apprenticeships are one of the great pathways to a really great job and a great career. In my family my husband is a TAFE teacher. I know the value of our TAFE teachers, and I will thank them every day of the week and thank him for all the work that he does with supporting our young people, mainly young people – there are some adult apprentices as well – and supporting our apprentices to learn the trade of their passion. But also teachers really do support students around workplaces, workplace safety and payments, and they also counsel them on a whole lot of other issues that come with going to an employer. So I thank our TAFE teachers for doing an incredible job in this space.

It is valuable to learn hands-on. While you are learning, you are getting qualified, you are being paid, you are getting practical skills, and it is a pathway to a great job, like I have said, but it also can be a pathway to maybe university or further study in your passion. But I suppose I just want to at the outset make it very clear that Labor supports apprentices, Labor supports TAFE and Labor will always protect our free TAFE system. And to parents: your kids will be better under Labor, because we want your kids to have a pathway to a great job. And to students, who are leaving school: you are going to be better under Labor, because we want you to have a pathway to a great job, and that can be through an apprenticeship. You are going to be so important to building our great state, and you are going to be so important to the future, with all the different skills that we are going to need into the future.

We are absolutely going through a transition here in this state, and it is going through enormous change. I do not want to pre-empt too much of the work that we have done at a committee level. The Economy and Infrastructure Committee is about to table a report on this topic about pathways. In that report we do discuss a lot of the challenges that we are going to have into the future. I am not pre-empting anything here, because this is data from the Victorian Skills Authority, the employment projections dashboard from 2025 to 2035. We know that in the next three years nearly 400,000 new workers are expected to enter the workforce. Those are new positions or they are replacing retired workers. Over the next decade that number is going to increase to 1.4 million workers that are going

to be needed. The greatest areas of growth are going to be around aged care workers, disability carers, nurses, carpenters, construction managers, plumbers and more. We know that out of this workforce almost half are going to need a post-secondary education, like VET training, TAFE training or an apprenticeship. They are going to be absolutely essential as part of our future workforce.

Like I said, apprenticeships can provide an outstanding start to a career. We established the Apprenticeships Taskforce, which we announced during the 2022 election. We have got on with that work. We knew that this system needed to be better, and we have committed to that. Importantly, it was not just a process of department people working together. It was the taskforce talking to employers and talking to union representatives. It was informed by an apprentice and trainee reference group, which consulted with apprentices, trainers, employers, unions, industry bodies and the regulators. We wanted people who are on the ground who understand the system. They are the people that live it every day, and they are the ones that absolutely could give us the right lived experience to improve this system.

The final report was absolutely clear. It did paint a very clear picture that apprentices and trainees were experiencing bullying, discrimination, harassment, unsafe workplaces and unpaid wages, and it did raise concerns about the quality of the training. It is not all employers. I just want to make that clear. But there is a systemic issue, a systemic weakness in the framework itself, hence why we are here today. We do not want to see workplaces being unsafe. We certainly do not want to see incidents or deaths in our workplaces. We know that they are preventable, and we want to do everything we can to prevent them from happening in the first place. That is why this taskforce was so important. It made 16 recommendations to strengthen safety and oversight and modernise this framework. The government accepted all 16 recommendations in full or in principle.

At the time of announcing them in 2024, we did have a lot of industry saying that they very much welcomed our commitment to this work being done. The Master Builders Victoria CEO, who was a member of the taskforce, acknowledged and welcomed our acceptance of the recommendations, saying:

> These are great first steps and important moves forward in attracting and retaining more apprentices into industries like building and construction, including women.
>
> …
>
> We clearly need to establish better accounting and visibility, to effectively track apprentices … through the system, better understand completion rates and the issues which affect those rates, and ultimately be able to deliver better, tangible supports.

We have started to implement these recommendations, including the Apprenticeship Helpdesk, and have also strengthened apprenticeship systems and support. This bill is another step in doing that.

As we heard from some other speakers, this bill is responsible for regulating apprenticeships and traineeships. We are going to transfer that from the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority to Workforce Inspectorate Victoria. This is an important change. It has a strong focus on protecting workers rights, bringing apprenticeship regulation into an environment which is going to strengthen the focus on safety and obviously that compliance as well. That is what we should be doing here in this place: modernising not only our acts and our laws but also our regulatory systems.

This bill is going to have some arrangements also for labour hire providers who engage in apprenticeships and traineeships. It will provide that information sharing between co-regulators. As we have seen in many other systems, when multiple agencies are involved we want them to be able to share information and track and be more efficient, so we are doing that as well. We will also have a statutory review of the new scheme after five years, and we want to make sure that it is doing what we have set out to be doing here.

Like I have said, this is not about treating every employer like they are doing the wrong thing. We know that the overwhelming majority of employers who take on apprentices and trainees want to do

the right thing. They are actually putting a lot of effort, time, energy and money into investing in their young people. They are teaching them. They are mentoring them. They are giving them the skills to work locally and also to develop skills for a career, and we should absolutely be supporting and recognising that. We recognise that nearly 80 per cent of those employers who do take on an apprentice or trainee in Victoria are small businesses. They do not have big HR departments or compliance teams. We need to be able to support them in making sure that they are in the best position to take on an apprentice. We know young people want to do it, but there is a disconnect. We do find that there is a challenge with matching a want-to-be apprentice and an employer, and we want to make sure that the employer is in the best position to take someone on. That is why implementing these reforms has been really important.

With the time I have left I just want to reiterate the fact that this government really does support our apprentices. We want to make sure the system is there for them to succeed, to finish their apprenticeship and to get an incredible job at the end of it. To those who are leaving school thinking about an apprenticeship or traineeship now, we have your back. We have pathways for you. We want to support you. Only this government is going to give you that pathway. Only this government supports TAFE, and we are going to make sure you have a great future ahead.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (11:27): I rise to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026. This bill establishes new regulatory architecture for apprenticeships and traineeships. It transfers responsibility from the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority to Workforce Inspectorate Victoria. It creates an apprenticeship and traineeship commissioner, establishes a consultative committee, introduces employer licensing, creates new employer standards, expands compliance and enforcement powers and imposes new requirements around training plans and information sharing. That is a lot of machinery, but what does it actually do to get more young Victorians into apprenticeships? That is the question this government has failed to answer, because the numbers in this bill's own analysis are damning.

In 2025 Victorian trade apprenticeship commencements fell 11.8 per cent to their lowest level since 2001. Non-trade commencements fell 20 per cent to their lowest since 1995. Plumber commencements fell 15.5 per cent, carpenter commencements fell 16.1 per cent, sheet metal worker commencements fell 18.9 per cent, childcare commencements fell 23.1 per cent and aged and disabled carer commencements fell 16.6 per cent, and the number of apprentices actually in training fell from 73,000 in 2021 to 57,000 in 2025. This is a staggering 22 per cent decline. Overall commencements of apprenticeships have fallen by almost half – 46 per cent since 2021. This is all happening while Victoria is desperately short of skilled workers. This is clearly a failure of this Victorian Labor government.

The Victorian Skills Authority estimates that construction alone will need 162,000 new workers between 2025 and 2035. So think about that. We have a housing crisis. We need to build more homes. We need more infrastructure. We need plumbers, carpenters, electricians, builders and other skilled workers. And at precisely the same time as we need more people entering these trades, the number entering apprenticeships is collapsing. So the government's answer is to create another regulatory framework and make employers obtain a licence every year if they want to obtain and train an apprentice. That is the wrong direction to be heading. If an employer is already wondering whether they can afford to take on an apprentice, they should be asking, we should be saying and the government should be saying what we can do to make it easier for the employer to say yes and to actually employ and support them. Instead this bill asks them to navigate another licence, another compliance framework, another set of standards and another regulator.

We do not even know what the standards will be yet. There is no transparency around that. We do not know what the future costs will be. In fact it is quite likely that the licence will have associated with it a cost – another tax. We do not know what the regulatory burden on the employer will actually look

like. We do not have any evidence that this bill will result in increased commencements or completion rates, so the outcomes that we hope this bill would be addressing are not even identified.

The safety of apprentices and trainees is non-negotiable. The safety of teachers, principals and students is also non-negotiable. Teachers across Victoria do deserve our thanks. Can I take a minute, if I am given the opportunity, to thank our teachers who do an extraordinary job. They entered teaching to educate, inspire young people and make a difference. Every day they work incredibly hard to do just that, but too many are weighed down by increasing workloads, behavioural challenges and a system that leaves them feeling unsupported. We need to back our teachers, value their professionalism and give them the support they need to stay in the classroom doing exactly what they do best: teaching our kids. To every teacher who keeps turning up and giving their best to our children: thank you.

We do not need to increase the bureaucracy, paperwork, red tape and costs for our teachers, our principals and our employers. Costs are vitally important to be discussing, because at this part of the bill I would like to highlight that we could not get any confirmation in the bill briefing that would give us the confidence that this current Labor government are not planning to introduce a new cost on employers for this new licensing system.

That brings me to the broader issue of trust. How can we trust that this will not happen? Because every Victorian has every reason to be sceptical of this government when it says 'Trust us.' Just this week the Auditor-General exposed that Victorians are paying a hidden tax on every public transport fare – a secret tax, without the government publicly disclosing it. Yesterday the Auditor-General found that the tax had been approved in 2021 and was not acknowledged in the public documents that government should be putting in their communications around this tax. It was expected to raise $8 billion, and around $5 billion was going to go to the Suburban Rail Loop. Who was the transport minister when that levy was approved? Premier Ben Carroll. This has broken the covenant that government has with its community.

John Mullahy: On a point of order, Acting Speaker: relevance.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I ask the member on her feet to come back to the education and training reform amendment bill, please.

Roma BRITNELL: I absolutely am speaking about trust, the introduction of a licence that we are concerned about the cost of and the example that we saw just yesterday where taxes are introduced without trust.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): Is this on the point of order, or is this your contribution?

Roma BRITNELL: No, this is on the bill. I am on the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I have asked you to be relevant.

Paul Hamer: On a point of order, Acting Speaker: relevance.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I ask the member to come back to the education and training reform amendment bill.

Roma BRITNELL: I am speaking exactly on the bill, and this bill is about introducing a licence that could have associated with it a cost. I am talking about the costs that this government imposes on our community through different taxes, which is quite relevant to the bill when we are talking about a licence that may have a fee.

A member interjected.

Roma BRITNELL: It is very relevant. Suddenly Victorians are told that we should know where our money is going and what it is buying. Clearly integrity is still optional to this Premier, and we do deserve to know where our money is going. The Treasurer conceded that yesterday. That is the point.

Trust is not being built by telling Victorians about a tax after the Auditor-General discovers it. They get caught out, and that is when they do something about it.

Trust is built on creating trust that you can rely on, not trust that only occurs when you get caught out. It does not get built by creating another regulatory system or refusing to provide proper costings. Trust is not built by announcing reforms now and telling Victorians it will take years to implement these reforms, and trust certainly is not built by asking employers to do more, pay more and comply with more rules when government cannot show that these rules will actually produce more apprentices.

Victorians need a government that focuses on outcomes. We need more apprentices, we need more skilled workers, we need more homes, we need teachers who are safe and supported, we need students who are safe in their schools and we need a government that tells Victorians the truth about what it is doing with their money. Yes, let us improve safety, let us improve training quality, let us protect teachers and let us protect students, but let us not confuse more regulation with reform and let us not pretend that another regulator, another commissioner, another licence and another ICT system will somehow reverse a 46 per cent collapse in apprenticeship commencements.

Victoria's skills crisis is real. It has happened over a decade under this government. The housing crisis is real. Labor are responsible for this. The work shortage is real. These are the problems in Victoria, which has the highest unemployment rates of any state in this country. Our young people are the pathway to real work, and they should be supported – not getting another layer of bureaucracy. We will oppose this bill and will offer amendments in the upper house, because Victoria deserves a fresh start to deliver legislation that will support Victoria's growth by supporting both employees and employers.

I would like to thank some of the organisations that have been supporting our apprentices and our young people, Neil Porter Legacy in Warrnambool; the people who work in WDEA; the Beyond the Bell community, who are trying to increase retention rates; the local learning and employment network; and Standing Tall in Warrnambool, who support young people in our regions right through South-West Coast. There are some amazing people doing some amazing work, and they want to see legislation that grows the support around apprentices, trainees and students in schools, not legislation that adds more bureaucracy.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (11:37): I am just going to pick up on a couple of matters that were raised by the opposition. The member for Evelyn is purported to have been verballing ministerial advisers from a briefing, which is not appropriate. I will say further that there is funding publicly announced and Wage Inspectorate Victoria is funded ongoing. That is just to refute some of the allegations made. It is not appropriate to be verballing someone from a briefing; it is about respect. So I will just fundamentally put that out there as a point that should be taken in this chamber.

Secondly, with regard to our wonderful teachers, our $1.9 billion investment in growing and supporting our education workforce since 2019 is seeing results. Victoria now has about 14,000 more registered teachers than we did in 2020. Our workforce continues to grow, with more than 1300 extra full-time teachers employed in Victorian government schools in the 12 months to June 2025. This is the result of initiatives like Victoria's nation-leading employment-based teaching degrees and financial incentives for hard-to-staff roles laying the foundations for a strong and sustainable school workforce now and well into the future. ABS data shows that around 44,700 FTE additional staff were employed in Victorian schools between 2024 and 2025, the largest increase of any state or territory. Student-to-teacher ratios in government schools have also steadily improved, decreasing from 14.6 to 12.8 for primary between 2018 and 2025 and from 12.1 to 11.4 for secondary over the same period. So I hope that allays some of the concerns that were put to the chamber by the member for Sandringham.

I do find it, frankly, galling the way the opposition has absolutely trashed these reforms and diminished the significance of the benefit they will provide apprentices in our state, particularly when we note that

the last time the Liberals were in power they sacked more than 2000 TAFE teachers, shut 22 TAFE campuses and savagely ripped $1 billion from TAFE. So who are they to be trash-talking relevant reforms that are absolutely important to continuing to build apprenticeship pathways in this state. I will note, historically, that in July 2023 the Victorian Labor government delivered on its 2022 election commitment to establish the Apprenticeships Taskforce. While those opposite may think that harassment and work safety concerns are not important to apprentices, we think they are. This is what is inherent in the reforms of this bill. The taskforce's work highlights challenges that many apprentices continue to face, including workplace safety concerns, harassment, inconsistent training experiences and difficulties navigating the apprenticeship system.

These are not minor issues. They may find them minor; we do not. They can affect whether someone completes their apprenticeship. I am going to repeat that: they can affect whether someone completes their apprenticeship. These circumstances, these situations, these parameters matter and can also have an impact on whether they remain in their chosen occupation or reach their full potential. So instead of trying to oppose this bill and these important reforms, I would hope that those opposite would think about the pathways for apprentices and the different circumstances that they have to navigate and actually have some compassion and consideration and see the relevance of these reforms. It is not – and I know this has already been spoken about in the chamber – about condemning employers and saying they are terrible people or otherwise. It is just simply about taking on board the various reforms that have been put forward that have been fed back from apprentices themselves, experiences that they have noted. Should we not be listening to them and taking heed of what they themselves have experienced? I would have thought that empirical sort of evidence is actually relevant and important, so I would hope that those opposite might shift gear a little bit and just think about the working experiences of the apprentices themselves.

Specifically, the bill will deliver an annual employer licensing system assessing ongoing fitness to employ apprentices or trainees, which replaces the current one-off approval; a graduated set of compliance and monitoring tools ranging from notices to produce and comply to new offences and penalties that balance the need for proactive safeguards while minimising disincentivising employers from employing apprentices and trainees – absolutely there is sensitivity to the challenges that employers face themselves when managing their businesses; and greater information sharing between the relevant Victorian regulators. How could there be an issue with this? We know that across government departments, certainly interstate as well but in this circumstance, encouraging better communication across relevant Victorian regulators has got to be a good thing. This will deliver improved coordination and consistency between regulators. The bill will deliver regulations to be made setting out outcome-based employer standards to clarify ongoing expectations of employers across the apprenticeship and traineeship journey; stronger regulation of apprenticeships and traineeships under labour hire, including group training organisations, with the ability to prescribe specific employer standards for employers who are labour hire providers; expanded training plan oversight, including minimum content requirements – that would seem really practical to me, so why are those opposite opposed to such things?; lodgement processes; and registered training organisation reporting obligations. This is about accountability. That is not a bad thing. Surely accountability, when we are looking at government processes et cetera, is a good thing.

If we are looking at outcomes – and I think it is absolutely fair and proper to raise those questions; no-one is opposed to that – more than 10,000 Victorian apprentices completed their training in 2025. The number of apprentices completing their training in Victoria increased by 16.5 per cent, higher than the national increase of 8.1 per cent. You would not think that if you heard some of the speeches from the opposition, but I am just putting some facts and some data on the table. The latest data on apprentices and trainees in Victoria shows tradies are completing their training at record rates, with more women getting on the tools in traditionally male-dominated roles.

We know TAFE is the primary provider of apprenticeships and traineeships in Victoria. I am just going to repeat that: TAFE is the primary provider of apprenticeships and traineeships in Victoria, and

Labor backs in TAFE. It is a very high priority. That is why we have free TAFE. In 2025 more than 70 per cent of all Victorian apprentices and trainees completed their training through TAFE. Those are real figures. That is surely meaningful, and if we are talking about outcomes, well, there it is, right in front of us. Apprentices and businesses choose the TAFE network because of the quality of the training, the passion of the teachers and the world-class facilities. This also makes really good sense. We know that only Labor governments support TAFE and public provision of education and training. In February this year we enshrined in legislation the free TAFE guarantee, and you can see why. You can also see why so many apprentices are using this as a legitimate pathway to a very fulfilling career.

The Labor government has invested more than $16 billion in new and base funding into our TAFE and training system since 2014, including more than $660 million into 45 new and upgraded TAFE campuses. I heard a comment before: 'Oh, infrastructure.' Well, it does matter and where it is matters, because it also has to be accessible. Having TAFE around the state means that it is actually accessible, certainly from a commuting point of view and for people to be able to consistently attend their lessons et cetera. Infrastructure does matter. More than 245,000 students have benefited from Labor's free TAFE since 2019. If we are talking about outcomes, we can give you numbers; that is no problem. Thinking about cost of living and enabling the students to afford to complete their tuition, it has saved them more than $816 million in tuition fees, an average of more than $3300 per student. That is a lot of money, particularly for a student. So that is significant as well.

Clearly we have rebuilt and reformed Victoria's training system that the previous Liberal government left wrecked and ruined. That is why I have been so shocked by the slagging off of the TAFE system et cetera by those opposite. I was like, 'Have they actually read this bill?' It was like we were in a parallel universe. But in any case I have been happy to –

Annabelle Cleeland: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I think this member is misleading the house, and making imputations on members across the aisle is disorderly.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): There was not an imputation on an individual member. Her time has now expired, but I will give you the opportunity in debate to address any of those concerns.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (11:47): I also rise – but I will stick to the bill a little bit more than the previous member, who got a bit distracted – to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026. To refute some of those allegations made, we do believe there are some reasonable objectives in the bill. As you have heard ad nauseam throughout today, we absolutely support apprentices. Apprentices should be safe at work – no negotiation. They should receive proper and adequate training, and they should not be subject to bullying or harassment. These are important safeguards. Schools should also have appropriate powers to protect teachers and staff from serious abuse. But where we have raised concerns today is about the layering of another round of bureaucracy and compliance onto employers, who are already doing it tough. Rather than have these attacks on individuals or on our side of the house, we want to speak to some of the facts and the data behind these comments around how hard it is to do business in Victoria right now and in particular how that has consequences for whether you are in a position to appoint an apprentice in your business.

Trade apprenticeships fell by nearly 12 per cent last year. That is the lowest since 2001. Non-trade commencements have fallen more than 20 per cent. That is the lowest since 1995. Training overall for apprentices is down by more than 22 per cent. These are current figures, and you cannot try and spin your way out of whether this is factual or not. Businesses are doing it tough, and they are not in a position to appoint apprentices because of that. At the same time as we can see the figures are alarming, why is the Labor government trying to force more regulation and more bureaucracy on these businesses? We need to understand a solution to this and not just keep adding weight and pressure.

The businesses taking on apprentices in my region are overwhelmingly small and medium. They are builders, electricians, plumbers and mechanics. A shout-out to O'Sullivan Builders, who are right now helping us rebuild some sheds that were burnt down. They do not have compliance departments. They cannot take on apprentices, which would mean wearing the wages, the training, the supervision and the responsibility for a young person. This bill adds a new employer licensing system on top of all that, and it is a licensing system that needs to be reviewed annually.

We need to be careful about creating a system where an employer who would willingly train a young person decides the administrative burden is too great, because that is exactly where we are heading. We are already there, and you can see that with the numbers. Why is there a 12-month accreditation, not three years? I support the amendment by the member for Evelyn for a three-year licensing system, because we do have genuine concerns, and you have seen that here today, about a fee-based design. It is another mechanism to take more money out of the pockets of Victorians and the businesses trying to keep people employed, rather than a genuine safety or quality measure.

We have seen it today, and in fact I just got texted a news report saying that the Premier has done a backflip and abolished the secret Suburban Rail Loop tax. It is from our side of the house, the scrutiny and investigation into these fees and secret charges that Victorians pay the price for. We have seen it just in the last two days, this decades-long levy that was quietly placed on public transport fares, which regional Victoria chipped in a substantial amount for – and will be. Now the Premier has done a backflip, despite him signing off on this new levy. The Premier has said publicly that integrity is not optional, yet this charge was signed off on in 2021 when he himself was public transport minister.

Paul Hamer: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, the matter that the member is canvassing has got nothing to do with the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): Yes, and I believe I have already addressed relevance. This is not a wideranging debate, and I believe the member for Euroa was in the chamber when I talked to the member for South-West Coast. I ask you to come back to the education and training reform amendment bill, please.

Annabelle CLEELAND: The relevance, which I would like to refute, is that this is the same government that is telling small business it needs another licence and another fee to train an apprentice while it is quietly taxing the same Victorians to pay for a Melbourne rail project they will never use. I will talk about what this bill does.

Paul Hamer: On a point of order, Speaker, the Acting Speaker was very clear in her ruling, twice, that the member on her feet should be relevant to the bill that is actually being debated.

The SPEAKER: I have not been in the chair for the debate, but I have been listening intently, and I remind members when we are speaking on bills that to try and bring in extraneous issues is not the way to go. I ask the member for Euroa to come back to the bill.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Thank you, Speaker. Welcome back. I will talk about what the bill does not do. It does not create more apprenticeships. That was the purpose, and it goes absolutely against it. It does not give a small regional employer a new incentive to take one on. It does not touch the cost pressures already deciding whether an employer can afford to. The Victorian Skills Authority projects that construction alone will need more than 160,000 new workers in the decade. So our concerns are absolutely warranted.

I am conscious that members were interrupting my representation of regional Victoria, so I want to skip to why supporting regional businesses is important. We cannot talk about growing apprenticeships at the same time that this government is actively locking local businesses out of bushfire recovery work. The member for Eildon asked a question on notice, and in the response around the 25 contractors currently on the bushfire clean-up program, only three are based in the LGAs affected. My own question regarding this remains unanswered. The definition of 'local' has been

redrawn. On a disaster recovery program, it is traditionally defined by postcodes within the declared event area. It gets better. Labor's dysfunctional clean-up response has rewritten the rules, and 'local' is now apparently being calculated as anywhere in Victoria. This is not local content by any definition that residents of my electorate would recognise, and it explains why so little benefit is coming back into our community. Multiple local contractors who put machinery, equipment and people forward the moment the fires hit have not received work through the clean-up program, and they cannot go on the record because they are hopeful that one day this Labor government will wake up and start supporting regional businesses.

It was the deputy commissioner for recovery who changed the guidelines governing local contractor participation in the clean-up program, broadening 'local' to the statewide definition, and the outcome is on the record: barely any engagement, with contractors instead brought from as far as Geelong and Bendigo and Shepparton. No LGA was impacted. The clean-up program's head contractor Forge Solutions is part of the Johns Lyng Group, and given the scale of the appointment and the guidelines change that followed, Labor must be transparent on the appointment and probity process, including what, if any, role the deputy commissioner for recovery played in shaping the guidelines that determined how work flowed to that contractor and its local subcontractor arrangements.

These are not just contractors, these are the small businesses that employ apprentices. You cannot regulate for more apprentices with one hand while starving the very businesses that train them for work, and taxing them further, with the other. Training does not happen in a vacuum, it happens on worksites and in businesses, and they need to be viable to keep taking people on. Our alternative amendments are practical: remove the application fee for the employer licence, extend the licence from one to three years and bring forward the statutory review from five years to two.

We will always support genuine protections for apprentices and trainees. Another factor that we need to take into consideration is how our apprentices are getting to work. Public transport in regional Victoria is absolutely disgraceful. Most of it is buses that do not coincide with when apprentices start work. We need to look at changing the probationary licence age from 18 to 17 so our young apprentices can get to work. These are the practical steps that Labor should be looking at and not further taxes, not further fees. This side of the house, the Nationals, will always support regional businesses and the apprentices that they employ.

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (11:57): I am very excited to stand today and talk on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026. If I can have your brief indulgence, Speaker, I am also excited because I have just come from talking to the Hawthorn Football Club and Gazey in Strangers. That was a bit of a fanboy moment. What do we say when Gazey is in Parliament? 'Turn it up.'

Education is such a vital, important part of what we do in this place, one of the major portfolios that our cabinet looks after. I remember my first speech, and education played a big part of that because my intention when I came into this place was to do my best to upgrade and fund our local schools as best as possible, and I think so far we are doing okay. There is always more to do, as many have said. Before I go on about doing okay and things, let us talk about some of the context of what is in the bill. I want to go to the school community safety orders that are amended here and the fact that we are making some other changes to protect our teachers, staff, principals et cetera in a digital context. We all know that social media, while we all use it and it can do good in the world, can also do a lot of not-so-good. Unfortunately our teachers and students can get the brunt of that, including from other students. We know that since back in the day, when I was going to Kent Park Primary or Fairhills High School in the 1970s and 80s, there has always been bullying in schools, there have always been problems during school days. But back then, when you went home you left that at school. One of the problems we have with social media these days is that our kids are plugged in – take mine, for example: they are plugged in all the time – every day, a lot of the day. The irony is that now, with our restrictions on devices at schools, our kids do not have the devices at school but they have them at home, and in some terrible cases that bullying can continue at home.

We have as a government taken many steps to try and help our students. Other members have mentioned that mental health professionals in schools was a fantastic initiative. But we do also see, unfortunately, parts of the school community – and it is a very, very small amount of people – sometimes react to our staff, to our principals, in very unproductive ways, and in an even smaller amount of times this can get very problematic. These provisions for the safety orders are obviously a last resort, but sometimes those last resorts are needed.

I remember years ago Bec was at a school and there was this website that popped up. It was RateMyTeachers, and it was anonymous. Anyone could write anything. Our teachers do such a fantastic job, and I am very happy to see that they are thinking about being the best paid teachers in the country, and I cannot wait to see that get done and in place. While I am at it, I am also very happy to see a commitment to full and fair funding for our schools as well. That is fantastic. That is on top of the capital investment that this government has made over 12 years, but I digress.

I will give you an example where I think some of these changes will be very relevant. Recently one of the schools, and I will not say which school for reasons of naming people, in my area had an incident where a gentleman who is currently living in his car – that is a whole other story that we can talk about on how to help people – came onto school grounds during the day. Obviously that is not a good thing. The school was placed into lockdown, and the wonderful staff did everything they were meant to do. There was no further incident, but it is a concerning fact that this happens ever. That person was talked to. I think the police attended. There was no further incident to my knowledge, and that person left the premises. But that person is still living near the site, and it is my understanding that they might be entering the premises after hours. If someone is walking through school grounds after hours on a normal basis no-one would blink. But when we have someone who is doing that regularly, apparently after hours in the evening, then we have an issue. For something like this, school community safety orders may be a tool that could be used in this place, just to have a discussion with that person to try and explain to them the gravity of what is occurring. I fully support those changes.

I have garbled on a bit and I am going to run out of time, but I just want to go through some of the changes that we have had over the last eight years in our patch to iterate the investment in our educators and our education places. We have got Syndal South Primary School in my patch. Katelyn Joyce is doing a fantastic job down there. One of the first things that we committed money to was to upgrade building A. It was one of the old 1960s light timber construction buildings that had not really been upgraded much since then. We upgraded that building A. There is Glen Iris Primary School, with Maddie Witter down there. They had some issues with an old playground that needed to be upgraded. It is now a fully upgraded, inclusive playground, and I believe the little preppies, when we went down there, are pretty happy with that.

For Pinewood Primary School we made a commitment in 2022 to provide a brand new gym with music and art rooms, and I took a sneak peek last week when we got to drop in to see Karen down there. It is fantastic. We do not necessarily get thanked a lot in this job and no-one is saying we should, but I did have a guy come and tap me on the shoulder down at Pinewood Coles, which is my local – g'day to all the people down at Pinewood Coles – and he just said, 'Thanks for the gym, mate. Great that that was organised.' And I said, 'Well, you'd probably thank the Treasurer and the Premier, not me, but, you know, I'll take it.' That is looking fantastic.

At Camberwell South Primary School Natasha Cummins has been working on getting the toilets that run off the gym upgraded for her junior kids for years, and we managed to get that into our capital grants last year, so that is coming. They are very happy with that. At Ashwood School Karen Overall is doing fantastic work. We have got a brand new senior centre for those kids at Ashwood School, who are the best of us. At Burwood East Special Developmental School with Helen Smith, again, we made some upgrades there. We have upgraded, I believe – someone correct me if I am wrong – every special school in the state. I think that was the noise. At Parkhill Primary School Joanne Jolly is doing an awesome job. They have not only a gym that we upgraded about five or six years ago with the former member for Burwood but also the forecourt and atrium and other things that we have done –

they look fantastic. At Ashwood High School, with Dr Moore, then Meg and now the acting principal Michael Foster, they have got a brand new STEAM centre that we did in the last term, which is awesome, and we are doing some further work to building B, which is in planning now but all budgeted and in the bank.

At Mount Waverley Secondary College Karen Wade has got a STEAM centre as well. There is Campbell McKay at Mount Waverley Primary School, which had a bit of a fire incident the other day. Campbell, if you are listening, my understanding is everything is okay, which is good, but that is a shame. Maybe we will have to upgrade some of that to get rid of the old stuff there. They have got building upgrades that we also promised in 2022. At Ashburton Primary School we did netball courts I think in the last term. Again, there is a bit more to do, but that is a great upgrade for the kids down there. In this budget that we have just had we promised a brand new gym for Mount Waverley North Primary School, which Natalie Grieve and her team have been working on for probably over eight years but definitely since I have been here. There are a few other things we have done, but they are some of the commitments we have put into our education system in the Ashwood district, previously the Mount Waverley district. There is more to do, and I intend to get it done.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:07): I rise to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026. This government is addicted to red tape, regulation and tax, and we have just seen it again. We have record numbers of apprenticeships that are down. We see scenarios in this state where trade apprenticeship commencements are down 11.8 per cent, falling to the lowest number since 2001. I mean, that is just ridiculous: when we have a building and housing crisis we have the lowest apprenticeship commencements since 2001. Non-trade commencements are down 20 per cent, falling to the lowest numbers since 1995, when traineeships were in their infancy. Falling commencements were seen across a range of occupations, including plumbers – down 15.5 per cent. You cannot get a plumber in Victoria for love or money, and we have a government that is wanting to create more regulation to provide disincentives to getting plumbers into the workplace and small businesses to train them.

This is a government that is addicted to red tape, regulation and money, because all this is is just more cost that is being imposed on businesses and harm to these businesses. People are just turning away from the industry. No wonder Victoria is in a housing crisis when we have these issues and incompetent governments that want to introduce more red tape and regulation in this state. We have carpenters down 16.1 per cent and sheet metal workers down 18.9 per cent. It just continues to go on in terms of regulation and red tape in the building industry. This is not the first rodeo. We have had two other attempts by this government, unfortunately, to introduce a whole lot of regulation and red tape that has forced businesses – small builders – to become paperwork shufflers more than they are actual builders. Forget about laying a brick; they are more focused on having to deal with the volumes of paperwork to ensure that they can register and run their businesses. This government is just running small builders out of business, and that is why we are not getting things built in this state. We know from talking to Master Builders Victoria (MBV) and the Housing Industry Association (HIA) that we have seen the cost of building a house go up by about 30 per cent in the last few years; 43 per cent of the cost of constructing a home in Victoria, according to Master Builders, is regulation, red tape and taxation – the highest of any other state.

With 70 new taxes in a decade, it is a government addicted to tax regulation red tape. That is why homes in Victoria are not being built and that is why this particular bill, in the way that it is being presented to the house today, is a dud. It is a dud because what it does is say to those employers, 'Every year you've got to go about filling in a whole lot of paperwork. You've got to register and obtain a licence and comply to just take on another apprentice or a trainee.' What an incentive that is. It is a joke. What makes it even sadder is it is a government that does not consult with the industry. Master Builders Victoria actually wrote to the government raising serious concerns with this particular bill, warning it would hit small building businesses hardest at a time when the sector is already absorbing major regulatory change. We have the National Construction Code in Victoria that other states are

delaying. We are the first ones to adopt it, which means it is forcing more cost and more compliance issues on these industries at a time when they can least afford it.

The bill transfers regulation of apprenticeships and traineeships from the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority to Workforce Inspectorate Victoria and introduces – here is the kicker – a new annual employer licence and gives the regulator expanded enforcement powers, including civil penalties up to $25,000 and public naming of employers whose licences have been cancelled. Welcome to Victoria. Victoria is the cost capital. It is certainly not the building capital; homes are not being built. The government claim that they are building 80,000 homes a year. The minister was on her feet yesterday talking about how wonderful things are that we have now hit 50,000; she has just forgotten about the 80,000 target that the government had, which was kicked down the road to 800,000 over 10 years. They are celebrating failures now in Victoria: 'Do you know what, we're building the lowest number of homes that we have in a decade. But it's great – 50,000 homes.' Seriously, homes are not being built because it is just too expensive to build homes in Victoria.

Master Builders supports the underlying goal of protecting apprenticeships and traineeships – we all do – but not at the cost of actually giving a young person a start in life. We want to get apprentices into a trade or into a profession, get them going on the tools and into a job earning an income and ensuring that they get their start in life. That will not happen under this bill, because it is another deterrent before they hit the start line. Let us get them in the job. Let us get them on the tools. Let us get them in the construction industry. Let us get them building homes, not filling in paperwork.

Master Builders' key concern is the bill departs from what the taskforce actually recommended. Rather than a specialist education-led regulator with a risk-based registration process, the bill applies a general workplace enforcement model with strict liability offences and a no-fault element required, with 98 per cent of the construction business nationally employing less than 20 people. More than half of the apprenticeships and traineeships are in small businesses. More than half are working in construction, and the compliance burden will fall disproportionately on operators that are least equipped to absorb the cost – small businesses. Again, we are trying to hit a nail with a sledgehammer and do something here to a small sector and say they are the big guys of the construction industry. What about the small builders? This government does not care about them, because they are not union dominated. It is not just another CFMEU handout on the Big Build in some of the big construction projects, because they do not care about small businesses and they do not care about small builders. We have seen that time and time again.

Master Builders is calling for a pause to the bill until further consultation can occur. If the government had any decency and thought about shaving costs and getting homes built, they would pause this bill and at the very least take up the amendments that we have seen from the member for Evelyn, who has done fine work on this bill. But do not take the Master Builders words as exclusive; the Housing Industry Association is calling for the Victorian government to withdraw its proposal to require employers to obtain a licence before engaging apprentices, warning the scheme will add red tape, increase costs and reduce apprenticeship opportunities at a time of severe skill shortages.

Again, this is a warning sign from the two peak industry bodies. HIA and MBV are saying, 'Warning, warning, Will Robinson, don't go forward with this bill. It will cost money. It will cost jobs. It will not build homes.' The government has ignored the warning signs and is pushing on because they are addicted to tax, addicted to red tape, addicted to regulation and addicted to the bureaucratic mess that Victoria has become under the useless government that currently presides over us.

Today I tabled a petition from 1879 people opposing the abolition of the Architects Registration Board of Victoria – 1879 architects. They are really concerned about their board being abolished, particularly what that will do to young people who are studying architecture. Victoria produces 43 per cent of Australia's master architecture graduates from five accredited programs, including many international students. What the government wants to do is abolish the board. Again, it is an industry where Victoria is leading the way in terms of design. We are the design capital in Victoria when it comes to

architecture and built form, product design in so many different areas, fashion. The government wants to rip the carpet from under the very people that are creating the opportunities. I presented that petition which opposes the abolition of the Architects Registration Board of Victoria, which the government wants to kill. It is another example of the government wanting to take away any industry support. They ignore Master Builders and they ignore HIA. They not only ignore the architects registration board but they want to sack it.

That is what we are dealing with in this state, a government that just runs a dictatorship. They want to run everything from Spring Street. They want all planning to come from Spring Street, not from local councils. They take away people's local voices. That is why this government is addicted to red tape, costs and tax. For us to go forward, we need a fresh start in Victoria to get rid of this useless government and get homes built again.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (12:17): I rise to support the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026. I cannot tell you how proud I was to officially open the tech school in Broadmeadows last week. Thanks to another massive Labor state government investment in both Broadmeadows and in education, we now have a magnificent place to learn, to discover, to challenge, to innovate and to prepare our young people for the jobs of the future.

Success has many parents and this is truly one of them. The first time I met Sheena Frost, Gina Dougall and Sally Curtin as a candidate four years ago, they told me their number one priority for Broadmeadows was a tech school. I was able to secure an election commitment for just that. The Kangan board and the indomitable Sharan Burrow are also incredibly strong advocates. Their vision is second to none. I thank them and the team at Kangan for bringing this project to life: CEO Laura Macpherson, director of the Hume tech school Bo Li and the Hume tech school team, my good friend Melissa Tinetti and all the wonderful staff at Kangan, industry partners and representatives from local schools. The tech school is a great example of what can be achieved when schools, training providers, industry and the community work together to create better opportunities for young people.

One of Broadmeadows' greatest strength is the strong partnerships between organisations and their shared commitment to a better life for everyone. Together we are the strongest advocates for the people of Broadmeadows. I particularly thank all those who work so hard with me on the Broadmeadows Revitalisation Board and those who were able to join in the celebrations last week: Kim Stadtmiller, CEO of the Hume Whittlesea Local Learning and Employment Network; Don, CEO of DPV Health; and representatives from Banksia Gardens and Hume City Council and, importantly, students from Aitken College, Hume Valley, Mickleham Secondary and Hume Central who were able to join us on the day and were so proud that their ideas have been included in the building.

The tech school initiative began in 2014, with a $128 million Victorian Labor government commitment to establish 10 tech schools across the state. In 2023 we committed a further $116 million to build six more tech schools so that 62,000 more Victorian students could access hands-on STEM learning experiences for the careers of tomorrow. Hume is the fourth of those new tech schools to open, and I know it will make such a difference to local students and schools across the electorates of Broadmeadows, Greenvale and Kalkallo.

There has been a lot of excitement about this tech school, and it is easy to see why. You can see the thought that has gone into every part of the building. It was designed with students, teachers, industry and the local community and with strong connection to country. It brings together culture, knowledge, learning and the possibilities of STEM. The artwork at the entrance, created by Aunty Kim Wandin and Chris Joy, draws on the Woi-wurrung story of the Seven Sisters. This tech school will provide free high-tech, hands-on learning experiences for more than 20,000 secondary students from 28 partner schools. This Labor government has also made free transport available for local students to get there, making it easier than ever to access great learning opportunities locally. Plans also include

running programs after school hours and during school holidays to give even more local kids the chance to explore, learn and be involved in positive activities.

Students will take part in immersive programs in clean energy, advanced manufacturing, digital technology, health infrastructure and social services. What I love about the programs on offer is that they encourage students to think about how technology can improve lives, strengthen communities and solve real-world challenges. In anatomy, students can design and print 3D medical devices and explore careers in health technology. In race to sustainability, they will investigate renewable energy and design solutions for a cleaner future. In data detectives, they will take on the role of cybersecurity analysts, investigating digital threats and how to protect people and their data. There will also be a focus on biomanufacturing, lab science, robotics, freight and logistics, autonomous vehicles, ethical decision-making in transport, food security, waste reduction and, my favourite, the circular economy. I thank Hume council for being a leader in this field. I cannot wait to see the discoveries, innovations and opportunities that come from this tech school.

Only Labor is making sure every child, no matter their postcode, gets a world-class public education close to home. We have invested heavily in quality education for the early years right through to adulthood. Education is my number one priority, and I am really proud of what we have been able to achieve across the electorate. Just in Broadmeadows, Labor has invested $20 million into the Broadmeadows Special Developmental School. I initiated a major upgrade at Hume Valley, upgraded courts and doubled the size of Gowrie's early childhood centre. Across the electorate we have expanded kindergartens to deliver on Labor's nation-leading free kinder for three- and four-year-olds. We have built one of the first government owned and run childcare centres in Moomba Park and an incredible new STEM and technology centre at John Fawkner. We have invested $10 million into the Jacana School for Autism and upgraded all of our special schools, plus made major upgrades to primary schools including Meadows, Glenroy West, Westbreen and Fawkner. Federal Labor have delivered the university study hub at Broadmeadows led by La Trobe – a real game changer. We have partnered to deliver 120 new social homes nearly ready to open just across the road from the TAFE.

Only Labor delivers on education, as demonstrated by the recent offer to teachers and support staff, which will make them the best paid in the nation. We know that education is the most powerful tool to transform lives and communities, and our teachers and support staff work hard every day to deliver on this priority.

Worker safety is a priority of the Carroll Labor government and has been the foundation of the labour and union movements for over 100 years. I recently invited local union reps from our schools into Parliament to discuss teacher safety and wellbeing, and I thank the Premier and the members for Greenvale and Pascoe Vale for joining me. We continue to work together to deliver on their priorities and develop policies that assist local teachers and schools to enhance the learning environment for all. This bill reflects our deep commitment to teachers and the critical work they do and will strengthen powers to keep them and all staff and students safe at schools.

This bill will also keep our youngest workers safe at the commencement of their careers, strengthening protections for Victorians entering the workforce through apprenticeships and traineeships. Victoria's 62,000 apprentices and trainees form a crucial element of our economy and society. Apprenticeships and traineeships play a critical role in enabling our workers to develop their skills and participate in the workforce and provide employers with access to a skilled supply of labour to support Victoria's economic growth and sustainability. Liberal governments defunded, closed and ruined our TAFEs, yet we have rebuilt and reformed Victoria's training system.

Many TAFE students continue their journey from learning to employment via a traineeship or apprenticeship, and they need to be safe and supported. In February this year Minister Tierney and I visited Kangan Institute and celebrated National Apprenticeship Week. We congratulated Apprenticeships Victoria and its strong partnership with employers and training organisations on their fifth anniversary of enhancing the apprenticeship journey and boosting retention and completion rates.

It was so heartening to hear the life-changing stories of the many apprentices and the support that this program has given them. More than 80,000 apprentices and trainees have received crucial support to build skills and rewarding careers.

In 2023 the government established the Apprenticeships Taskforce to advise the Labor government and to provide recommendations to improve safety and make the system fairer for apprentices. The taskforce consulted extensively, including with apprentices and trainees from priority groups, women and First Nations apprentices and trainees. It consulted extensively with small business to ensure the recommendations were considering the needs of both employees and employers. The taskforce finalised its report in March 2024 and made 16 recommendations, and we are implementing all of them.

A key finding was the potential for a power imbalance between the apprentice or trainee and their employer, which can unfortunately make them more susceptible to being exploited. For many it is their first job and often they are not sure of their rights, are unsure what is appropriate or not appropriate in the workplace or just do not know where to go when they need help. The majority are less than 25 years old, with a large percentage under 19, and it is really difficult to be assertive at that age. Younger workers are also found to be more prone to workplace safety incidents. Apprentices and trainees in the construction industry face greater health and safety risks given the dangers when working on a building site.

This bill delivers on the government's response to the taskforce's recommendations to strengthen the regulatory framework for apprenticeships and traineeships. The key recommendations in the bill regarding apprentices and trainees will provide additional protection, particularly for those engaged by labour hire firms. Being able to speak in this place after rising to support the Workplace Protection Orders Bill 2026 last sitting week shows the dedication of this government to make Victorians' places of work and study safer places to be, and I commend the bill to the house.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (12:27): I am pleased to rise on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026. Speaking as a person who has employed a lot of apprentices over the years – I did through my construction career, as did my father before me – if this bill came forward when I was self-employed, I would nearly stop employing apprentices. The construction industry is the main sector that employs apprentices throughout the state. We do have other apprenticeships obviously; we have hairdressing and baking and whatever. The construction industry is so over-regulated. You have got so much paperwork to do now, and government keeps getting in the way. I cannot see this bill doing anything but disincentivising people to take on apprentices.

To introduce a bill where every year now you have to be registered to take on an apprentice is almost like we are going to have builders as registered training organisations. That is what it feels like. I sat down with the Housing Industry Association (HIA) on this bill, and they were totally against it, for good reason. You have got to remember that 70 per cent of the houses built in this state are done by mum-and-dad builders. They are not done by the Metricons and the Simonds and those ones. In actual fact Metricon and Simonds are less likely to employ apprentices. They generally just employ subcontractors: your framers, sparkies, fix-out carpenters and lock-out carpenters. It is that next tier down – the subbies – that employ apprentices. The 70 per cent of the builders in this state are the ones that are employing the apprentices, so there is no incentive now. We are again making life more difficult in the construction industry.

I will give credit where credit is due. The construction industry had a little bit of a reprieve when we changed ministers. The Minister for Housing, Building and Precincts, the member for Bentleigh, made a couple of changes that were positive for the construction industry. I have said this before in this chamber. I know, Deputy Speaker, you have probably been sitting in that chair while I have been saying it: when you get the major bodies, being the HIA and Master Builders Victoria, saying to the government, 'Pause this. Consult more,' they need to listen. They need to listen for good reason.

The apprenticeship numbers in this state are falling dramatically. The member for Broadmeadows just referenced tech schools. Tech schools were the best thing we ever had. I went to –

Belinda Wilson interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: I will take up the interjection from the member from Narre Warren North. She just said that we shut them all. Well, she might want to go back and check the history books, because it was actually the Cain government that started to merge the tech schools and the high schools in this state. It was the Cain government that actually started that process. It was not a Liberal government. I know the next thing she will say is 'Jeff Kennett' and she will run around crazy. It was the Cain government that did that. The Cain government were the ones that started to close the tech schools in this state. The biggest mistake we made in this state was shutting tech schools for kids like me who were not academic. I could go to a tech school and I could get a range of experience in different trades that I would like to try. I tried boilermaking, carpentry and fitting and turning. I tried all those trades when I was at tech school and learning. The great thing about a tech school was that a tech school student was more likely to get an apprenticeship because they had that basic skill that was taught to them, and not just the hands-on skill but the theory as well. The best thing Victoria ever had was tech schools, until the Cain–Kirner governments shut them down. That was actually what happened. If you check your history, you will find I am right. I am not often wrong. I thought I was wrong once, but I was mistaken – completely different.

If we look at our apprenticeship numbers, in 2022–23 we had about 58,620 apprentices, in 2023–24 we had 33,023 and in 2024–25 we had 24,888. The 2025–26 figures are predicted to drop another 18. 2 per cent. When you look at that, if we just go back to the 2022–23 and 2024–25 figures, we have dropped from 58,000 to 24,000. So rather than bringing in legislation that is going to cause more paperwork for anyone employing an apprentice, why don't we look at why the figures are dropping? Has anyone done any research into why the figures are dropping for apprenticeships? Goodness knows we need more trades in this state. But then I talk to people like the Master Plumbers association. They are limited on the amount of apprentices they can train a year. I am happy to be corrected, but I think it is about 150 a year. I have sat down with Master Plumbers, and they could double that figure. So if we want more trades in the system, why aren't we going to bodies like Master Plumbers, talking to them and saying, 'How can we get more people through?' The simple response will be, 'Lift the caps.' That will be the simple response from Master Plumbers: 'Lift the caps. We'll put as many through as we possibly can.' When you have that significant drop in two to three years, you have got to research why we are having that drop and why we are having the failures in the completion of apprenticeships, not introduce more regulation to make life harder.

As I said at the start of this contribution, I have employed apprentices, and if anyone in this chamber has employed an apprentice I am more than happy for them to contribute. But when you employ an apprentice, probably depending on the trade, for the first two years they are relatively unproductive. Okay, you get them out there and you say, 'Listen, I want you to whack this frame together.' You know it would take a tradesman maybe an hour and it will take the apprentice 3 hours. He is learning, and as an employer you cop that. You know you are going to have those losses in the first couple of years. This is the thing about apprenticeships. Apprenticeships are so important. It is one of the few industries where you get trained and paid at the same time, unlike university. All you do if you go to uni is that you end up with a big debt.

At least with an apprenticeship, with a trade, you are being paid while you are being trained. It is one of the few industries where you can do that. That is why I am sitting here wondering why we have had such a decrease. We cannot sit back and say, 'Well, we're going to put more regulation on it. This is going to be good,' and expect the industry will employ more apprentices; they will not. Even the federal Labor government has dropped the rebate for apprentices from $5000 to $4000 – another disincentive. I have said this before to the government: if you keep whacking industry enough, they are not going to have any faith in you anymore. This is what is happening in the construction industry particularly. For the last three years they have been belted from pillar to post. You can talk to any

builder, anyone out there, and they will all say the same thing. As I said, I give the member for Bentleigh credit – he gave them a glimmer of hope when he reversed the minimum financial requirements – but this is not going to improve our apprenticeship numbers one bit.

I do not like this bill at all, and if I was employing apprentices I would not like it at all, because why would I want to be registered? Builders have police checks. To be a registered builder you have to have a police check. The builders are the ones employing the apprentices, so why make their lives harder? Why didn't the government sit back, if they are serious about trades and tradies, and go, 'How can we give the builders or the plumbers or whatever an incentive to employ apprentices?' Not make life harder for them and bog them down in more regulation and more paperwork. We are already 75 homes behind the promise of 80,000 homes a year. If we want to get more houses in this state, there is a really simple solution: get out of the way. Get government out of the way and let builders build so we can get more homes.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (12:37): I rise to support the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026. I do so because few responsibilities of government are more important than ensuring that a young Victorian leaving school can look to the future and say, 'There is a pathway for me' – a pathway to further education, a pathway into an apprenticeship or traineeship, a pathway into a good, secure and well-paid job and ultimately a pathway towards the dignity, independence and opportunity that come from meaningful work. A job, as we know, is much more than a pay cheque. It provides purpose, achievement, independence and security. It gives people the capacity to support themselves and their families, meet the cost of living and contribute to their community.

That is why since coming to government in 2014 our Victorian Labor government has continued to place jobs, skills training and education at the heart of our economic and social agenda. We rebuilt TAFE, we introduced free TAFE, we strengthened Local Jobs First, we introduced the major projects skills guarantee, we invested in schools, apprenticeships and vocational education and we have deliberately used our infrastructure program, government procurement and frontline services to create opportunities for Victorian workers, apprentices, trainees and businesses. Since 2014 Local Jobs First has been applied to thousands of projects, for example, representing almost $200 billion in government investment, while the major projects skills guarantee has supported thousands of apprentices, trainees and cadets into employment on major Victorian projects.

Since free TAFE began in 2019 more than 245,000 students have benefited, saving them more than $816 million in tuition fees, an average of more than $3300 per student. We have invested more than $16 billion in new and base funding in TAFE and training since 2014, including more than $660 million for 45 new or upgraded TAFE campuses right across the state. That investment matters because TAFE remains the backbone of our apprenticeship system. In 2025 more than 70 per cent of Victorian apprentices and trainees who completed their training did so through TAFE.

Investing in apprenticeships is one thing, but we must also make sure that when someone begins an apprenticeship we do everything possible to ensure they finish it safely, fairly and successfully. Victoria currently has around 62,000 apprentices and trainees, but the regulatory framework governing them is no longer fit for purpose. The current framework was established more than 15 years ago, with elements dating back more than 25 years. It has not kept pace with the changing nature of work, education or Victoria's economy. The Apprenticeships Taskforce, established by our government and chaired by former ACTU president Sharan Burrow AC, identified serious issues confronting apprentices, including workplace safety concerns, harassment, inconsistent training and difficulties navigating the system. It made 16 recommendations and three supporting actions, and our government supported all 16 recommendations either in full or in principle.

We know there can be an enormous power imbalance between a young apprentice and an employer. Most apprentices and trainees are under 25, and many are even under 19, as you can appreciate, Acting Speaker Farnham, from your experience. This is the very first workplace for many of them, yet

apprentices have experienced bullying, harassment, discrimination and wage theft. Tragically, there have also been workplace incidents resulting in serious injuries and deaths. A young person should never have to choose between finishing their trade or feeling safe at work. That is why this bill modernises the system. In straightforward terms it will do quite a number of things, including transfer the regulation of apprentices and traineeships to Workforce Inspectorate Victoria, establish stronger compliance and enforcement powers, introduce a new licensing system for employers of apprentices and trainees, establish clearer employer standards, strengthen protections for apprentices working through labour hire providers, improve oversight of training plans and enable better information sharing between the regulators. It will create a dedicated apprenticeship and traineeship commissioner and consultative committee and require a statutory review of the new scheme after five years. And rather than the current one-off employer approval, the new licensing system will provide ongoing oversight with a light-touch annual renewal designed to minimise unnecessary burdens on good employers. I should say the overwhelming majority of employers who employ apprentices do so in a good, fair and reasonable way. They do a great job of overseeing and training apprentices, and we should continue to acknowledge and thank those employers who do take on apprentices, because they make a massive contribution to the future jobs and skills pipeline of our state. They should be commended.

This bill also strengthens our schools. It enshrines the principle that Victorian schools should be safe and respectful places to learn and work; strengthens the permission-to-teach arrangements, renamed 'conditional authority to teach'; and improves the school community safety order scheme. This is fundamentally a bill about safety, about quality and about pathways. Those pathways have never been more important as our economy, our in-demand industries and our workforce and skills pipeline continue to grow, evolve and transform.

Acting Speaker Farnham, I am very proud to be a member of the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee, which you were previously a member of as well, but we have recently been undertaking, since your departure, an inquiry into student pathways and in-demand industries. According to the Victorian Skills Authority, over 1.4 million workers will be needed in Victoria by 2035. This includes both people filling newly created jobs and workers replacing people who retire. It is forecast that 87 per cent of those workers and jobs will need post-secondary qualifications. Of the approximately 1.5 million workers, there are about 716,000 that will be in occupations generally aligned with VET qualifications and about 551,000 occupations aligned with university-level qualifications.

The biggest workforce needs are concentrated in some of the most important industries and areas, including health care and social assistance, where we will need another 363,000 workers by 2035, including ageing and disability carers, nursing support, personal care workers, early childhood educators and other health occupations. In construction we will need 162,000 by 2035 – carpenters, joiners, plumbers, construction managers, electricians and many other skilled trades. In education we will need 150,000 new workers by 2035 – teachers, again early childhood educators, education aides, university educators, TAFE teachers and so much more. In professional, scientific and technical services we will need 140,000 workers by 2035 – software programmers, engineers, even solicitors, accountants and management analysts. In accommodation and food services we will need 125,000 new workers – more chefs, cooks, hospitality workers; cafe, restaurant and hotel managers; and many more baristas as well. Retail trade will need 115,000 new workers by 2035, including pharmacists, sales managers and retail frontline workers. In public administration and safety we will need 95,000 new workers – police, policy analysis, intelligence professionals and many across the public administration sector. In manufacturing we will need 80,000 new workers – metal fitters, machinists, production managers, technicians and advanced manufacturing specialists. In transport and postal warehousing we will need 75,000 new workers across logistics, distribution and procurement managers and transport workers and drivers too. In financial insurance services we will need another 70,000 workers and across digital technology at least around 20,000 new workers. Each of these

sectors and the people that work within them are the people who will build Victoria, care for Victoria, teach Victoria and drive the Victorian economy of the future as it continues to grow and evolve.

But there is of course as part of this another enormous transformation occurring simultaneously: artificial intelligence. Jobs and Skills Australia's 2025 *Our Gen AI Transition* study, the first whole-of-Australia labour market government study into generative AI, essentially found that AI is much more likely to change and augment jobs than eliminate them. JSA says 87 per cent of current Australian jobs are more exposed to augmentation than automation. That is, AI has the capacity to complement and uplift the productivity of existing jobs, not just outright replace them. This Jobs and Skills Australia analysis, subsequently highlighted by the Productivity Commission, found that only around 4 per cent of Australian workers are currently employed in occupations classified as 'highly exposed to AI automation', compared with approximately 31 per cent in occupations 'highly exposed to AI augmentation'.

For Victoria the Victorian Skills Authority has taken that national JSA analysis and applied it directly to Victoria's skills plan. It estimates that for the roughly 1.5 million workers Victoria will need over the next decade, a very large proportion will enter occupations whose tasks are expected to be transformed by artificial intelligence. But government modelling indicates that AI is overwhelmingly, again, more than likely to augment those workers rather than replace them. And that distinction really matters: the future is not simply a story about robots replacing workers; it is a story about jobs, industries and our world changing, just as they have changed over the millennia as technology has changed and evolved. Industries and jobs changed through the advent of the printed word – books. Industry and jobs changed through the dawn of the industrial revolution. Industries and jobs changed with the advent of the telephone. Industries and jobs changed with the advent of Ford and General Motors's assembly lines. Industries and jobs changed with the launch of the space race as well, with Sputnik, Mercury, Gemini, Apollo, and the subsequent missions of Artemis and the ongoing mission of Voyager adding to the stars. Industries and jobs changed through the splitting of the atom. Industries and jobs are changing through the clean energy revolution – through solar, wind, battery storage and so much more. Industries and jobs also changed through the advent of analogue and subsequent digital communications and computing – mobile phones, emails, internet, the ATM and so much more.

So the challenge before us is not simply that AI or robots are coming to take people's jobs; it is to ensure that the new technology that emerges is able to complement and grow our economy, industries, workforce and skills pathways to support prosperity, productivity and socioeconomic gains for everyone, just like the previous technological evolutions have continued to do. Across all of our sectors we will continue to experience more demand, particularly in those frontline services, to continue growing the Victorian economy and helping every Victorian.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (12:47): I rise in support of the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026. In the community that I represent, there are so many people who have built a good life through having a trade. That started with having an apprenticeship, and it is one of the first steps on a journey to what can be a fantastic life for you and your family. Our whole community benefits from having a demographic made up of so many people with a trade, because it means that as volunteers in our community with different community organisations, they have got the skills to really help just get things done. So I really appreciate having that make-up of my community.

There are young people in my community that are following in those footsteps, and I have had the pleasure to meet many young apprentices in my community who are learning how to build houses, who are learning how to wire houses, who are learning about automotive trades and so much more. The way that they are supported, first at school, then in school-based apprenticeships and then stepping out into the broader community – it is just fantastic to see that wraparound support. When a young person does not have that school-based support with the officers there and that wraparound service, it is good to know that this government is making sure that there are good protections for them in their workplace. I do not know, Acting Speaker Farnham, if you have seen things like this on your local

community Facebook, but I often see messages from young people looking for an apprenticeship, and they always seem like such upstanding young people that are really seeking to have a go at life, and the community is very quick to jump in and give people guidance about who could take them on. We love apprentices, and we love the businesses that take apprentices on.

In my community, at Whittlesea Secondary College one of our teachers has been teaching trade and woodwork for over 45 years. I recently shared with my community a photo of the wooden table my husband made all those years ago in the 1990s at high school with Mr Lucas, and I called on the community to share with me if they also still had a table at their house that they had made with Mr Lucas. The response was overwhelming. I have had people emailing me photos of the tables as well. There were such positive comments about and memories of Mr Lucas, and so many of those comments went on to say 'I'm a chippie now' or 'I was apprentice of the year in 2006'. These are people who were taught by him and through his support have gone on to work with their hands and help build our community, so I am really thankful to Mr Lucas for that, and the whole community is as well. We value the skills of apprentices and the fact that they are building our great state, and it is only right that they are protected and that they have support as young people, often in their first experience in employment. Unfortunately there have been safety incidents where there have been serious injuries and death, and that is absolutely not something we want to see, because where things are preventable we should prevent them, and that is what this bill is about.

This bill comes about through the work of the Apprenticeships Taskforce, which was chaired by a former ACTU president and included a former justice of the Fair Work Commission. Its membership was exhaustive and included employer representatives. Those opposite are somehow wanting to have two sides of the same coin, one being the safety of apprentices and one being support for business as though an increase in one is a reduction in the other. This government rejects that. We reject pitting one group against another in that way. We support both and we believe that everybody should have those protections in their workplace. There are many things in this bill which will streamline things for employers and make it easier for them compared to the current system. For example, the current approvals by the regulator to enter into a training contract is changed to this more streamlined licensing process where after the first year employers will just be asked if there has been any change to the circumstances. If not, that is all that needs to happen.

We know that the vast majority of employers do the right thing by apprentices and trainees, and this is just to make sure that for those apprentices or trainees that unfortunately find themselves in an environment where someone who does not do the right thing have got somebody there to support them. Sometimes people do not have the courage to speak up or do not even know that their rights are being breached or that greater safety is available. This is just one of the things that this government has done around creating better conditions for apprentices. We have got the centralised Apprentice Helpdesk, as well as new mental health and counselling services for apprentices, additional support for employers and ways to improve training quality. Other supports are funding of $5.8 million over two years in the 2026–27 budget to continue the Apprentice Helpdesk that I spoke about and transition to the workplace rights apprentice training program. Previous support has been around the priority apprenticeship model.

If we just take a step back and look at the big transitions our state is experiencing, especially around renewable energy and around transport projects, the opportunities presented to apprentices through those projects have been immense. But it goes both ways, and the state of Victoria has really benefited from those workers and from the skills those workers have developed through working on such big and complex projects, and they are skills that we need into the future. That is why we will support apprentices not just now but into the future as well.

One of those types of support is the apprenticeship support officer program, which provides apprentices with that tailored support, including referrals and help with training; employment safety; workplace concerns; mental and physical wellbeing; housing, which can be a big deal for young people; financial difficulties; and drug and alcohol issues. There are 29 of these officers currently

employed across 13 TAFEs to provide support to first-year apprentices and those who experience additional problems. Over 21,000 apprentices were contacted under the program in 2025. In one year alone all those points of contact provided that support, which I am really pleased about. It is one thing to say that you support apprentices and you support people building a good life with their hands and through the skills that they can develop from an apprenticeship – to say that is easy, but what you can see is the government taking a bigger, structural, more systematic approach through the taskforce that I mentioned and accepting in part or in full all of the recommendations that that broad-based taskforce delivered. Platitudes do not cut it. I think any tradesperson probably wants you to cut through the rubbish and just get to the point, so I will come to the point, and that is that this government supports apprenticeships and supports people to be safe at work and to come home safely to their family, and that is why I support the bill.

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (12:57): I rise to give my contribution on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026, which goes to apprenticeships, traineeships, schools and other matters. I only have a short time before lunch, so I would like to say how lucky are young people today? I look at and go to different TAFEs and different institutions and I just wish I was young again and had those opportunities. I am still young, but I wish I was a bit younger. I often wonder what I would do if I were at TAFE. I think my wife would love me to go to TAFE and learn how to build stuff, because I am one of those people that does odd jobs around the home. I measure five times, cut three times and then get my wife to do it properly. But maybe it is a bit late for me to do that. I guess I would go off and do cooking. I have already done a bit of cooking, but I would like to go back and do that. But I just think people are really fortunate, and listening to the debates today and hearing everyone talk about the opportunities that the Labor government have given kids and apprentices, I just hope that we take a moment to step back and be grateful for what we have and the work that everyone here in this place is doing to support them to have a future. That is what this bill is about too – having a future.

I did think about the fact that I probably did not have an apprenticeship, and then I went, 'Well, yes, I did, actually'. Way back in 1979 – now I am feeling old – I got a part-time scholarship to go to the West Australian Ballet company. Instead of going to sport on a Wednesday afternoon, I would catch a bus from Fremantle over to North Freo, go to the West Australian Ballet company and be taught by one of the professionals there in a classical ballet class. I realised that was my apprenticeship. To be taken into a fold, a place where I was cared for and nurtured by someone with experience who was generous enough to share that experience and teach me a technique, a philosophy and a way of thinking about the possible job that I was about to embrace, was a really, really special opportunity. I know Anthony is probably not watching this, but if he is, I thank him for all those lessons.

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

Business interrupted under standing orders.

The SPEAKER: I acknowledge in the gallery former minister and member for Bayswater the Honourable Heidi Victoria.

Members

Minister for Rural and Regional Development

Absence

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:02): I wish to advise the house that for the purposes of question time today the Minister for Community Sport will answer questions for the portfolios of rural and regional development, agriculture and water.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Suburban Rail Loop

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. Why did the Premier conceal an $8 billion tax for five years until he was caught red-handed by the Auditor-General?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:02): I absolutely reject the premise of the question. I am a Premier that fixes things, and I have got rid of this charge.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): The Premier said integrity is no longer optional. How does secretly sitting on an $8 billion tax for five years meet his own test of integrity?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:03): We began the week by saving $2 billion, and today we saved Victorians another $8 billion.

Ministers statements: education system

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Education, Minister for Skills and Training, Minister for First Peoples, Minister for Women and Gender Equality) (14:04): I said yesterday that Labor is indeed the Education State, but this is not just through offering our educators the best paying conditions in the country. On this side of the house we are literally building the Education State one new and upgraded school at a time. We are investing in schools, schools and even more schools. In fact we are building and upgrading more schools than anywhere else in the country, and we are not stopping. That is 121 new schools built, with two new schools opening next year. The new primary school for Aintree North will support up to 700 students in that fast-growing community, and I know the member for Kororoit cannot wait to open the doors to her community on that one. The new specialist school for Officer will support up to 144 students, giving them a high-quality education close to home. I know this one project is very close to the heart of the member for Pakenham, who recently met with the principal to share the excitement for day one. These new schools are on top of the 2400 upgrades this government has delivered to Victorian schools, including of course the brand new classroom opened by the Premier just a few days ago at Bellaire Primary School in Highton.

It is quite the contrast with those opposite. While this government has invested more than $20 billion in new and upgraded schools for Victorian students where they are needed most, those opposite are plotting out which schools, which hospitals, which services they will be cutting –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Deputy Premier is a repeat offender in misusing ministers statements to attack the opposition – a serial offender.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. The Deputy Premier to come back to her ministers statement. Member for Brighton, if you wish to raise a point of order, please do so in the correct way. Deputy Premier, without attacking the opposition.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: The Education State is not just a tagline on a numberplate; it is reality, and it is backed up by real investment – more than $20 billion in new and upgraded schools for Victorian students. Meanwhile, those opposite continue to plot with their One Nation colleagues and $40 billion of cuts.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, as I raised with you both yesterday and on Tuesday, the misuse of ministers statements is just out of control. I would ask if you –

Members interjecting.

James Newbury: I believe that I have raised a point of order on every single ministers statement this week. It is just unacceptable to misuse them to attack the opposition.

The SPEAKER: Again I remind the member for Brighton of the correct way to raise a point of order. I remind ministers again that in their ministers statements they will not attack the opposition.

Suburban Rail Loop

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): My question is to the Premier. Given the Premier says integrity is no longer optional, why didn't he reveal the secret $8 billion tax on day one as Premier and apologise then?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:07): On that side they look to the past. We look to the future, and we have abolished it.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was: why did the Premier hide the tax?

The SPEAKER: There is no need to repeat the question in a point of order, member for Brighton.

Ben CARROLL: On public transport services our record speaks for itself. You cut train lines, we cut fares.

The SPEAKER: The Premier is reminded to address his comments through the Chair.

Anthony Cianflone interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Pascoe Vale can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Pascoe Vale withdrew from chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be direct in his response, and he has not dealt with the substance of the question.

The SPEAKER: I cannot tell the Premier how to answer a question. The Premier has concluded his answer.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): This morning the Premier revealed he has asked his department to find out whether there are any other charges that might need to be made public. Why does the Premier not know how many secret taxes his own government has imposed on Victorians?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:09): Can't you imagine the secret side deals and secret side letters they are working on right now?

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this is simply appalling. It is absolutely appalling.

The SPEAKER: What is the point of order, member for Brighton?

James Newbury: On relevance, the Premier is simply being evasive.

Anthony Carbines: On the point of order, Speaker, points of order must not be used to deliberately disrupt the proceedings or to respond to debate.

The SPEAKER: I uphold the point of order on relevance. However, I remind the member for Brighton that a point of order is not an opportunity to make a statement to the house.

Ben CARROLL: I will not relitigate the past, I will fix it.

Ministers statements: police resources

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (14:10): I rise to update the house on the Carroll Labor government's plan to get more cops on the beat and help keep our community safe. We

have delivered the single biggest uplift in police numbers in the state's history, backed by a record $5 billion investment and funding for more than 3600 new police. We are giving Victoria Police the funding, the powers and the support they need, and we are backing the Chief Commissioner of Police's plan for a safe Victoria.

Victorians have told us that they still want to see someone at the counter of their local police station. That is why we are recruiting 400 police reservists and getting station counters open and more frontline police back on the beat. Every reservist on the front counter frees up our frontline police to be back on the beat. The first 50 are going to Essendon, Oakleigh, Bayswater, Cranbourne, Glen Waverley and Bentleigh. Over the coming weeks the second wave of reservists will be deployed for the first time. The members for Box Hill, Werribee, Pakenham, Melton, Kalkallo and Narre Warren North will have reservists at their counters and more police out in their communities.

While on this side of the house we continue to back Victoria Police, we know that a Liberal–National–One Nation coalition can only mean one thing: a new direction.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, again the minister, as has been the case with every single ministers statement this week, is misusing the ministers statement to attack the opposition. They are repeat offenders.

The SPEAKER: Minister, without attacking the opposition. You will be sat down.

Paul EDBROOKE: I will not attack the opposition. Funding for community safety – cut. The violence reduction unit – cut. Extra cops – cut. PSOs and reservists – cut. The last time they had a chance they cut $130 million from Victoria Police's budget, and that is a fact.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is defying your ruling.

The SPEAKER: I do not believe that is the case. I think the minister was referring to a previous government.

Paul EDBROOKE: Thank you for your counsel, Speaker. Those opposite do need to be honest with Victorians, because promising $40 billion worth of cuts can only mean frontline cuts –

The SPEAKER: I ask the minister to resume his seat and stay in his seat.

Suburban Rail Loop

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (14:13): My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier confirm that, when he was sworn in last month, contained in his incoming briefs was a draft of the VAGO report into the Suburban Rail Loop, which, as we know, outlined VAGO's concerns with this secret $8 billion tax?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:14): I absolutely reject the premise of the question. Captain Integrity over there – no way, mate.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Euroa! The house will come to order. The Leader of the Opposition is warned. The member for Yan Yean is warned. The member for Euroa is warned. Premier, when you address the house, you do it through the Chair. The member for Bulleen on a supplementary question, and not across the table.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (14:14): The Deputy Premier said this morning in relation to the government's $8 billion secret SRL tax she was not aware:

> … that there'd been any proactive decision to keep components of that increase hidden from public view.

Isn't it the case that the now Premier attended the meeting of the budget and finance committee, where the now Deputy Premier was in attendance and was authorised to decide how this secret tax should or would be communicated to the public?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:15): I completely reject the premise of the question. I am the Premier now, taking the state in a new direction.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I am concerned that the Premier is misleading the house.

The SPEAKER: There are correct ways to raise that, member for Brighton. It is not through a point of order.

Ministers statements: major events

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy, Minister for Major Events, Minister for Medical Research, Minister for Racing, Minister for Economic Development) (14:16): The sun is shining outside, and it is also shining on a huge list of major events Victorians can enjoy over the next six months. Outside of the chambers I am proud that the Victorian visitor economy hit a record $48 billion in annual spend this year, with 120 million visitors to Victoria last year. That is 1200 MCGs.

First up, we have got the NFL coming in two weeks time, with half of the sold-out MCG expected to be interstate and international visitors. That is hotel rooms and restaurants fully booked. We have got pubs at capacity. Our region is seeing an uptick of fans staying and exploring our great state for over a week. Of course then we are off to the races. When we go off to the races and the first group 1 of the spring carnival on Saturday at Caulfield, we expect to see those opposite with their new stablemate in the bright, bright orange One Nation silks. I look forward to seeing that. I will also be at the Caulfield Cup in October and the Melbourne Cup in November, with Half Yours looking to repeat his historic double from last year. Perhaps the opposition leader should also be backing that in, because after all the Liberals–One Nation coalition will only be half yours.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, again, as with every other ministers statement this week, the minister is misusing their ministers statement. As you are sitting down multiple ministers every day, I would ask you to sit this minister down.

The SPEAKER: I ask the member for Brighton to cease making statements with his points of order. Come back to your ministers statement, Minister, without attacking the opposition.

Anthony CARBINES: You might be able to stop the major events minister, but you cannot stop the race that stops the nation, the Melbourne Cup. We have also got the AFL Grand Final, the MotoGP featuring Barnesy, the Australian Open golf, the Boxing Day test, the Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race and the Australian Open tennis. We have got the Formula One and even the 150th Ashes anniversary test match all before the next footy season starts with round 1 next year in March, when the Catters might even be raising another premiership flag. We will see. What else have we got on the go? You must also be careful deciding. I list these major events so that those opposite can consider what they will cut with $40 billion in cuts. That is the list that they have got to choose from.

The SPEAKER: The minister will resume his seat.

Anthony CARBINES: We will defend major events in this state and jobs in Victoria.

The SPEAKER: Minister, I appreciate your enthusiasm, but please look at the Chair when I ask you to resume your seat.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the serial offending by ministers opposite is just out of control. It is serial offending.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Government integrity

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:19): My question is for the Premier. According to the gifts register, seven Labor ministers and parliamentary secretaries accepted dozens of expensive gifts from the gambling industry last year. This includes the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation Enver Erdogan, the person responsible for regulating the gambling industry, who accepted gifts valued at thousands of dollars from Tabcorp, Crown Casino and Endeavour Group, a pokies giant. This is a serious conflict of interest and one expressly prohibited under the ministerial code of conduct, even when it is disclosed. As the person responsible for enforcing the code, will the Premier take action or is integrity in fact negotiable?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:20): The ministerial code has been followed by all members and ministers and parliamentary secretaries, and it is our reform that has led to this transparency.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:20): The Premier's answer is simply not true. Ministers are paid 450 grand a year to represent the public's interest, not the interests of gambling corporations. These gifts are called inducements for a reason: because they are likely to persuade ministers to support these harmful industries instead of regulating them. Minister Erdogan watered down pokies reforms in the same period in which he accepted these gifts. The Premier has tried to distance himself from his predecessors, but true integrity means that your ministers cannot be bought by powerful interests. So, unlike his predecessors, will the Premier ban gifts to MPs from gambling corporations?

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Speaker, on *Rulings from the Chair* and Speaker Delzoppo:

> A member may not use the opportunity to make a speech when asking a question.

The SPEAKER: I remind members that you do not actually need a whole minute to ask a question.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:21): All appropriate disclosures have been made in accordance with the rules.

Ministers statements: regional development

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations) (14:21): The Carroll Labor government is backing regional Victoria, and you do not have to look far to see it. It was great to spend time last week in Ararat talking to local businesses with the hardworking member for Ripon. Then I went down to meet with the Committee for Geelong with the members for Lara, Geelong and Bellarine and Ms Tierney from the other place. Since coming to government, Labor has invested an average of more than $4 billion every year in regional Victoria, more than twice what the Liberals and Nationals managed when they were last in government. Regional unemployment has fallen from 6.6 per cent under the former Liberal–National government to 3.7 per cent today. We have cut regional payroll tax to just a quarter of the metropolitan rate, the lowest in the country, to help regional businesses grow and create more jobs. We are backing that growth with projects like the Ballarat Base Hospital upgrade in the member for Wendouree's electorate, and we have upgraded the Maryborough hospital in the member for Ripon's electorate. We have built the fantastic Nyaal Banyul convention centre in Geelong, and there is also the Gippsland line upgrade, to announce just a few upgrades. We are delivering the infrastructure, jobs and opportunities regional Victorians deserve.

These are the sorts of investments that only Labor governments deliver, while the Liberals and Nationals have a long history of treating regional Victoria as an afterthought. Who could forget the former Liberal Premier Jeff Kennett describing regional Victoria as the toenails of the state? In fact the member for Brighton recently called them out-of-towners. We know what $40 billion worth of cuts would do to regional jobs, services –

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, in speaking to the chamber, the minister is required to be factual. He is leaving out the fact that this government has spent 12 per cent of infrastructure investment in the regions when we are a quarter of the state.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Nationals, a point of order is not an opportunity to make a statement to the house. There is no point of order.

Colin BROOKS: We know what $40 billion of cuts would do to regional jobs, services and communities.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I draw your attention to Speaker Brooks's ruling in relation to misuse of a ministers statement when it attacks the opposition. I would suggest to you that Minister Brooks is breaching that ruling.

The SPEAKER: The Treasurer has not mentioned the opposition.

Colin BROOKS: But I will say, under Jess you will get less.

The SPEAKER: Treasurer, I ask you to not address members in that manner. As you are a former Speaker, I expect better from you.

Suburban Rail Loop

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:24): My question is to the Premier. On Tuesday the Premier claimed he was saving $1 billion from the Suburban Rail Loop by scrapping underground interchanges at Box Hill and Glen Waverley. Why did the Premier deceive Victorians by claiming a $1 billion saving for interchanges the Auditor-General says were never funded in the first place?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:25): We are actually saving Victorians $2 billion by building this project. They are going to pause and stop it.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:25): How can Victorians trust a Premier who fraudulently presents the cancellation of unfunded projects as genuine savings?

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Speaker, I think the framing of the question from the member is misleading and the use of the word 'fraudulent' is unparliamentary.

The SPEAKER: It is not, actually, but anyway.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:26): We reject entirely the premise of the question. We are building this project and saving Victorians money in the process.

Ministers statements: government achievements

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:26): Our government believes in a very simple idea: if you work hard, you should be able to build a good life. You should have the things that a good life provides, like good health care, a great education, secure work and a home of your own, like free dental – providing public dental clinics so no Victorian lives in pain and no Victorian raids their superannuation – and like free TAFE. It was wonderful to be able to see the member for Sunbury at the new TAFE campus opened this week, the new classrooms that have been opened in Geelong this week and the new suburb being built in Melton with seven new schools, new parks and the infrastructure that families need. These are the things Victorians and families rely on from a Labor government. Your bank balance or your postcode should never define your future. Whether it is home ownership or going to the dentist, these are the things that Labor values.

It is a very different Victoria to that presented by those opposite. We know Labor will always build; they see the public service as a cost. They see education as a nice-to-have; we see it as the most fundamental building block for a great life. Labor will always build. Labor will always fight for working people, and we will never stop fighting for them. What is not leadership is saying you support action on climate change in Kew and then coming in here and telling everyone you support coal. We stand with Victorians. We do not say one thing in Kew and another thing in Spring Street.

Constituency questions

Eildon electorate

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (14:29): (1788) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Residents and members of the mountain biking community have contacted me regarding the condition of the Cascades mountain bike trail between Lake Mountain and Marysville. Concerns have been raised about erosion, fallen trees, overgrown vegetation, debris, exposed rock, reduced visibility and the adequacy of maintenance arrangements, with reports that these issues may be creating safety risks for trail users. The trail is an important tourism and recreation asset for Marysville, Lake Mountain and the region more generally. It supports local businesses and attracts visitors from across Victoria. What action is the government taking to ensure the Cascades mountain bike trail is maintained to an appropriate standard, and are sufficient resources being allocated to trail inspection, maintenance and hazard removal to address community concerns about rider safety?

Broadmeadows electorate

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (14:30): (1789) My question is for the Minister for Public Transport, and I ask: when will a big power clean of the Broadmeadows station precinct occur? The Broadmeadows station precinct has multiple owners and falls within the responsibility of private owners, Metro Trains and several departments. Despite my ongoing efforts and strong advocacy, this complexity has proved challenging to overcome. However, in this year's budget I secured funding for improvements and have been working closely with the department and council to implement these as soon as possible, starting with a big power clean of the entire precinct. We are looking at expanded CCTV, improved greenery, murals, more lighting and opportunities to activate the space as well. There are 115 new train services, and the community connectors commenced last week, and it was great to meet them and the PSOs, who are now there from 9 am until the last train. I have also secured funding for the bus interchange, which will be resurfaced this financial year. I believe the owners of the private building are also making some improvements, and I hope these can occur in the next few weeks.

Mildura electorate

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (14:31): (1790) My urgent constituency question is to the Minister for Children in the other place and comes from the community of Hopetoun. What is the government's solution to the escalating early years crisis facing Hopetoun families? Hopetoun has been without child care since April 2024. Just as Emerge Early Years had recruited staff and prepared to reopen the service, serious water, mould and structural damage forced the early years centre to close for potentially two years. Twenty-seven children are enrolled in kindergarten this year, while 15 families have expressed interest in child care. Kindergarten is now operating from the senior citizens building, which is not fit for purpose, not safe and displaces older residents as well. This temporary arrangement cannot accommodate the child care. The Department of Education has advised that no relocatable building is available and that a $2.5 million rebuild is just not justified – because country kids do not matter! Well, they do. They have offered funding to make the seniors building suitable for kindergarten services, but that displaces our seniors – it is robbing Peter to pay Paul. What is the solution?

Monbulk electorate

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (14:32): (1791) My question is for the Minister for Environment. How will the minister respond to the calls from Yarra Ranges council and other advocates for kangaroos to remove this local government area, which includes the Dandenong Ranges, within my electorate of Monbulk, from the kangaroo harvesting program? Yarra Ranges is the only peri-urban LGA which is included in this program. It is an area renowned for its rich natural environment and unique wildlife. Kangaroos are an iconic part of this landscape, valued by residents and visitors alike. Increasingly, community members are expressing concern about the impact of commercial harvesting in areas close to homes, recreation spaces and wildlife corridors. They are

concerned about animal welfare outcomes and the effect harvesting can have on local mob structures and the broader ecosystem. The Yarra Ranges community has a strong commitment to conservation and coexistence with native wildlife, and decisions affecting kangaroos should reflect community expectations, local environmental values and the importance of protecting Victoria's indigenous species for future generations. I look forward to the minister's response.

Euroa electorate

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (14:33): (1792) My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. Why was the V/Line timetable for services from Heathcote Junction and Wandong to Seymour changed so that the service which previously arrived at 8:36 am now arrives at nearly 9 am? Gabriel's daughter has just started at St Mary's College in Seymour, and the old timetable, with the train arriving at 8:36 am, was a key reason for the family choosing that school. Under the new timetable she will not arrive until 8:57 am, after the school day has started, and the only alternative is 7:46 am, nearly an hour earlier, meaning she will be forced to stand outside the locked gates at the school. Driving her every day is not affordable with fuel costs where they are. Dean Wood, Julie O'Neill and so many others have reached out and said this is ludicrous and that there was absolutely no consultation with the community when these decisions were made. There is now a replacement bus for students, but not for those trying to get to work. Will the minister commit to reviewing this timetable so that students like Gabriel's daughter can get to school safely and on time? If any further changes happen, please consult with the community.

The SPEAKER: Member for Euroa, you asked two questions. Which one do you want to stand?

Annabelle CLEELAND: The first: why was the V/Line timetable changed?

Preston electorate

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (14:34): (1793) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public Transport, and my question is: what is the process for reviewing Victoria's strategic cycling corridors, particularly those in our local Darebin area. I ask this because of course we are strongly committed to improving our cycling infrastructure. In recent years our Victorian Labor government has upgraded a number of major cycling routes across Preston and Reservoir. We look forward to continuing to do so in partnership with Darebin council. But as we do that, I think we do also need to look at reviewing some of our strategic cycling corridors, notably the issue with the routeing through the notorious Boldrewood Parade–Broadway roundabout, perhaps some of the routeing through the Eric Street area, which is very steep, and then the strange omission of the Merri Creek Trail and the Darebin Creek Trail from our strategic cycling corridors even though they are used frequently by local cyclists and as a state government we have invested heavily into making them high-quality cycling routes. Any information that the minister can provide about a potential review process would be greatly appreciated.

Melbourne electorate

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:35): (1794) My question is to the Minister for Medical Research. When will Labor finally catch up with other states and increase funding for Victoria's medical research institutes to prevent them from closing? The Parkville medical precinct in my electorate is world renowned. It is home to institutes like Peter Mac, WEHI, the Florey and many more. They do incredible life-saving research. They employ 73,000 people and contribute $3.6 billion to our economy every single year. But right now they are facing a funding cliff. In fact 10 of our 14 independent medical research institutes could close by 2030 because Labor in Victoria is refusing to give them the funding that other states do. Every time an institute wins a research grant, it still needs additional funding to keep the lights on and pay its staff. Victoria covers just 17 per cent of these costs, while Queensland funds around 80 per cent. I am calling for urgent intervention from the government and a funding commitment to ensure that these medical research institutes can survive and thrive.

The SPEAKER: The member for Melbourne referred to 'Labor in Victoria'. I assume you meant the government. I remind members that it is referring to a government or a minister.

Cranbourne electorate

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (14:36): (1795) My constituency question is to the Premier. How will the Victorian government support the Nepalese Australian community, many of whom live in Cranbourne, in the context of the floods devastating the region? I want to take the opportunity to acknowledge the destructive floods sweeping across Nepal. Cranbourne is home to a strong and resilient Nepalese community, and I know their thoughts are with their family, friends and loved ones back home. The emotional impact can be devastating too. I am conscious of the loss of other Australians who may have been travelling through the region. They are in our thoughts, and we will be by their side. I look forward to the Premier's response.

Morwell electorate

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (14:37): (1796) My question is to the Premier. The Victorian Auditor-General yesterday revealed Labor quietly hiked every public transport ticket by 1 per cent from January 2025, buried inside the annual fare increase, in a bid to fund the problematic Suburban Rail Loop project. That equates to an additional $60 a week in public transport fares, more than $3000 a year for frequent commuters, all to covertly bleed an additional $8 billion from Victorians. Sixty per cent of that revenue, an estimated $4.8 billion by 2062, is earmarked to fund the SRL East, making the secret tax the project's single biggest source of value capture funding. The secret tax was signed off in 2021 when the Premier was Minister for Public Transport. Regional Victorians are yet again being forced to bankroll a multibillion-dollar project in Melbourne that most of them will never use. My question to the Premier is: how long has the Premier known about the secret public transport tax that Labor deceptively introduced to bankroll the Suburban Rail Loop?

The SPEAKER: I presume you mean the government, member for Morwell.

Hastings electorate

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (14:38): (1797) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public Transport. Minister, please tell me how many people have used the cross-peninsula bus service, also known as the route 886, since it made its first trip on 5 July this year? Many people in the community have talked about and asked for a cross-peninsula bus service for decades. I campaigned on it, and as soon as I had a seat in this place I set about doing everything I could to make it happen. I would like to give my thanks to the two transport ministers in the government at the time who helped make this happen. The first one is now the Premier, Premier Carroll, and the second transport minister is now the Deputy Premier, Deputy Premier Williams, and I say thank you very much for your help and support in making the bus a reality. The bus is up, it is running, and people are using it and telling me they are very happy with it and how fantastic it is to be able to get into Mornington so quickly. People also ask how many people are actually using it. I know patronage will grow and, I believe, come this summer every bus will be packed to the rafters.

Annabelle Cleeland: On a point of order, Speaker, I have 34 questions currently overdue, and they cover several portfolios – some date back to March – environment, housing, public transport, several health questions, roads and road safety –

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Euroa, we need the numbers of the questions.

Annabelle Cleeland: You want me to read out all 34?

The SPEAKER: No, I ask you to give that to the clerks.

Annabelle Cleeland: Excellent. I have 36 more questions overdue by the end of this week too.

The SPEAKER: Pass the list to the clerks, member for Euroa.

Bills

Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (14:40): I am very happy to continue my contribution on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026. This bill does two main things: it fixes up the rules that protect apprentices and trainees at work and it gives our schools better tools to help keep staff and students safe, including from abuse that now happens online as much as it does in person. Both matter to Victorian families.

First, let us start with the apprentices. We have got 62,000 apprentices and trainees across Victoria. Most are under 25 and a fair few are under 19, and that means many are new to the workforce, still learning their rights and still working out who to call if something is not right on the job. The current rules protecting these young workers are around 20 years old. The framework has not kept pace with how apprenticeships and traineeships actually work today or with the size of the risks. There have been safety incidents in this state resulting in serious injury and death among apprentices, and I believe there have been five deaths in the last five years, and that is not acceptable. So the government set up the Apprenticeships Taskforce in 2023, and the taskforce spoke with apprentices and trainees, employers, unions and regulators and delivered its final report in March 2024 with 16 recommendations. The government, I am glad to say, has accepted all of them in full or in part, and this bill delivers the legislative response. Regulation of apprenticeships and traineeships moves from the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority to Workforce Inspectorate Victoria, a body with stronger capability in industry regulation. This frees the VRQA to focus on its core job of regulating schools and vocational education.

Second, the regulator gets a proper set of enforcement tools. At the moment, the options are limited to cancelling an approval or prosecuting an employer, nothing in between. This bill introduces notices to produce compliance notices, infringement notices, official warnings and enforceable undertakings, so action can be proportionate to the risk. Third, employers will now need an annual licence to take on apprentices and trainees, replacing the current one-off approval. That means ongoing oversight rather than a single check at the start. I believe this makes things safer for trainees and apprentices. Fourth, there is stronger regulation of labour hire providers who employ apprentices and trainees, an area the taskforce identified as higher risk due to limited oversight when a third party is involved.

These changes are about giving apprentices and trainees the protection the current system was never built to provide and giving good employers a fairer system to operate in. Training plans are also getting a shake-up. That is the document that spells out what an apprentice is actually supposed to be learning, what trade they are training in, what the employer needs to teach them and how often someone checks in on their progress. This bill makes sure that document actually has to include the basics so nothing is left vague and everyone knows what is expected day to day and from day one.

The bill also gets the different regulators talking to each other properly. Right now, if one agency spots a problem with an employer, there is no guarantee that that information gets passed on to whoever else needs to know. This fixes that. It means regulators can share what they know and work together on the tricky cases, instead of everyone working on their own in a silo. On top of that, there will be a dedicated commissioner just for apprenticeships and traineeships sitting within Workforce Inspectorate Victoria to drive this new system. There will also be a committee made up of industry, employees and other key voices to keep the commissioner across what is actually happening on the ground. To make sure all this is working the way it should, the bill locks in a review within five years, which will come back to this Parliament.

The changes will be in place on 1 July 2029 at the latest, and the government is aiming to get there sooner if it can. That timeframe is about doing it properly. New computer systems need to be built, staff need to move across to the new set-up and there is a lot of talking to do with employers, apprentices, trainees and unions before any of the new rules kick in.

All of this builds on support that is already up and running. Right now there are 29 apprenticeship support officers working across 13 TAFEs, and last year they made over 150,000 contacts with more than 21,000 apprentices. There is also the Apprentice Helpdesk, which has handled more than 3430 cases since it opened in mid-2025. This bill just puts that support on a firmer footing going forward, and that is a good thing.

The bill introduces a new statutory principle, enshrining the expectation that all Victorian schools are safe and respectful places of learning and work. It also strengthens the school community safety order scheme following a statutory review, giving principals simpler and more effective powers to protect staff and students from harmful, threatening and abusive behaviour. This is a very good thing. I have principal morning teas in my office at least four times a year, and the dangers that principals and school staff face from students and also parents of physical abuse is really quite extraordinary. So I am happy that this is happening. For the first time this includes digital content school community safety orders. These allow actions against people using social media or messaging platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and services like WhatsApp, to harm school staff or students. That is a gap in the current scheme this bill closes. The process for making these orders is also being streamlined. Immediate orders no longer require proof of imminent risk, a threshold the review found ruled out most situations where urgent action was actually needed. Ongoing orders can now be extended by up to 12 months without having to repeat the full process, while still requiring reasonable and proportionate procedural fairness for the person in the orders to apply.

There is a lot in this bill, and a lot of it sits alongside the government's ongoing investment in training more broadly. More than $16 billion has gone into Victoria's TAFE and training system since 2014, including over $660 million into 45 new and upgraded campuses. Since 2019, more than 245,000 students have benefited from free TAFE, saving them more than $816 million in tuition fees, an average of over $3300 per student. As I said earlier, I am quite jealous of the facilities that our students have now with TAFE. If I could start over, I would. I commend the bill to the house.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy, Minister for Major Events, Minister for Medical Research, Minister for Racing, Minister for Economic Development) (14:47): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Business of the house

Adjournment

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy, Minister for Major Events, Minister for Medical Research, Minister for Racing, Minister for Economic Development) (14:47): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until 8 September 2026.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Associations Incorporation Reform Amendment Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Tim Richardson:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (14:48): To begin this contribution, I will make it very clear that the Nationals and the Liberals oppose this bill. To make another thing clear, there are two parts to this bill, one which involves incorporated associations that have an industrial relations purpose and a second which involves incorporated associations that are listed as terrorist organisations or prohibited hate groups. It is preposterous that those two are featured in the same bill, which is why we oppose this bill. But I do want to make another thing very clear: the Nationals and the Liberals have no interest whatsoever in protecting those in the second part of the bill – neo-Nazis, terrorist organisations and organisations engaged in unlawful hate actions or actions that serve that kind of terrible purpose – none whatsoever. If the government identifies a genuine gap in Victorian law which then allows a terrorist organisation or prohibited neo-Nazi organisation to obtain legal protections or legitimacy through incorporation, then it should bring a clean bill to the Parliament – separate it, split it – which is what we intend to do in the upper house.

We will then look at that. We will consider the evidence, and where there is a genuine problem obviously requiring legislation we will fix it, but I do not for a minute believe that these types of groups are sitting around doing administration and paperwork for Consumer Affairs Victoria. If there was a legitimate need and there was evidence shown to legislate against these types of organisations, we would have looked at it, but instead this government has taken the politically convenient issue of these neo-Nazi terrorist organisations and hate groups and bundled it into a bill containing a completely separate industrial relations agenda. That should make every member of this place, every member of the community and every member of some of these alternative associated incorporations ask: why? Why are we debating neo-Nazis and retail workers in the same bill? Why are we debating terrorist organisations and paramedics in the same bill? Why are hate groups and railway workers being debated in the same bill? Why are organisations that engage in unlawful extremism being legitimately bundled with perfectly lawful associations of Victorian workers? They have absolutely nothing to do with one another, and yet this government would have Victorians believe that somehow they belong together when they do not.

The government's sales pitch has been remarkably simple and misleading, and its own media release is headed 'Stopping workers being scammed and stamping out hate'. The government says that so-called Red Unions – and I should not even say that, because they are legitimate organisations representing thousands of Victorian workers across all manner of sectors: nurses, paramedics, police and teachers – are registering as ordinary incorporated associations instead of federally registered unions. Well, we know what happens when they try to register as federally registered unions. It happened to the Victorian Ambulance Union, and I will get to that very, very shortly, because there is an interesting little carve-out to make sure that the VAU are not captured by this particular bill. The minister says:

If you're calling yourself a union, you should have to act like one.

Then the government says it is going to stop hate groups incorporating and obtaining what it calls the legitimacy and financial structuring benefits of incorporation. That sounds simple, but again, I do not think they are that concerned with their legal protections and how their organisation is structured. These are not law-abiding citizens in the first place, so it is ridiculous.

The bill is decidedly more complicated than that original press release suggests when you actually look at who may be affected. The government's neat little storyline about fake unions starts to really

unravel. Let us talk about what an incorporated association is, and it is worth explaining, considering that is what this whole bill is about. The government's language has deliberately blurred the distinctions. An incorporated association is a legal entity. It can hold assets, it can enter contracts, it can employ people, it can have insurance, it can sue and be sued, and its existence continues independently of individual members. Thousands upon thousands of Victorian sporting clubs, charities, community organisations, professional bodies and other associations use this structure. Some of them have to to be able to gain any sort of government funding. But an incorporated association, as we know, is not automatically a federally registered union. We know that, and nobody is suggesting otherwise.

I might also point out that federally registered employee organisations operate under the Commonwealth legislation framework, and they receive statutory rights and privileges. They are the ones that have the right of entry. Incorporated associations can do all those other things, but they do not carry that right of entry – and they also do not profess to. It is pointed out everywhere on their websites. And it is not just the Red Unions. They have been named in the government's media release, but it is not just them. It is things like RAFFWU, the Retail and Fast Food Workers Union. They also point out that because they are an incorporated association they do not have those rights of entry, but they have all of the other mechanisms to be able to represent those workers in that sector. Registered union officials also may obtain rights of entry, and we have covered that. That distinction does matter for incorporated associations.

There is a little bit of rhetoric too that Labor seem to keep skipping over. An organisation does not need to be a federally registered union to lawfully represent workers in every circumstance – we know that – which is how these competitive unions have operated for so long and why it is upsetting so many people within the SDA, for example, because they are bleeding members to RAFFWU, and we know that. An industrial association can represent its members, we know that. A worker can appoint a bargaining representative and an organisation can participate in enterprise bargaining, which they have done, and it can appear in industrial processes, it can advocate and it can organise. And we know that because these organisations are doing that.

Let us talk about the Independent Transport Union. I have engaged with members of the ITU during consideration of this bill, and it is not a federally registered union either, we know that, and it also makes it clear. But it does represent transport workers, largely V/Line workers. It participates in those bargaining negotiations, it participates in industrial processes, and in 2025 the Fair Work Commission dealt with an application involving the Independent Transport Union for a protected action ballot covering employees across Victorian transport employers. This is not some imaginary organisation sitting in a suburban garage somewhere just dreaming up these things and printing membership cards on a printer and pretending to be a union. There are workers legitimately choosing an organisation to represent them, and that is one of the key points here. This bill is incredibly undemocratic, it is anti freedom of association and it stinks.

Choice matters. Apparently, though, that choice has become a very large problem for the Labor government, because if those workers understand exactly what the ITU or any of these independent associations or unions can do and what they cannot do, if they understand it is not a federally registered union or a registered employee organisation, why does the government then care which organisations they can choose from? And they do care. Is this a factional favour to the SDA to get rid of RAFFWU? Why won't the government provide us with the organisations that will and will not be affected? We have asked for those. We have also asked for the level of consultation that was involved in the writing of this bill, which we have not received.

Let us talk about RAFFWU – again, the Retail and Fast Food Workers Union. This is where the government's political narrative really starts to fall apart. RAFFWU is an incorporated industrial association, as I have said, and if you do a little bit of research on RAFFWU, it is pretty obvious that you would not describe them as sort of a conservative front organisation at all. They are very much an organisation that is built of the political left; we know that. In fact there are plenty of opinions that

come from RAFFWU that many members on this side of the house would not agree with. RAFFWU has also politically defended the CFMEU. I do not think there is a member on this side that would agree with that at all. They have defended the CFMEU during the controversy surrounding the administration of the construction division and expressed their solidarity. Their industrial philosophy certainly does not align with mine, but this is precisely the point. Freedom of association means very little if we only defend it for organisations whose politics we like.

RAFFWU represents retail and fast-food workers. It competes directly with the Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees' Association, the SDA, and RAFFWU says this legislation threatens its ability to continue operating under its current incorporated structure. Commentators from the left have made precisely the same criticism of this legislation as organisations from the other side: that the federal registration system can present substantial barriers where an existing registered organisation already covers the relevant workers, which creates a very strange situation. The Victorian government says, 'You shouldn't be an incorporated association. Go and become federally registered.' Well, it is not that easy. The federal system can effectively say, 'No, we've already got a union that represents those workers and also donates to the Labor Party, so we're not going to let you be a federally registered union. You can't do that,' which is why they have to be an incorporated association in the first place. They are trying to get rid of freedom of association and freedom of choice so that workers can only choose a state-sanctioned union that donates to the Labor Party – that is the crux of this. If a worker does not like how they are being represented by the federally registered organisation covering those workers, and workers are left asking where they are supposed to go if they do not want to pay those membership fees, then where are they supposed to go? You go to an incorporated association. But this will then outlaw those associations. Workers need to have choice.

There is also another element which Labor might find slightly uncomfortable. That is the elephant in the Kmart aisle. The Premier himself has spoken about his early years working at Kmart Airport West, where he started working as a young man. It is wonderful working in retail. I have worked in retail; I have worked in fast food as well. While working at Kmart the Premier joined the SDA. Obviously there is nothing wrong with that. I want to be clear about this as well: there is nothing improper about being a member of the SDA or joining that union when you are working at Kmart. But when the Premier's own government introduces legislation which potentially threatens the incorporated structure of the SDA's direct competitor in retail and fast food, then surely this Parliament is not only entitled to ask questions but is bound to. We are bound to ask questions, and there are some very simple ones that we would like asked. Was the SDA consulted on this bill? I said earlier that we have not received a list of stakeholder consultations that took place. Did the SDA advocate for these changes? Victorians will probably make up their minds. Transparency is not a strong point. Did the SDA ask the government to deal with incorporated industrial associations? Probably. Was RAFFWU consulted? I can answer that one, because I know the answer is no. We could ask when they were if the government still spins around the answer to that one. Was Trades Hall consulted? Probably. Which federally registered unions were consulted? Again, I have asked for any consultation that took place on this bill, and I am yet to be provided with that.

We come back to that question again: why won't the government simply table the complete list of associations it believes will be affected by this legislation, and who exactly was consulted? Was the Jewish community consulted? I know that neither the Australian Jewish Association nor the Jewish Community Council of Victoria (JCCV) were consulted, and they are very disgruntled, I will put it, for not being consulted at all and being left feeling like they are being used for political gain with zero consultation whatsoever. I am not alleging any sort of conspiracy here. I do not need to; the facts speak for themselves. The circumstances themselves demand transparency, because if government legislation removes or disadvantages a competitor to an organisation with longstanding links to the Labor Party, the government should be bending over backwards to demonstrate that the process was independent, transparent and justified. Present the problems that are being solved here.

I said earlier in my contribution that I would bring up the VAU, the Victorian Ambulance Union. The Victorian Ambulance Union and the Police Association Victoria were the first two I thought of that could be hit by this type of legislation. The police association operate under a different federal framework, so effectively they are a federal union, but not under that registration. It is a long and complicated process that I have learned a lot about in the last couple of weeks. They are okay. The VAU are not federally registered. They have been operating as an industrial association. However, they tried to become federally registered, and like that caricature that I tried to illustrate earlier, there has been some pushback. There are other organisations that represent ambulance workers, but the Victorian Ambulance Union obviously represents Victorian ambulance workers. It did lodge an application federally in 2024. What happened, I hear you ask. Its application ran into those complex federal industrial laws. It was objected to by the existing registered organisations. Questions arose about whether the VAU fell within the Commonwealth definition of 'enterprise association' because a majority of its members worked for Ambulance Victoria – state based.

The VAU have fought the issue. It was pursued through the Fair Work Commission process. Here we have an organisation that effectively said it was trying to enter the federal registered system and the federal legal architecture presented barriers to doing exactly that, which is what a lot of the other incorporated associations have run into as well. However, the VAU – and I spoke to Danny Hill whilst considering this bill – continued representing Victorian paramedics. I want to thank them, while I have the opportunity, for the job they do. It bargained with AV, Ambulance Victoria, and participated in that Fair Work Commission process.

Ambulance Victoria has itself dealt with the VAU as an industrial representative. Is the Victorian Ambulance Union a fake union like the others have been called? There would not be a paramedic in the state that would say no. Of course they are. But if it is not, then explain that principle. There is a nice little carve-out in this bill, though. Again, you do not want to allege any conspiracies here, but anyone that has applied to be federally registered before 1 July is exempt from this process. When was this presented to the house? Two weeks ago, well after that exemption date. Who else was consulted or notified that they needed to have a federal registration in to be exempt? I can tell you exactly how many independents were consulted: zero, absolutely none. That is a nice little carve-out for the VAU. They are still not federally registered as a union, but they are working through that process. Hopefully that will happen for them, because they do a very, very good job. Again, with the VAU there were objections. I cannot remember who from off the top of my head; I did not include the list of objectors because it is not really relevant. But given that there were those objections – 2024 is when they originally applied and it is now near the end of 2026 – it has been a long process.

Let us talk about unions for workers. If workers are unhappy, like I said earlier, with the organisation that is representing their industry, why shouldn't they be able to establish an alternative? Why shouldn't they? Why shouldn't another organisation compete for their membership? Why shouldn't another organisation offer lower fees? Why shouldn't it offer a different service? Why shouldn't it take a different approach to bargaining? Why shouldn't it be politically independent? That is an important question, I would suggest. And why shouldn't workers be allowed to decide who represents them? If the established union provides better representation, terrific, workers will choose it. That is competition. That is the competitive landscape. That is the free market. To do something like this, to outlaw any form of competition, is removing choice and removing freedom of association, which is a direct attack on democracy. It really is. But are we surprised? Not in the slightest.

If workers are being misled, then deal with that misleading conduct. But like I have illustrated, the associations and the unions that I have dealt with in consideration of this bill all have what their abilities are and are not illustrated on their websites and communications. The strongest argument this government has got is that these are fake unions and they are scams. That does not stack up, because they are very transparent about what is going on and what they can and they cannot do. If an organisation tells someone it is federally registered and it is not, that is a problem. No-one is denying that. But none of these associations are doing that. If workers are paying membership fees because

they have been deliberately deceived about what they are purchasing, that is a problem. Consumer protection always should be the priority. If that is an issue for some – certainly not any of the ones that I have consulted with – then let us deal with that. There is legislation that can deal with that already. The solution here is not to remove competition. You cannot just go around removing the competitor to make it so that workers have no choice other than a state-sanctioned union that donates directly to the Labor Party and is well documented for doing so. This is Soviet-style legislation coming quietly through this place, and it stinks and Victorians know it. Like I said, there have been unions and associations on both sides of the political spectrum that have illustrated and have been very vocal in their opposition to this bill and in how they feel about it. It is freedom of association. To be honest, if people are not happy with the organisation that is currently representing them, then freedom of association literally means they are free to move off and organise and come together and associate to form a group for better representation. That is exactly what freedom of association is, and isn't that fundamentally the basis of the union movement in the first place?

There are two parts to this bill that do not belong together in the first place. There is the part relating to associations with an industrial relations purpose, and there is the second part, which is dealing with those terrorist organisations and hate groups. As it stands right now, we have no choice but to stand up for Victorian workers in this place and for the communities that have not been consulted with regard to this bill; we have to oppose it because it is a direct attack on freedom of association and democracy.

There is another question. I have gone through a few questions that the government need to ask, but I think there is another question that the government should be asking themselves. If they were on this side of the house, would they want us having this kind of power? I do not think so. I do not think any government should have the power to remove competition from any sort of landscape, particularly competitive unions or associations – anything. Competition is a good thing.

I just want to quickly get to the public interest test. There is another reason for concern. I mean, there are plenty, but the other reason for concern is that this bill introduces a very broad public interest consideration into decisions concerning incorporation. That should concern every member who understands the importance of civil society. An incorporated association might be unpopular. It might be annoying – I am not suggesting that any of the ones that I have consulted with are at all. It might campaign against the government, but it might campaign against the opposition. It might say things that make everyone uncomfortable, but that does not mean that the government should have an expansive ability to decide that its continued incorporation is contrary to the public interest, where industrial associations are concerned. Once Parliament gives government powers over unpopular organisations and to decide if their continued incorporation is contrary to the public interest, that is a slippery slope. That is why good legislation is written for the government you fear, not merely the government that is currently governing. So that question really needs to be asked: would members opposite be comfortable giving precisely the same power to the opposition? I do not think so.

I am going to cut it short, even though I have a few pages left of my notes and a few other things I want to express. But in the interests of time, because we are getting away with the afternoon, which is unfortunate, I want to cover off the part of the bill that has no business being part of this bill. Let me go to part 2 – the other half of the government's political construction of this – the neo-Nazis, the terrorist organisations and the hate groups. They say that these organisations should not be able to incorporate. I agree, but again, these organisations are not sitting down doing Consumer Affairs Victoria paperwork on the weekend, are they? Let us be honest, they are not lawful organisations. They do not want to gain legitimacy and the financial structuring advantages that incorporation provides. We know that. Fine, but let us put it in context. These are not organisations, again, going about their lawful due diligence in their paperwork and filing their taxes and things like that – come on. Victoria already has substantial laws, too, dealing with Nazi symbols, Nazi gestures, serious vilification and unlawful extremist conduct. And terrorist organisations are, unsurprisingly, already subject to extensive Commonwealth criminal law.

During the briefing I did ask for the proscribed organisations that this would affect, and the department did come back to me with that list. On that list there are two. One is an Islamic extremist group. The other one is the White Australia Party. There are two. We know that they are federally proscribed terrorist organisations and hate groups. So again, why are we bundling these issues together? It is a really, really important question that needs to be asked by Victorians. I know for a fact that the Jewish community have asked that question, and they feel like they are being used as political fodder for this debate. Just wrap it all up, tie it in a red bow and let the government then talk about how we have opposed these bills and we are protecting those sorts of organisations, which I am not even going to name any more. It is absolute rot. The whole premise of this bill being bundled together – associations with an industrial purpose and these terrorist organisations and hate groups – is preposterous. There is a word for you. It is preposterous, and it should never be allowed to happen.

Like I said earlier, I was going to cut this short so a few other of our members could get up to speak, but I am quite passionate about this bill, which is why we will be opposing it in this place. We will be attempting to split the bill in the other place when it eventually gets there, but a lot of questions need to be asked. This will be a very, very slippery slope.

With my last moment, I do want to thank every industrial association that I spoke with – the guys from the Red Union, the guys from the RAFFWU, the guys from the ITU, Danny Hill from the VAU, Wayne Gatt from the police association, the Apprentices Group Australia and the JCCV – for all of these bits of information. Everyone that I spoke to within industrial associations was very forthcoming with their opinion of this. In fact some of them did not even know it was happening until I called them. What does that say about government consultation? Like I said, we are vehemently opposed to this bill. We are vehemently opposed to the removal of freedom of association. It is an attack on democracy, it is an attack on the free market and it is an attack on competitive unions, and we are absolutely opposed to it.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (15:18): What a story from the member for Mildura. I think if you were walking through the library, you would have to find that in the conspiracy aisle. But I noticed some key characters missing from that story, and they were workers – and workers rights. The whole focus of her time on her feet – I think that was half an hour – was the organisations themselves. But we should not be surprised, because we know that the Liberal–National–One Nation party coalition is not a group that is going to be supporting workers. The track record is there – opposing penalty rates, opposing minimum wage rises, not believing that people should have childcare subsidies and being fundamentally anti-worker – and here we are bringing amendment legislation to make sure that workers get the utmost protection from those who seek to say that they do represent them but at the end of the day cannot properly and fully protect their workers' rights. We are trying to fix that, and those opposite are turning it into a conspiracy theory. I say shame on them for that. We heard talk of the free market and competition and everything to do with the right of the organisation and nothing to do with the right of the worker. Well, we on this side are not surprised.

I will go into that in a little bit more detail soon, but can I just take a moment to note the most egregious part of the member for Mildura's speech. When we were talking about hate organisations being deregistered she named them as, I think, the White Australia Party and she referred to a terrorist organisation, and she said, 'There are only two.' So two is okay? Is three okay? Is four okay? One is not okay. One is one too many. Two is double one. I will give you that one for free. We are not going to dilly-dally or not make efforts to protect our community if there are 'only two' terrorist or hate groups. One hate group is more than enough. On the slippery slope that the member for Mildura speaks of, I am afraid she is already at the bottom of the slide. And who she is sitting there with is a disgrace. Those opposite need to reflect on who they seek to partner up with in this place and what it will do to the fine state of Victoria, because we can see it. We can see it so clearly.

Even in the language of an attack on democracy this is just tapping into all that classic far-right language, when clearly this has nothing to do with freedom of association. People are absolutely free

to associate. They are free to form organisations. Nobody is being stopped from associating. But this is stopping organisations from pretending to be federally registered unions.

Jade Benham interjected.

Lauren KATHAGE: People can associate as they like. Nobody is stopping that. There is no attack on democracy. This is about supporting workers. If the way the member for Mildura and those opposite want to see our community governed is by putting the rights of workers to the bottom, well, we just will not accept it. We absolutely will not. You know what, I was in this chamber just yesterday and I remember those opposite on their feet talking about the Police Association Victoria. Do you remember that? Just yesterday they were in here claiming that they were subject to this, and then today they come in and suddenly they have done a whole 180 and are saying the opposite. We can see that they will just say whatever suits the time they are in. We see that in our own community. To one group of people they will say, 'We're on your side. We're for you,' then to the next group of people, out of the other side of their mouth, 'Oh no, we're on your side. Don't you worry about that.'

Well, let us have a listen to the people they are on the side of. Let us have a listen to the Red Union Support Hub, that collective of associated organisations, and what their managing director had to say. We are talking about protecting workers rights, right? This is what their managing director had to say:

> Schemes like superannuation and workers' compensation insurance are a result of an overbloated bureaucracy, and are just unnecessary taxes we all have to pay.

They are representing workers? They say superannuation and workers compensation are 'unnecessary taxes we all have to pay'. Well, I do not think that is the view of workers. I think if the people they said they represent heard that, they would park their membership elsewhere. That is at the heart of what this is about. It is about workers and their hard-earned money. It is a sacrifice; it is money that you are paying to the union because they have your back. You are making an investment in your protection and in your wellbeing. To think that there are groups who seek to tell workers they are for them but have views like this, who take their money and then do not represent them and in fact cannot represent them – I mean, it is terrible, and that is why we are seeking to fix it.

A further notion of conspiracy that the member for Mildura brought into this place is a conflation somehow of hate groups and groups that are associations incorporated representing workers. It is the same piece of legislation that we are amending. This is what you do; when you are amending a piece of legislation, you make all the amendments to the legislation. We are not going to do it once for one topic, put it all the way through, and do it another time for the next topic. You can see the nonsensical nature of that. They are just looking for ways to oppose this because fundamentally, at core, they do not support workers, and their new best mates, the One Nation party, who they wish to rely on, absolutely will not want them doing that. I see this as a dress rehearsal by those opposite to demonstrate to their future bedfellows, 'Oh, don't worry, we too can bash workers. We too can put workers last.' Well, it is all out in the open now, and I am really keen to hear what the following speakers for those opposite have to say, because I bet you we are not going to hear about workers rights. We are not going to hear about protections for workers. We are not going to hear about safer conditions, better conditions and ensuring that workers and their families have a decent life. That is not what we are going to hear. We are going to hear the phrases of the member for Mildura. We are going to hear 'slippery slopes'. We are going to hear 'free market'. We are going to hear 'competition'. We are going to hear conjecture about existing unions, those institutions that stand up and fight for workers, woven by those opposite into some sort of second-rate conspiracy novel. Well, the only ones that are second-rate are those opposite. I hope that all workers hear what those opposite have in store for them if they ever have the good luck of being on the government benches.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (15:28): There are a few members on the other side who should be practising their valedictories, and I think the member we just heard from is one of them.

A member interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: You will be hearing mine next week. In 20 years I do not think I have ever quoted a communist leader, but it was Mao Zedong who said:

> Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend.

And of course he lied about it, but that was his intention – to pretend that the communists actually like to have different views and competition. I do care about workers rights. I care about the workers right to join an organisation of their choosing, to actually exercise the acknowledged human right of freedom of association. That is one of the human rights those members opposite never like to talk about too much. They never like to talk about freedom of association too much, because it means that workers may choose to join a union that does not donate to the Labor Party – imagine that. And why would you ever want to question the veracity of a Labor Party government, state-sanctioned union? Well, I can give you one example. I read this headline from the *Australian* newspaper of yesterday:

> Five men arrested as police raid construction union headquarters in fraud and drugs probe

Apparently the CFMEU in Victoria is such a paragon of virtue, such a paragon of protection for workers rights, that this government is passing legislation to prevent any union being set up in competition to it. Because why wouldn't you want to force someone in the construction industry who wants to join an employee association to join the CFMEU? I mean, who does not want to engage in a bit of fraud and drugs, because that is what the –

Juliana Addison interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: We do not want to engage in fraud and drugs, member for Wendouree, unlike the Labor Party and their affiliated unions. Let us be really clear about what this bill is about. This bill is about saying if you want to create a union, a real union to represent construction workers that is not tainted by fraud, that is not tainted by corruption, that is not tainted by standover tactics and gangsterism – if you want to create a union that is not tainted by drugs and associations with outlaw motorcycle gangs – this Labor government and this bill say no, you cannot. You are forced to join the CFMEU. That is what this is. It is just another protection racket for dodgy unions who support the Labor Party. Let us not forget how many millions of dollars the CFMEU donated to the Labor Party before the 2022 election. Was it one? Was it two? How many millions was it? Gone very quiet on the other side all of a sudden. They were very chirpy 30 seconds ago. The cat has got their tongue. They have had a sudden memory blank when it comes to how many millions of dollars the corrupt CFMEU. Here comes their chief defender. Here comes John Setka's mate.

Luba Grigorovitch: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, I would ask the member to come back to the bill, not talk about things outside of its width.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): The member is being relevant to the bill, and the member will continue.

Michael O'BRIEN: A lot of defensiveness from the minister at the table when I start talking about the CFMEU and her mates like John Setka. I can see that. It is an absolutely corrupt organisation with corrupt people in it at the leadership.

Luba Grigorovitch: On a point of order, Acting Speaker –

Michael O'BRIEN: I feel sorry for the workers who have had their union membership fees ripped off them by shocking, corrupt people like Setka over all these years.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Member for Malvern, when someone stands on a point of order you, will cease.

Luba Grigorovitch: I actually have a lot of respect for the member on his feet, but he is completely missing the point of the bill that is being debated at the moment.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): What is your point of order?

Luba Grigorovitch: Relevance again.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): The member is being relevant to the bill. I will allow him to continue.

Michael O'BRIEN: I thank you for your ruling, Acting Speaker. The reason I am being relevant is this government is trying to say that if you are a worker in the construction industry, there is only one union you can join, and that is the CFMEU. Because if you want to set up a different union, one that is not infected and tainted by corruption and links to drugs and outlaw motorcycle gangs and standover tactics, you cannot do it. That is what this bill does.

We have already heard from the member for Mildura in her very sensible contribution that this is also a bill designed to try and kill off left wing alternatives to existing unions. The Premier might have his relationship with the shoppies union. We understand that. But there is a more perhaps some would say left wing, some would say activist union, the Retail and Fast Food Workers Union and that is a competitor to the SDA. That is exactly the type of organisation that this bill is designed to kill off.

There is a lot of work that unions can do that does not involve being a federally registered union. You do not have to go to Fair Work in relation to what federally registered unions do. There are many ways in which a union can stand up for its members without necessarily having to do that level of service as well. As long as a professional association is not misleading people or deceiving people over what they do and do not do, why shouldn't they be allowed to operate? Why shouldn't they be allowed to exist? Why shouldn't we have freedom of association in this state?

I remember when I was a bit younger going past worksites in Melbourne and seeing that horrible sign 'No ticket, no start'. It was an extortion racket. If you did not join the union, you could not get a job. And disgraceful unions and, I should say, some disgraceful employers signed up to that, and they absolutely destroyed the individual rights of workers to choose to join or not join a union. This also goes back to Bill Kelty and the deals done between him and Keating and Hawke in the 1980s, when they decided to create superunions, and they had the big union merger process. One of the things that came out of that was that only one union would be recognised by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, as it was back then. So this was the deal – it is basically a state-sanctioned monopoly: if you want to be a member of a union, there is only one you can join, and it is the one the government says you can join. Does that sound like a Western liberal democracy or does that sound like a communist dictatorship? The only union you are allowed to join is the one the state says you can join, because that is what this bill is about, and that is why we oppose it.

There is other stuff in there which is not objectionable. Of course we are quite happy to outlaw some of the horrible hatemongering groups, but the heart of this bill is about running a protection racket for big unions, and usually big unions affiliated to the Labor Party. They provide members opposite, members of the government, with political muscle, with financial support, and it is a protection racket for them. We are standing up for the rights of workers – the rights of workers to choose who represents them. Every worker should have the right to choose who represents them, and if they do not like the CFMEU representing them, because they are a corrupt organisation run by a bunch of thugs, they should have the right to choose a different organisation to represent them. If they do not want the shoppies to represent them and they want a more activist or a more left-wing union, they should have the right to do that. If they do not want the Australian Education Union to represent them because they think they are too political, they should have the right to join an organisation of their choosing.

Our position is the one that is most pro-union, because pro-union should be about giving workers the choice to join an organisation to represent their interests. The government's position is about saying, 'We will support your right to join only if it's the one state-sanctioned union we've approved,' who, by the way, just happens –

Steve McGhie interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: Registered by an organisation of the state, member for Melton. If you want to split hairs, you can split hairs, but it is state-sanctioned unions. That is what this is all about. I probably cut my political teeth at university when I was fighting for voluntary student unionism, and I did that. I did that having been elected a number of times by my constituents at the University of Melbourne to the student union –

Juliana Addison interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: I had a year as activities officer, member for Wendouree. We put on the best beer and bands you have ever seen. It shows you that Liberals are better at running unions than lefties are. We had a great year. Voluntary unionism is good for me, it is good for you and it is good for workers. They should have not just the choice to choose whether they join or not join a union but also the choice as to what type of union they join, and that is why we oppose this bill. This bill is about taking choice away from workers. This side of the house stands for choice for workers and workers rights, unlike the mealy-mouthed people opposite.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (15:38): I want to take a leaf out of the book of the member for Yan Yean. I think starting from the premise of thinking about workers first is very important when we are having this discussion about making sure that there is transparency about what the particular organisation can offer to that worker in terms of the protections they are entitled to. That is really, I think, a premise from which it is good to start. We know that all workers deserve to have access to a safe, fair workplace and they deserve to have real support when their workplace does not meet those standards. Trade unions registered under the federal Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act 2009 (FWRO act) have statutory rights to represent their members' interests in industrial relations matters. There are some organisations in Victoria that state they are trade unions but are registered under our Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012, not the federal Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act. And what is the problem with this? It leaves members without the protections they need and deserve, and I think that is the fundamental premise here, just being absolutely transparent about what the organisation is actually offering or not offering for that worker so that, heaven forbid, they are caught in a particular situation or matter and they suddenly go for help and find that that particular organisation actually does not have the authority to deliver the protection and help that they need and deserve. That is what I think we are talking about here, fundamentally.

Further to that point, and thinking about adequate protections for workers and being up-front with them about what that particular organisation can do, trade unions who are registered under the federal Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act have access to certain rights to help them best represent their workers. These include being able to apply for entry permits to enter an employer's premises to meet with employees and investigate suspected contraventions of workplace laws. Registered trade unions can also represent their members at the Fair Work Commission, act as a representative in enterprise agreements, provide delegates who advise on and help resolve workplace issues and more. They are also subject to strict disclosure rules. They have to provide financial statements, and they are listed as a body that can sue or be sued.

These rights are important. They keep employers accountable for doing the wrong thing and make sure employees feel supported and safe at work. State incorporation under the Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 does not and cannot confer these federal industrial rights. I think that clarifies exactly the premise from which we are working here today. Organisations under the state act cannot enter workplaces to investigate alleged wrongdoing or enable delegates to resolve workplace issues and cannot engage as effectively in enterprise bargaining as registered unions. I think it is only fair and reasonable that workers know exactly what they are entering into, so to speak, when they join X or Y organisation. Currently certain entities incorporated under the AIRA pursue an industrial relations purpose without holding registration under the FWRO act. And what is the problem with this? I think leading into that statement, we can already anticipate what some of the problems might be.

This opens up considerable risk to workers. We just keep coming back to that central purpose: what is in the best interests of workers? Individuals might join these state incorporated bodies believing they have access to full industrial protection and support in workplace disputes, but they do not. That does not seem very fair to the workers themselves, and they might not find that out until it is too late. So even whilst the worker is joining that organisation in earnest and in good faith and anticipating certain types of protections, that is not necessarily what they receive at the end of the day. That is certainly the premise upon which we are debating this bill here and now and seeking to bring forward these reforms.

The Associations Incorporation Reform Amendment Bill 2026 will introduce a definition of 'industrial relations purpose' within the act to mean a registrable body with the purpose of furthering, protecting or representing the industrial relations interests of members. We know that there are a lot of organisations that may have some industrial relations purposes but are not purporting to provide full industrial relations protections under the federal act, and that would seem to be an unacceptable contradiction. I just want to quote a headline from the *Australian*: 'Red Union bosses accused of Fair Work Act breaches'. If we are going to be really honest here in this conversation, Red Union Support Hub, RUSH, are:

> … accused of breaching employment law after allegedly pressuring a worker to become an independent contractor rather than an employee and promising him more pay without the "overbloated bureaucracy" of superannuation and workers' compensation.

We are starting to see that perhaps there was a little bit of excessive gloss and glow and fluff about those organisations, which are not authentic unions and are not providing the legitimate protections that the workers deserve.

Another point that I do want to take up is concern about freedom of association. That is an important point to raise. I am glad it is raised. The bill does not prevent freedom of association. These organisations can still exist, but we will not let them pretend to be registered federal unions with appropriate powers. Again what we are talking about here is transparency, about being really up-front about what the organisation is offering or not offering in terms of protections to those workers. I think that is really important. When we are looking at this whole debate, we need to look at it from a holistic perspective and not say, 'Unions bad and these Red Unions all good.' I think that is certainly masking the truth, and it is also blurring the purpose or the impetus for these particular reforms, which is really about being up-front about whether you actually have the authority federally to be able to transact certain matters, whether it is enterprise bargaining or otherwise, fully and with a purpose that is actually to the betterment of that worker and that is authorised and fit and proper.

Another aspect of this bill looks at the issue of the rise in extremist behaviour, hate groups et cetera, which obviously do not operate in the interests of any Victorian. Just to offer some calm, I should say in terms of concerns that have been raised about how disruptive this particular legislation might be to incorporated associations more broadly, there are around 45,000 incorporated associations in Victoria under the Associations Incorporation Reform Act, most of which are genuine community organisations that are doing the right thing by their members and by their community, and may they continue to do so. No-one here in any way wants to undermine these in-the-main fantastic organisations that deliver good things for the community. There are plenty of benefits to being incorporated. You can buy and sell property, enter into contracts, invest or borrow money, open a bank account et cetera. It provides groups with legitimacy, and the Associations Incorporation Reform Act is intended to provide the framework to make sure appropriate groups gain that legitimacy.

However, with increasing reports of vilification, hate crimes and extremist violence around the country, it is important we ensure that groups who are promoting this are not able to game the current framework from our Associations and Corporations Reform Act and gain that same legitimacy provided to other community groups. Hate groups do not deserve to access those benefits, and we cannot stand by and just let it happen. That is not appropriate; that is not right and proper. But we are

not fundamentally undermining the majority of community organisations, who are doing great deeds in our community and upon whom many of us probably rely; our communities would not function the same way without them. That is not the purpose of this bill, and I think to smear the purpose or to try and blur the fundamental rationale for these reforms is not helpful, to say the least, and is probably causing unnecessary fear in certain organisations. The White Australia Party is a classic example. It has been listed as a prohibited hate group under the Criminal Code Act 1995 of the Commonwealth, and under the current framework, the registrar has limited powers under the Associations Incorporation Reform Act to refuse registration. This of course needs to change. That is a classic example of where having these controls is good for our community.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (15:48): I rise to make some comments about the Associations Incorporation Reform Amendment Bill 2026. Just when you think it cannot get any crazier, we have a government, literally just before an election, bring a bill before the Parliament to limit people's involvement in unions except their own. We have had probably one of the biggest corruption scandals in Victoria with the CFMEU – $15 billion gone missing under this government – and now we have a monopoly on unions and an attempt to eliminate competition from any other union or association that happens to exist. There is nothing more simple than what this government wants to do. The question that needs to be asked is: why now, and what is this government trying to actually do as part of this bill that is before us?

I will tell you why now. We have it now because there is a new Premier that is looking for support from Trades Hall to man the polling booths, to fundraise rivers-of-gold money into the Labor Party, to try and once again steal this election from defeat. Even that will not happen with this government, because the people have walked away from the Labor Party. Even the backbenchers know that with a new Premier it is the same brand, same face, same lousy decisions, incompetence after incompetence. And now they want to eliminate the competition and take more dough and say to Trades Hall, 'You know what, we're looking after you, so would you help us man the polling booths? Roll out some more money. Help try and save a couple of backbenchers from also being eliminated.' Instead of eliminating the competition, they should help eliminate the rest of the Labor Party because of incompetence. We have seen corruption. We have seen bullying and intimidation by a government that is absolutely beyond belief.

Let me just explain how bad this is. This government claim that they are full of consultation and that they were so strong in introducing new hate laws in Victoria. And just in the final throes of this government, if you want an example of a government that is all about a headline, all about a press release and nothing about substance, have a look at this bill. This bill is meant to ensure that we strengthen our hate laws and ensure that those like the National Socialist Network do not get a guernsey, are not allowed bank accounts, are not allowed to rent premises – a whole lot of things. Well, that is great and I sign up fully for that, but why is it in this bill? What has it got to do with the unions? Why are you lumping hate groups in with teachers, with professionals, with doctors and with other unions? Why is this government doing that?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Member for Caulfield, please do not beat up the furniture.

David SOUTHWICK: I am very passionate, Acting Speaker, as you can imagine. For this government, in trying to do something to stop the Nazis, who are the first people that you would think they would actually contact? The Jewish community. The Jewish Community Council of Victoria have not been consulted at all about this bill.

Steve McGhie interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: The member for Melton interjects and says the Jewish community do not want it. Well, the Jewish community did not know about this bill until last week, when I called the Jewish community and said, 'What do you think about this bill?' And the peak body said, 'What bill?'

What a disgrace that this government want to bring a bill dealing with hate laws to banish the Nazis, yet they do not talk to the Jewish community. Whether it is the Australian Jewish Association or the Jewish Community Council, neither of them has been consulted. Do you know what the Jewish community have said since they have been informed by the opposition? Not by the government – this is the government's work; we are doing the work for them. The Jewish Community Council have written to the government, and they have said, 'Separate the bill.' If you really believe in what you are trying to do, let us deal with the hate, let us deal with the intimidation, let us deal with the Nazis and the far extremists that we have, and let us go for it.

Also, they have asked for further strengthening because this particular form of hate does not stop the Nazis from registering themselves as a political party and running in November. If they are serious about banishing the Nazis and the extremists altogether, 92 days or thereabouts out from an election, where is that? It is not there, because this is just nothing but spin. It is spin, just to be able to say, 'We're doing a great thing. We're standing up against hate.' This government is not standing up against anything. The are just trying to save their own backs and get their union mates helping them. Do not forget the CFMEU has been donating millions of dollars to the Labor Party. Despite $15 billion worth of corruption which has been seen on the Big Build, now they want to give them a further free kick with what we are seeing. It just continues again and again and again. If the government had integrity, they would split the bill. Let us talk about the hate laws, and we will stand together on that. We will support that together – proudly. But do not turn this into a political football on hate. The Jewish community want the bill split.

The government has stood by the Jewish community over the last four years and said, 'We're standing up against hate in Victoria.' We have seen since 7 October the horrific attacks on the Jewish community – antisemitism like we have never seen before. I plead with the government to not play politics with this. Do not try and tie this up with unions and banishing unions and your own internal politics. Do not do that. I think that is wrong, by the way. I absolutely think that is wrong, and I will not be supporting it, because we like competition. You know what, people should be able to choose what union they stand for and what they want to associate with. Freedom of association should be a number one thing that we hold loudly and proudly as Victorians and Australians. Freedom of association should be part of every Victorian's and Australian's DNA. That is what we should hold up. Have the competition with unions. I will be very, very strongly opposing that part of the bill. But when it comes to the hate side of this bill, separate it off and I will stand with the Labor Party and support that part of the bill. But if you play politics with our community, with the Jewish community, which has been through hell and back, then you stand condemned. You, the Labor Party, stand condemned for playing politics with what we have seen.

We have got a royal commission happening at the moment – which has been probably one of the biggest royal commissions in terms of the amount of contributions that have been made – established by the Albanese Labor government to stamp out hate and antisemitism. That is happening right as we speak. If this government has any gumption at all, it should do the right thing and split this bill. Show us that you are not just about spin. Show us that you have got some integrity. This is another chance for the Premier to stand up and do something, because what we see in here is a joke. You do not put things like this forward when a community are being harmed and targeted the way that they are and you do not even talk to them. What a disgrace. I would hope the government would do something about it. That is my plea.

I know others want to speak, so I am going to finish there. I know I have been very passionate, and I am sorry for being passionate, but I am really angry. We have been through hell and back. We do not need another game and a stunt here trying to put the thing together so when we vote against it you turn around and say, 'Oh, you're voting for hate.' That is a whole lot of crap. We are not doing that. We want to vote against hate. We want to be with you. Do not turn this into a political football. Let us stand against the Nazis together, and then let us have the vote on who should be part of what union. We will stand with choice and with freedom of association, and the government can stand with the

CFMEU. Let us have that fight. We know that you love the CFMEU and the corrupt $15 billion. Let the government have that. We know the government is big on that. But on the hate, please, let us stand together.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (15:57): That was quite an interesting contribution. To commence, I will take up the member for Caulfield's concerns about why the two items are in the same bill. The answer, I am afraid, is much more mundane than the theory posited there, this conspiracy theory. The answer is because it deals with the same legislation, so it makes sense. It is prudent to actually take the two different elements together and put them in the same bill, because we are seeking to amend the same piece of legislation. That is why the two sit together, looking at terrorist organisations, prohibited hate groups, and also looking at Red Unions. As I say, it is a much more mundane reason.

What I will really tackle is the conspiracy theory that was just used by the member for Caulfield in here, which I find incredibly disturbing – very, very disturbing. I have never heard the language used here before from anyone in this Parliament, so to hear someone positing the theory that we are trying to steal the election has actually sent a shiver down my spine. That is language I genuinely never thought I would hear in this chamber or the other chamber, but to hear it today just now has me very, very concerned, because that is the language of Trump, that is the language of the hard far right in the US and it is the language of the hard far right in the UK and any other place on the planet at the moment where we see incredibly dangerous actors from the far right trying to take over and actually destroy democracy and the pillars of democracy as we know and hold them dear. I am an incredible fan of our democratic system here in Australia. I think we have one of the best ones in the world. Part of that is the understanding amongst all of us that conspiracy theories should not play any part in undermining the faith and confidence of people across this land and here in our state of Victoria.

People in Victoria need to understand that we have a robust electoral system, we have a strong democracy and there is no-one trying to steal an election. It just makes me wonder why on earth that language has been introduced into this place. I have said so many times in my nearly four years here that words matter. They really, really do. I know that you would understand that, Acting Speaker Farnham. Most of us here really do understand that. What I am wondering is: if the member for Caulfield is claiming that we are trying to steal the election, is it an audition for a future One Nation coalition government? It sounds like it would be music to the ears of Gina Rinehart and Pauline Hanson. To hear that language here must be sending thrills up their spines. For me, it is a chill down mine. There is so much I have to say on this bill, but I could not let that go. I am absolutely flabbergasted at what we have heard in this chamber today, and I hope I never hear it again, because those words are incredibly dangerous.

I will get to the crux of this bill. As I said, the reason we have two elements put forward today is because they seek to address the same legislation. This bill is about making sure that when Victorians deal with an incorporated association, the legal status attached to that organisation actually means something. It is about making sure workers are not led to believe they have protections that simply do not exist. It is about making clear that organisations built on hatred, terror and division should not receive the legitimacy and practical benefits that incorporation provides.

Incorporated associations across Victoria are part of the fabric of our state. There are about 45,000 of them. They include wonderful sporting clubs, cultural associations, neighbourhood houses, charities, volunteer groups and so many other organisations that bring people together and make our communities stronger. In Monbulk I see that contribution every day. Our local associations create places where people belong. They support people doing it tough. They run community sport, celebrate culture and look after neighbours. Much of that work, the vast, vast majority of it, is carried out by generous volunteers who give up their time and their energy for no reason other than to just leave this place better than they found it. Those organisations deserve a regulatory system with integrity. Incorporation brings real benefits: limited liability for members and volunteers, a recognised governance structure, the ability to hold property and enter contracts and greater confidence when

fundraising. It also carries an important signal of legitimacy. The public is entitled to trust that this status is being used for the purpose for which it was designed.

This bill protects trust in some very important ways. As I said just before, it prevents listed terrorist organisations and prohibited hate groups from becoming or remaining incorporated associations in Victoria. These are groups formally listed under Commonwealth law after the relevant safeguards and legal processes have run their course. It is not on a whim. The bill requires the registrar of incorporated associations to refuse their registration or direct an existing association to wind up. It is a clear and principled position. A hate group should not be allowed to dress itself up as an ordinary community organisation. A terrorist organisation should not receive the legal, financial and reputational advantages that incorporation offers. Incorporation is not a badge of respectability to be claimed by organisations that seek to intimidate, vilify or harm others. It does not prevent lawful political, cultural or religious expression and it does not stop people from holding or debating views.

I will take up the point that has been made by those opposite as well, that somehow this bill is about denying freedom of association. What an absolute furphy, a scare tactic straight out of the coalition playbook. It is about removing the cloak of legitimacy that these entities try to cover themselves with, be they terrorist organisations or hate groups or Red Unions who go around purporting to represent people but take their money and actually have no right of entry and no way of truly protecting those workers.

This takes me to the second major reform, where we come to industrial relations. Workers deserve clarity. If an organisation is presenting itself as able to protect or represent people at work, a person joining it should understand exactly what it is, what it can do and what protections come with that membership. For a worker facing underpayment, unfair treatment or a dispute with a powerful employer, that is not a technical distinction – it can determine whether or not they receive effective representation when they need it most.

As many would be aware, and as you yourself would be aware, Acting Speaker Lambert, I have firsthand experience of working for a registered union, the Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees' Association. I heard some crackpot theories about that earlier too. There have been some wild conspiracy theories in this debate today. I have to say I was not entertaining that notion, but we have gone down many, many rabbit holes today. I am sure there will be others following me who will want to take up the argument on this as well. But every day for well over a century the SDA has turned up to fight for decent pay, for decent work, for all of its members, the overwhelming majority of whom are female and young and therefore much more vulnerable. Just this year the SDA won the groundbreaking adult rates at 18 case and through their successful advocacy strengthened laws protecting retail workers from violence in their workplace. I have been reliably informed by my dear friend and colleague in the other place Mr Michael Galea that legislation creating workplace protection orders has just passed that house. It will be on its way to the Governor imminently. That has come through the strong advocacy of the SDA as well.

Strong, accountable and properly regulated worker representation makes a significant difference to conditions for workers. It can mean recovering wages that were never paid, having safer conditions and having the confidence to speak up without standing alone. It can mean dignity at work and security for a family at home. But an organisation out there calling itself a union does not give it the legal capacity of a federally registered organisation, and there are plenty of those out there. I will tell you what the ACTU says about them. They have encapsulated the problem with Red Unions best, stating they have been set up by bad-faith actors to rip workers off. They do not have full powers to represent workers under workplace laws. They are not legally entitled to represent workers in unfair dismissal proceedings or in the Federal Court as a matter of right. They cannot legally enter a workplace to assist members, hold discussions with employees or inspect records relating to workplace contravention. They do not even treat their own employees right, and they should never be allowed to misrepresent themselves to workers as unions. If you are purporting to be a union and you go and tell people that schemes like superannuation and workers compensation insurance are the results of an overbloated

bureaucracy and are just unnecessary taxes we all have to pay, then you should have no legitimacy whatsoever.

My time has run down having to deal with the threats that we are somehow stealing an election. Again, I shake my head at that. It is one of the worst things I have heard in this chamber. I commend this bill to the house.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (16:07): I rise today to speak on the Associations Incorporation Reform Amendment Bill 2026. This bill is what happens when a new Premier wants to thank his factional mates and help them by shutting down their competition. The Retail and Fast Food Workers Union, or RAFFWU, was formed in 2016 to fight for the rights of retail and fast-food workers, who are often young, who are often low paid and who are often marginalised. RAFFWU presents a direct threat to the SDA, and they want to shut them down. The SDA is a powerful, conservative, right-wing union at the core of the Labor right faction of the ALP.

This bill sets up the provisions that will see RAFFWU and other independent, legitimate unions disbanded if they are not registered through the federal system. Realistically they cannot be, not because they are not conducting valuable workers representation but because the federal system is set up to condense powers and rights to the existing, often Labor-aligned, unions. Many of these unions are brilliant. They do important, excellent work to represent their workers. They are fierce, and the Greens are staunch allies of many of these unions. But some workers do not feel represented well by their unions and do not feel that they have a place to go to when they need support, and that is why unions like RAFFWU have been formed. The conservative, right-wing SDA has been complicit in workplace agreements that sold out supermarket and fast-food workers and saw them underpaid hundreds of millions of dollars. They have used predatory tactics to trick young workers into joining on their first day, and they have historically opposed same-sex marriage, abortion and queer rights. It is no wonder that workers looked elsewhere for representation. It is no wonder that RAFFWU was formed in response.

I know that workers are more powerful together. We all know that. They are stronger as a large collective, and so I do not want to see every disenfranchised worker trying to set up a new organisation. Our big, established unions play a vital role, but there must be a place for alternative legitimate options too. Not only is this bill a threat to independent activist unions, but it has significant implications for workers in the future who want to organise and unionise outside of their current union. This bill in its current form represents a dangerous precedent against freedom of association and the democratic rights of workers, rights which should not be curtailed by the state.

This bill also seeks to have sham unions and hate groups deregistered. The Greens absolutely support this. We do not want to see right-wing anti-vaxxers parading as legitimate unions. Hate and terror groups should be shut down by any means possible. I support the government working to shut down scam outfits and hate groups, but let us be honest, in this bill those functions are just providing cover to shut down the legitimate independent unions who threaten the Premier's factional mates. I welcome the government introducing standalone legislation to shut down scam unions and hate groups.

Again, I want workers to have a natural home in many of the existing unions. Most of them do a great job fighting for their members, but so do RAFFWU and the other legitimate independent unions. The Greens will not stand by and have them shut down because that is what suits the SDA. The Greens will always stand with workers and will always stand against union busting, and we oppose this bill.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon) (16:11): I rise in support of this bill. I think this bill plays a really important role in protecting the freedoms of this state. I fear that where we find ourselves now as a Western liberal democracy is a place that we have not seen since the 1930s. The fact that we are trying to now prevent these terrorist organisations and hate groups from registering is really important. Why do I feel so strongly about this? I want to talk about the American Civil War briefly, if you will indulge me. The city of Vicksburg in Mississippi was the subject of a 47-day siege. On the Fourth of July 1863

Confederate Lieutenant-General John C Pemberton surrendered. He was asked, 'Why are you surrendering on this day?' He said:

> I know my people; I know their peculiar weaknesses and their national vanity; I know we can get better terms from them on July 4 than any other day of the year.

Why is that important? It is important because in Vicksburg, Mississippi, they did not celebrate the Fourth of July for the next 75 years – three generations. In the same way, when the Western Roman Empire fell it was about three generations before that whole system of government and way in which the artisans crafted their trade broke down – three generations.

Currently there is due to be an election in Saxony-Anhalt, which is a state in Germany. Alternative für Deutschland, AFD, is on 41 per cent in that state. The CDU, whose positions and policies I do not share but who is a responsible centre-right party, are on 24 per cent. What does the AFD want to do? The AFD, for example, have talked about how they want to lift EU sanctions on Russia. They oppose aid to Ukraine. They are against the EU. Can you think for a moment what will happen if Germany pulls out of the European Union? Can you think about what that will do for the plight of Western liberal democracy? It is somewhat confronting. I am not dead yet, but the hour beckons, and I fear that Western liberal democracy is in far worse shape as I leave this place than when I arrived. It concerns me that we are starting to see these groups emerge.

I was raised to believe very clearly in the 1970s and the 80s, 'Never again.' So I have always supported the State of Israel. That does not mean I have always supported the actions of the Israeli government at all times, but I have always supported the right of Israel to exist as a state. And again, I think that some of the language that has been used, some of the normalisation of extreme rhetoric, has become far too commonplace for my liking. When you think about the pressures and the fissures that have been brought to bear on what I would regard as being a tolerant, pluralistic, Western liberal democracy, it is deeply concerning. It is deeply concerning where we find ourselves in 2026. I fear that, because with the passage of time people forget. People do not study history, people do not inquire, people do not criticise or they do not critically think about what is being put to them.

Historically, I remember going to Melbourne University in the early 1990s. You would get on an old Comeng train at Mitcham station. Everyone was reading the *Herald Sun*. Everyone would listen to 3AW. Now of course we might, particularly on the progressive side of politics, have views about having only 3AW or the *Herald Sun* as your primary form of information. I hasten to add that Ross Stevenson is the funniest bloke on Melbourne radio and an absolute legend. But what that meant was those news outlets had to be broadly responsible. They had to broadly adhere to standards. You might not always agree with elements that they would put up. You might have some concerns about a particular angle. I know certainly in about 1991 there was a very strong campaign against Piers Akerman saying bias is bad, because of some of the reporting of the Kirner government. But broadly speaking those outlets were responsible outlets, and they had a social responsibility to provide fairly reliable and accurate reporting.

What we are seeing now is the fraying and the fragmentation of society, where people are going down these Facebook or TikTok rabbit holes where more and more extreme views are being reinforced. There is no counterpoint, there is no anchor by which to draw them back. You are seeing a confluence of events with the fraying of responsible journalism at a time when we are getting further away from these horrific actions that occurred in the Second World War. I really did not think in 2014, when I arrived, that in 2026 we would be seeing this sort of rise of far-right movements. I did not think that you would see fascists and extremists storming Camp Sovereignty. I did not think you would have a set of circumstances or an event where a Welcome to Country is being booed. I just would not have thought this was where we would be in 2026.

Maybe I am the outlier. Maybe I am the one that is stuck in the past and maybe what is happening around me is passing me by. But some of the core principles of decency, of respect, of having these respectful disagreements or having a different outlook on life are entirely legitimate. That is entirely

fair and appropriate. Again, for those in this place, this great colosseum of ideas where we come into this place and we have different views of the state and the way in which the state should be administered and run, we fundamentally agree that we are aiming to be on this side of the house. We are aiming to get a majority of the seats in this place to form a government. That has been understood. But what we are seeing now with the change with these groups that are arriving and are forming is they are articulating a view that is completely at odds with this place. What happens if some of these groups get together and they start having deep fake AIs? What happens if they start to produce the voice of the Leader of the Opposition as part of a deep fake AI saying something completely vile and offensive, or the Premier for that matter? What happens then? I think that as a Parliament – I can appreciate there has been a wide range of views on this legislation and a wide range of views expressed – fundamentally we have to think about, and I hope the 61st Parliament turns its mind to these matters, how we try to ensure the integrity of this institution. Not since the 1930s, when we saw Western liberal democracy threatened in such a way, has the very notion of parliamentary representative democracy being the best form of government for our nation, or indeed most Western nations, been under such a level of siege. And that is concerning.

I do want to make one observation. I heard some commentary about the SDA. The SDA is the responsible union for bargaining on behalf of the employees of Bunnings. I remember, just before the global financial crisis, there was a guy who had been on the tools at Sunshine. He had started in 1994 and he retired. Bunnings rang him up and they said, 'Look, you've got these shares. What do you want to do?' He said, 'What shares?' They said, 'Well, as part of your employment agreement, you've been getting shares allocated to you every year of your employment.' He said, 'I'll just sell them. Just sell them.' Six weeks later, he rang them up in tears, because he had received a cheque for $160,000. Now, $160,000 in 2026 might not seem like much, but I can tell you one thing: $160,000 before the GFC probably would have bought you half a house. In today's money, that is about half a million dollars.

I would have thought that a trade union that advocates on behalf of its members, making sure that its members get a piece of the action through equity, would be a good thing. It would be a desirable thing. It would be a positive thing. And that was delivered because of the SDA – no-one else. The SDA negotiated in good faith for their members, and they gave equity to their members. Through having that level of equity and support, workers are better off. I would have thought that was a good thing.

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (16:21): I rise to speak on the Associations Incorporation Reform Amendment Bill 2026. I will be clear to start with: I support firm action against listed terrorist organisations and prohibited hate groups. Neo-Nazi organisations, terrorist fronts and groups that promote hatred or violence should not be able to use incorporated status as a shield of legitimacy. But Parliament should not accept an omnibus bill simply because one part carries a worthy label. Every power in this bill must be shown to be necessary and proportionate. That case has not been made.

Commonwealth law already provides listing regimes for terrorist organisations and prohibited hate groups, with serious offences for membership, recruitment, funding and support. Victoria criminalises serious vilification. Section 127 of the act already allows an association to be wound up if it exists for an illegal purpose or if the public interest requires it. If a gap remains, identify it and bring in a focused bill. Instead, a legitimate community safety objective is being used as a political cover for a scheme aimed at worker associations that compete with Labor-aligned unions. Why are teachers, nurses, retail workers and transport workers being swept into the same legislative package as terrorists and neo-Nazis?

The new Premier promised a new direction, yet this bill raises questions that Labor has not answered. The Premier joined the SDA at Kmart. I note that even I was a member of the SDA when I worked at Franklins many years ago, when it was compulsory. The SDA remains Kmart's federally registered union, while the Retail and Fast Food Workers Union is its direct retail industry competitor. This bill could strip RAFFWU of Victorian incorporation. I am not alleging a secret deal, but Parliament is entitled to know: did the SDA seek or help shape these provisions? Was it consulted? Was RAFFWU?

Refusing to identify all affected and exempt bodies only feeds suspicion of a factional favour. Do we have a new Premier but with the same old Labor instincts?

About 45,000 incorporated associations support community life across Victoria. In the Mornington electorate, sporting clubs, neighbourhood groups, service organisations and cultural bodies rely on clear and fair associations law. This bill does not endanger all of them, but a framework of this scale demands precision and proper safeguards.

This bill bundles three propositions. It creates mandatory consequences for listed terrorist and hate groups. It bars and can wind up an association with an industrial relations purpose where the registrar believes it can seek federal registration unless exempt. It also adds a broad public interest refusal power and guides the registrar's existing public interest winding-up power. These propositions should not be forced through as one package. Conflating community safety with industrial competition allows this Labor government to paint anyone who objects to its union policy as soft on extremism. The Australian Jewish Association has rejected that approach, saying it was not genuinely consulted and that the Jewish community should not be used as a political wedge. The member for Caulfield in his speech before noted that when he consulted and talked to Jewish groups, they said, 'What bill?' That says they were not properly consulted at all.

The industrial definition as well is extraordinarily broad. An association is caught if it has a purpose of furthering, protecting or representing industrial interests of members. It need not be its sole, dominant or even substantive purpose. The government's charter statement admits the test may capture organisations whose industrial role is not their main purpose. The supposed safeguard is an exemption to be prescribed later. The second-reading speech mentions union choirs and professional associations focused on education or networking, but the regulations are not before us. We are being asked to pass the prohibition now and discover the safeguards later. Labor says that affected associations can simply register federally. The word 'simply' is doing a lot of work here. An employee association or organisation generally needs at least 50 members, and the Fair Work Commission must consider whether they could more conveniently belong to or be more effectively represented by an existing registered organisation. That 'conveniently belong' test protects incumbents and can make registration practically impossible.

The federal framework has existed since 2009. Why is this suddenly urgent without a complete impact list or proper consultation? Also, some bodies will not qualify. The charter statement admits an ineligible body may be left unincorporated, exposing members and office-holders to greater liability and limiting its ability to sue, hold property and act in its own name. Most tellingly, the government's own human rights analysis says that it is not clear that one limitation on freedom of expression is reasonably necessary and that there is some question whether the limitation on freedom of association is justified. Those are serious warnings.

The review provisions make matters worse. An industrial purpose body refused registration loses VCAT review and must go to the Supreme Court within 28 days, a costly path for a small member organisation. The registrar can demand information within 14 days. The bill starts the day after royal assent, and the promised regulations remain unseen. The narrow transition protects only associations that applied for federal registration before 1 July 2026. That cut-off was two months before the bill was announced, so affected groups had no chance to apply in response. It may preserve the position of the Victorian Ambulance Union, which applied in 2024, but it leaves the Independent Transport Union, ITU, exposed. The ITU shows this is not abstract. It says it represents well over 1000 Victorian transport workers, including in major regional centres. It employs professional staff and solicitors. It complies with its legal obligations and, after taking barristers' advice, it believes this bill captures it. It says that federal registration is unrealistic because the 'conveniently belong' test gives incumbent unions a virtual veto.

The minister calls these organisations fake and says that workers are being scammed, yet incorporated industrial associations can lawfully represent workers, participate in bargaining and undertake

industrial activity. Lacking every statutory privilege of a registered union is not the same as providing no service. The RAFFWU has led national strikes at Coles, Woolworths and Apple and backed underpayment actions against major fast-food employers. It emerged after exposing hundreds of millions of dollars in underpayments at Woolworths and Coles under SDA agreements. Red Union as well says that its Victorian bodies support about 6000 members here and 26,000 nationally. Winding them up in Victoria could have national consequences. Red Union associations are competitors to politicised Labor-aligned unions, with Red Union often having cheaper fees by at least 30 per cent. Their fees do not go to any political party, such as the Labor Party, and they can focus solely on workers rights over politics.

This is not occurring in isolation. Federal Labor has also moved through its national platform to restrict unregistered unions' participation in industrial matters. That change was moved by the workplace relations minister and former SDA organiser Amanda Rishworth. If an association misleads workers about its status, require plain language disclosure and enforce false claims. Apply proper financial reporting, governance and membership protections. Tell members which rights are available and which are not. That is proportionate consumer protection; compulsory winding up is not.

I need not endorse the ITU, Red Union or RAFFWU to defend worker choice. The ITU put it plainly: established unions should not need the rules rewritten so they cannot lose. They should win members by proving they are better. Opposition to this bill crosses ordinary political lines. The Greens, the Australian Jewish Association, left-wing RAFFWU, the ITU, the Red Union network, Liberal conservative and left-wing and right-wing voices have all objected. This is not a routine left- versus right-wing argument. It is about freedom of association and the proper limits of state power.

Only weeks ago Operation Richmond showed the danger when union influence and government power become too close. IBAC made no finding of corrupt conduct, and that must be said, but it found serious and concerning conduct, privileged access and extraordinary influence in firefighter bargaining. The lesson should be independence and transparency, not allowing the state to determine or decide which worker associations remain incorporated. Robert Menzies said freedom of association is of the first order of importance in the world of liberty. That includes the right to join together, to choose between organisations and to not be forced into a government-favoured structure. This is a situation where workers should have a choice. They should not be forced to join the CFMEU, whose corrupt use of taxpayer money has been seen. They should have full worker choice and association.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (16:32): This has just been absolutely wild. From the first words of the member for Mildura, the lead speaker for the opposition, to the member for Mornington, this has just been the most arrant tissue of nonsense I have ever had the – let us use the word – 'privilege' to listen to in this place. We have gone from Menzies to Mao Zedong in the member for Malvern's contribution. But before I commence, and I know it is not proper to acknowledge those in the gallery, I want to make sure that the member for Lowan has not brought in the state secretary of the United Firefighters Union. No, we are clear, and I will continue.

It is fascinating to see their perspectives on trade unionism morph in a week from invoking Michael Donovan and the state secretariat of the Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees' Association (SDA) to now being the best friends of the Retail and Fast Food Workers Union (RAFFWU). It is a broad church over there, as the member for Mornington has just articulated – a grab bag of those on the conspiracist right to those in the Greens, all of whom are united in their opposition to this worthy bill. I think that tells you all you need to know. It is a worthy piece of legislation. Bringing human rights into this, as some have sought to do, is preposterous. There is no limitation on freedom of expression within this bill. The organisations that have been invoked can still exist; they just cannot purport to be things that they are not, which is to say, registered trade unions with the Fair Work Commission, with powers to represent workers at the Fair Work Commission, rather than being industrial associations under this state's Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012, which they should not be allowed to do. This bill merely clarifies that point. The organisations mentioned can still retain registration as

federally incorporated associations through ASIC. They can still access similar benefits as they do under state incorporation. There is going to be little practical impact on their capacity to operate.

Moreover – and I pick up another point of the member for Mornington – this is not an omnibus bill. It is one bill which amends one piece of legislation to uphold the integrity of our state-based incorporations legislative framework, which supports the important work of community organisations across all of our electorates – sporting clubs and the like.

As I say, this debate has been wild, but let us be very clear what the opposition and what the Greens are doing in their opposition to this bill. They are voting to undermine workers rights and representation, and they are voting to make it harder to confront and to dismantle hate groups. That is their choice, but that is the implication of their decision. Invoking Mao Zedong, using spurious arguments about freedom of association as a smokescreen is just that – a tactic and a smokescreen that we can see through and Victorians can see through.

I want to begin by rebutting the lead speaker, the member for Mildura, who demonstrated complete ignorance of Australia's industrial relations laws. It was just another attempt to unpick the rights, the dignity and the collective solidarity of workers in this state. It is entirely in keeping with every single statement that Pauline Hanson has ever uttered in the context of industrial relations. It is entirely in keeping with the parties' opposite endeavours to unpick rights, dignity, pay and conditions and the circumstances in which workers can seek representation and dignity at work. It is in keeping with WorkChoices. It is in keeping with the Kennett government's unpicking of state-based industrial rights. It is entirely consistent with their approach to politics and with their approach to economics and will have the effect of undermining the rights, the pay, the dignity and the conditions of Victorian workers. That is what I contend is on the ballot paper this November, and this bill, this debate and the decision of those opposite to oppose this bill emphasise that. They do not want Victorian workers to have strong representation, because giving them that strong representation, ensuring that those who have relatively limited economic agency can collectively come together to seek better pay and conditions, is anathema to them. It is not in their DNA. They know that in undermining those things, they diminish the rights of workers. That is what will be on the ballot paper in November.

I also want to turn to the comments of the member for Malvern. He is not somebody who is ignorant of Australian industrial relations laws, but it is very funny to hear him as a dyed-in-the-wool supporter of RAFFWU. It is very amusing to see the unity ticket that exists between the member for Malvern on the one hand and the Greens on the other hand. The member for Malvern and his colleagues in the Liberal Party should at least be honest. Their opposition to this bill is entirely in keeping with their economic tradition, with the H.R. Nicholls Society, with the Institute of Public Affairs, with groups which have consistently sought complete labour market deregulation and the erosion of the capacity of legitimate, pragmatic unions to advocate for decent pay and conditions and the dignity and safety of employees at work. The member for Essendon spoke powerfully about the practical effect of that pragmatic representation for workers with a really powerful example of how that benefited a member of the SDA, an employee of Wesfarmers, in his electorate. He also talked about the risks of the extremes taking hold in this place. Some of the tortured logic and extreme language that has been used by those opposing this bill I think frays the collective common good and undermines trust in institutions.

Fundamentally, I believe that it is a cornerstone of the Australian economic and social tradition to ensure that those who have limited agency have the capacity to work together in concert with others to give them greater agency and market power than they would otherwise have. It has been a cornerstone of our industrial relations system since the Harvester judgement that those who are at work should have fair pay and conditions that enable them to live a decent life. Opposition to bills like this undermines the capacity of Australians and Victorians to have decent pay and conditions and to live decent lives. There are a number of furphies that have been put about by those opposite suggesting that this trammels freedom of association – it does nothing of the sort. Organisations that this bill impacts from the industrial perspective can still exist, but they can exist under ASIC frameworks. They

should not be able to use state-based association incorporation legislation to hide what they truly are. As many members have said, these are not registered trade unions. The member for Mornington suggested that they are delivering value and that they have a solicitor employed. Well, that is terrific, but that solicitor cannot advocate for any member of RAFFWU at the Fair Work Commission. They cannot provide them with legal representation in that forum.

Let us be really clear about this: these organisations do not do what they say on the tin. They should not be allowed to use state-based incorporated associations legislation to purport that. That is why this bill is important. It also, as I said at the outset, cracks down upon hate groups and those who seek to divide our society, those who seek to inflict harm upon others.

I want to turn, in the time that is remaining to me, just to reflect upon the impact of strong, constructive, pragmatic trade unions on modern Australia. The member for Malvern talked about the Accord in his contribution but only saw it in a negative light, only saw it as some kind of conspiracy against workers and a conspiracy against the Australian economy to agglomerate trade unions. On the other hand, I would suggest that the work of Ralph Willis, of Bill Kelty and of Paul Keating in the early 1980s set up modern Australia for success. It ensured that we grew the pie and that all had the opportunity to enjoy a slice of that pie. They were focused on the common good. They were focused on the collective prosperity of this country and ensuring that it was distributed fairly, that hard work was rewarded, that there was an incentive for private enterprise but also that workers who were part of that had a stake in the collective success of their company and the collective success of the economy. The member for Malvern's criticism completely dodges that.

Let us look at the impact of the Prices and Incomes Accord more broadly. We saw lower inflation. We saw greater economic stability through the 1980s and 1990s. We saw improved employment and lower unemployment and lower underemployment. We saw productivity improvements year on year on year that enabled real wage growth. We became the envy of the world as a consequence of trade unions working together with government to secure a high minimum wage and to secure superannuation that ensured that Australians have dignity in their retirement. We saw these things as a consequence of pragmatic unions working on behalf of their members. We have seen it today in the upper house as workplace protection orders have become law in this state. That is what is at risk in November. That is what is on the ballot paper. That is what the opposition and the Greens, in coalition with One Nation, wish to see undermined and unpicked in Victoria. Their opposition to this bill is entirely indicative of that.

In this country we have some of the highest paid retail workers in the world as a consequence of the sustained and pragmatic representation of the SDA that has led to a high retail award, that has secured penalty rates and that has secured more public holidays for workers across Australia, including Easter Sunday in Tasmania just last week. These are the practical things that make a difference to people's lives in our state, in the communities that I represent. It is why I support this bill. I would suggest, Acting Speaker, that the clock has stopped, and I am happy to continue until it resumes. Notwithstanding that, others may wish to speak on the bill. But I could talk about the accord for hours, and I will, because it was a defining moment in the economic history of this country, and it is what those opposite are seeking to undermine. They have always done so, and the member for Malvern and his colleagues should just be honest that this is part of their opposition to effective, pragmatic trade unionism. It has always been there. It has been there since the days of Costello, and the H.R. Nicholls Society endures. I support this bill.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (16:42): I rise to support the member for Mildura, as we oppose this bill, the Associations Incorporation Reform Amendment Bill 2026. At the outset, can I say that we support strong action against neo-Nazis, terrorist organisations and violent extremists, and we support organisations that seek to outlaw legitimate hatred. We also support protecting workers from organisations that deliberately misrepresent what they are and what they can do with the legal protections they can provide.

Some of the contributions I have heard from the other side just say that we are anti-union, and that is not the case. But what we are finding in this bill is the government are certainly trying to make life a little bit smoother for them to make sure that they do not have competition in certain areas, and this is what we have to protect ourselves against. But those legitimate objectives certainly do not give the government a blank cheque to roll all the issues into one bill and justify legislation that potentially restricts legitimate freedom of association. They do not just give government the power to decide which organisations workers can establish and which organisations can continue to operate, and they certainly do not remove the obligation of this government to explain the political circumstances around the bill. The government says this legislation is about stopping what it calls fake unions. The government claims workers are being misled. But when we look beyond the government's slogans, some serious questions emerge.

The bill establishes an industrial relations purpose test. It potentially captures associations involved in furthering, protecting or representing the industrial interests of their members, which is a massively important change, because we are not simply talking about scammers; we are talking about the organisations established by workers themselves, and we are talking about independent organisations that may compete with the established registered unions. The self-interest of Labor always floats to the top, and we see that here in this bill.

One of the organisations that is affected is the Retail and Fast Food Workers Union, and that is where this legislation becomes particularly interesting. They certainly compete for members in the retail and fast-food sector. Which is the major established registered union representing workers in those industries? It turns out it is the shoppies, the Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees' Association, the SDA. And who has got a longstanding association with the SDA? The current Premier, Premier Carroll. The Premier's connection with the SDA is not speculation; it is part of his political history. When Premier Carroll worked at Kmart, he joined the union as a young man. That was an introduction to trade unionism. Decades later he is the Premier and his government is bringing legislation into the Parliament that could have the effect of restricting organisations that compete with established registered unions. I would have thought that that deserves some scrutiny as we go through this bill. Surely the Parliament should not just wave this legislation through without examining who benefits from it.

I am not standing here claiming that the Premier personally drafted this bill to benefit the SDA, but I am saying the government has a responsibility to explain why this legislation and these consequences are necessary and why less restrictive alternatives are inadequate, because of the perceptions. The perceptions do matter, and so does transparency. When government legislation potentially affects competitors of an organisation with longstanding connections to the labour movement, the government should expect questions to be asked. We heard those questions asked by the member for Malvern, the member for Mildura and others in this place, and that is why we are challenging this legislation, because those questions still need to be answered. We have seen enough rorts go through this government to understand that you cannot just take on face value what the government puts up. It has to be challenged, and questions need to be asked.

Under the Commonwealth registered organisation system simply wanting to become a registered union does not guarantee that an organisation can become one. We know that an applicant can face significant barriers where an existing registered organisation already covers workers in that industry. Considering the position in which the organisation can find itself, they have industrial relations purposes so they should not operate as an incorporated association. The organisations then attempt to enter the federal registered organisation system and they can be told there is already an organisation that covers those workers. Where does that leave the workers? Again, they do not get the opportunities. It is more of a catch 22: rather than having choices, you will be told who you can belong to rather than being able to start another union.

It raises fundamental questions about freedom of association, as was mentioned earlier today. If workers voluntarily decide that an existing union does not represent them adequately, they should be

able to establish an alternative organisation. This is what we are saying. Under this bill that will not be possible in some circumstances. Competition is apparently important to everybody else in the union movement except when it might affect a union that exists today. Why should unions be different? In terms of that, if the SDA provides outstanding representation to retail workers, then it should have nothing to fear from the competition. Workers will choose it. And if another organisation provides better representation, workers should be entitled to choose that organisation. That decision should belong to the workers and certainly not to the government of the day and the Labor Party to decide in this place. It should be open for others to do it and create other opportunities.

We need to consider this on its merits. As we said earlier on and other speakers on this side also said, we do not support this legislation. It needs to be fair. There needs to be more security, because, as I said earlier, the Premier belongs to the SDA or has in the past, and we will establish this –

John Mullahy: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member on his feet has to be factual, and he is not being factual.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert): I do not uphold the point of order, but I would remind the member for Ovens Valley about imputations against members.

Tim McCURDY: As the member for Mildura said, we should separate the genuine measures dealing with hate and extremism out of this bill. It is highly contentious, and we should move them out and certainly go back to the drawing board, consult properly and consult with other industries as well. Above all, it should respect the right of Victorian workers to decide for themselves who they want representing them. For those reasons I cannot support the Associations Incorporation Reform Amendment Bill, as has been said by the members for Mildura and Malvern and others in this place.

John LISTER (Werribee) (16:50): It is my honour to speak on a bill on this matter, particularly as someone who more recently than a lot of others in this chamber was working in a lot of the industries that have been mentioned by those opposite, particularly the retail industry, and was a member of the Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees' Association (SDA). However, I am not a member anymore. There were some very interesting attempts and some very long bows drawn by those opposite over there.

In doing a little bit of reading into this bill late last week, I was particularly concerned at the representations being made by these associations that purport to be of a trade union ilk. I looked particularly at the Teachers' Professional Association of Australia (TPAA), which has a very, very interesting website where basically every second line says, 'But we're not associated with the Labor Party.' That is very interesting, because neither is the Australian Education Union, which is the key union responsible for teachers across all of Australia but particularly here in Victoria. A shout-out to a lot of my fellow members in the AEU as well. But I think this goes to a particularly important point. They accuse these unions of being political, yet everything written on their websites is about how they are not the Labor Party. It is just wild looking at these so-called Red Union websites and some of the things that they purport.

There has been a lot mentioned by those opposite, the interesting combination of Greens and Liberal speakers over there, about the Retail and Fast Food Workers Union (RAFFWU), another one of those interesting associations. They are registered as an incorporated association under ASIC and enjoy those same benefits as any other incorporated association under ASIC. There is going to be little impact on their rights as an incorporated association. But what this bill will do is make sure that it is clear that they cannot represent you in the same way as a registered organisation can under the Fair Work Act 2009, and I think that is only reasonable. They have no right of entry. They have no right to enter into an agreement with a workplace through the Fair Work Commission. It is quite clear that the people behind these particular so-called Red Unions, or what have you, are doing it because they want to be political rather than in the interests of the workers that they purport to represent. When it comes to the freedom of association, there is no prevention of freedom of association in this bill. They can

still exist, but we will not let them pretend that they can do something that they quite clearly cannot. I do note, too, that the Fair Work Commission itself has raised a lot of concerns about some of these unions in their deliberations around different agreements, particularly one around a particular laundry clause in the previous Woolworths agreement. There were a few other different things that they raised as being quite contrary to the interests of the workers that they purport to represent. They say that these organisations are somehow being attacked. No, we are making it clear to workers all across Victoria that the people who can represent them are those registered unions.

I will return back to one of the topics that I am particularly adept in, which is teaching. The Teachers' Professional Association of Australia purport to represent teachers here in Victoria, when we have seen quite clearly that the Australian Education Union represent teachers here in Victoria, and they were the organisation that we worked closely with across the whole enterprise bargaining period we had over this previous year. They are the ones that could actually take that protected industrial action. If you were a member of the TPAA, you were sitting back at school just like anyone else who was not a member of the AEU.

Having that clarity means that we do not have people sucked into these circles and paying for something that they cannot get. I even noted, too, that with some of these professional associations purporting to be unions, they do not always have an opportunity to sit in meetings with a workplace where there may be a formal representation required. So they are paying their subscription essentially to this organisation, yet they cannot even sit in there with a boss and have those discussions about what might be a very serious matter. Even with the legal advice in some of these organisations, they say that they can provide legal advice but you end up getting a bill for it, whereas when you are with a union most of the time you will not get a bill for that. That is part of your dues.

I think it is particularly important for younger workers as well. I noted that organisations like RAFFWU are quite good on Instagram, quite good on Reddit; they are always out there trying to recruit people to their cause, as is their wont. But for a lot of young people out there it is important that the information is clear that if you start a job at Kmart or you start a job at Woolworths or Coles, the only people who can truly make sure that you are getting your rights protected at work are organisations like the SDA, that registered organisation.

Keeping employers accountable for doing the wrong thing is so important. That is why this side has always championed the rights of workers to be able to do that. But we will not let these organisations use state acts or state legislation to somehow cover the fact that they purport they can do things that they cannot. There is a huge risk to workers. If they join these incorporated bodies, if they believe they have that access to industrial protection, they might not find out until very late that they have no right to have their representation in those workplace disputes.

There has been a lot of conversation from the champions of trade unionism across the way there about the purpose of this bill, but it is quite clear that we do not want people being sucked into organisations that purport to do something that they quite clearly cannot do. So this bill introduces a definition of 'industrial relations purpose' within the act, which means that it is clearer to people when they go to look up, say, the details online of those different incorporations, that it is what it says on the tin. If an organisation is registered under the state Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 and has made an application to be registered under Fair Work prior to 1 July 2026, there will be no action taken by the registrar overseeing this particular associations incorporation legislation. There will not be any action taken towards them until we understand what Fair Work's outcome is.

There are a lot of organisations that have some industrial relations purposes but are not purporting to provide full industrial relations protections under that federal act, and I think that federal act is particularly important. I would like to note that despite being the champions of trade unionism on that side, it was their mates in Canberra that brought in WorkChoices, which tried to take away ordinary people's rights. They try and make out as if they are trying to protect people's right of association, but it was their mates in Canberra that tried to water this down. It is shameful that they now come into this

place and somehow make out as if they are the champions of workers when the Liberal Party, if you ask anyone out on the street, has a history of undermining the rights of workers in this country. In fact it is what Menzies set out to do. He did not like the fact that the Labor Party represented unions in Parliament, so he set out to create a party directly to challenge that. In concluding, I think it is important for any young people who take the time to watch Parliament to look at this debate very closely and understand that we need to make sure that we have these protections.

The SPEAKER: The time set down for consideration of items on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (50): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (29): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Anthony Marsh, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (50): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (29): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Anthony Marsh, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

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

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Steve Dimopoulos:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That this bill be now read a second time and a third time.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (52): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (27): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Anthony Marsh, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Sonya Kilkenny:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

The SPEAKER: As the required statement of intention has been made under section 85(5)(c) of the Constitution Act 1975, the third reading of the bill must be passed by an absolute majority.

Motion agreed to by absolute majority.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Paul Hamer:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That this bill be now read a second time, government amendments 1 to 3 inclusive be agreed to and the bill be now read a third time.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (50): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (29): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Anthony Marsh, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

Read second time.

Circulated amendments

Circulated government amendments as follows agreed to:

1. Clause 25, after line 29 insert –

"(1A) Section 35(5)(c), as inserted by section 11(b) of the Amending Act, applies to –

(a) any Councillor who is stood down under section 228 or 229 on or after section 11 of the Amending Act comes into operation; and

(b) any Councillor who is stood down under section 228 or 229 before section 11 of the Amending Act comes into operation and who remains stood down after section 11 of the Amending Act comes into operation; and

(c) any Councillor who was stood down under section 228 or 229 at any time before the commencement of section 11 of the Amending Act comes into operation but is no longer stood down on the commencement of section 11 of the Amending Act.

(1B) A Councillor in respect of whom subsection (1A)(b) or (c) applies is taken to continue to have held office as a Councillor under section 35 as in force immediately before the commencement of section 11 of the Amending Act despite being absent from Council meetings for a period of 4 consecutive months without leave obtained from the Council if the absence is by reason only of the Councillor being stood down under section 228 or 229.".

2. Clause 25, page 22, line 29, omit 'operation.".' and insert "operation.".

3. Clause 25, page 22, after line 29 insert –

'(7) If a Councillor is charged with an offence specified in section 229(2) before section 229(2A), as inserted by section 24(1) of the Amending Act, comes into operation and the proceeding for that offence is not commenced by or on behalf of a law enforcement agency or the complainant is not

a law enforcement agency, on and after the commencement of section 229(2A), the Councillor is taken to not have been stood down under section 229(1).

(8) A Councillor taken to not have been stood down by force of subsection (7) is entitled to their allowance that was withheld under section 229(4) as a consequence of the Councillor being stood down before the commencement of section 229(2A).

(9) Despite subsection (7), anything done, including any act in the exercise of any function, power or duty by any person under the Act, as a consequence of a Councillor to whom that subsection applies being stood down under or in accordance with this Act, as in force before the commencement of section 229(2A), remains valid.".'.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Sonya Kilkenny:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Gabrielle Williams:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That this bill be now read a second time and a third time.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (52): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (27): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Anthony Marsh, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Mirboo North stadium

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (17:20): (1809) Speaker, with your indulgence, I have noted a lot of hugging and kissing going on up there and decided you have either got engaged or you are retiring from Parliament. And I would place on the record my thanks and that of the Nationals to you for your service and your commitment and your time as Speaker as well. I wish you all the best for the future.

My adjournment matter this evening, though, is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek from the minister is to finally do something about the Mirboo North stadium at Mirboo North Secondary College and primary school. This is something I am raising literally in the last couple of weeks of the term, because I have raised it so many times. I have written to so many different ministers and have not got anywhere on getting this stadium replaced. The stadium is shared. The primary school and secondary school are on the same site and they share the stadium. It is the only stadium in town, so it is used by the community as well. Whether it is Mirboo North basketball, the footy club, the yoga or the various martial arts clubs, they use the stadium as well. It is the only stadium in town. But it dates from the 1970s, and whilst the member for Hawthorn and the member for Bulleen will say, as I do, that that is not that old, it actually is that old, unfortunately. It is more than 50 years old now, and this stadium is in dire need of replacement. It does not have the required run-off areas. It has got a concrete floor with vinyl over the top, so it is not safe for the community. The toilets, perhaps in spite of the efforts of the schools – they have done a great job trying to tart them up a little bit, but they are pretty disgusting, the change rooms and toilets, and frankly the whole thing needs bulldozing and replacing. In a perfect world we would probably keep the existing facility and expand to a new stadium and use the existing facility for gym and other indoor activities that the schools could use. That may or may not be available, but this is something that does need to be done. Mirboo North has had a tough time over the last couple of years, particularly after the storm that hit the town and in fact damaged part of the school – not the stadium, but part of the school – back in 2024. We lost around 20 homes and there was certainly some significant impact.

I know the Minister for Community Sport came and visited the school with me in the aftermath of that, so she understands. But the problem we have is that the Department of Education owns this facility, and the shire will not do anything because it is an education department facility. The Minister for Community Sport cannot do anything because it is not their facility. They could potentially provide

funding, and certainly we hope they would do so, but I need the Minister for Education to direct the department to replace this facility and make sure that Mirboo North has a decent stadium going forward.

300–340 Barry Road, Campbellfield

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (17:23): (1810) My adjournment is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is an extension of the public notice period of the planning application for a data centre at the former Ford site in Campbellfield. This extension would enable time for further information to be given to the community and to be provided in different community languages. I thank the minister for meeting with me many times to pass on my concerns and the concerns of my community, and I thank her for agreeing to meet with local residents to hear from them directly. The concerns I share with residents include the impact of data centres on water and electricity, and I am very pleased that the national cabinet met yesterday to consider the introduction of compulsory requirements to address these issues.

We are also deeply concerned about the negative impact of this proposal on resident amenity, and I note that the EPA have submitted an objection to the application on the basis of excessive noise generation in their role as one of the many agencies that planning applications are referred to. I understand it can take some time for referral authorities to fully consider applications and make informed submissions to the minister before a decision is made. Public submissions also have to be considered before a decision can be made, and whilst I understand submissions remain open until the decision is made, a formal extension of the notice period would give the community some more certainty over the process and allow time for them to consider all information in their submissions, including policy changes that are currently being considered. I think this is particularly important in the surrounding suburbs, where over 70 per cent of residents do not speak English at home, and I would appreciate her consideration of this request.

Public transport

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (17:24): (1811) Speaker, with your indulgence, I will just echo the words of the Leader of the National Party on your service and your announcement of your retirement today. We will miss you. I guess that those who are kicked out maybe will not, but when we get the time back in the chamber, we will be able to see you again. Thank you for your service, and good luck.

My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Public Transport. I ask the minister to implement a campaign of respectful behaviour across our public transport network. I raise this matter and ask the minister to implement this campaign with the operators, particularly Yarra Trams and Metro Trains, in relation to a number of conversations and emails I have had from commuters right across the metropolitan network, particularly on the tram network in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, who have raised issues in relation to people using speakers, for instance, on trams and being quite disruptive on the public transport network. I think it is important that when we take public transport – I take the train, the tram and sometimes the bus to Parliament all the time – we are considerate about other passengers and that respectful behaviour is in people's minds when they are using public transport. I think it is important to have campaigns which are managed and put in place by the operators and led by the minister to ensure that this is known and that passengers know that we should be courteous to other people around us on public transport. So I ask the minister to implement a campaign around respect and respectful behaviour on our public transport network, focusing particularly on the tram and train networks.

Education system

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (17:26): (1812) The adjournment matter that I wish to raise is for the Minister for Education and concerns the enterprise bargaining agreement for our education workers. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide an update on how this agreement will support teachers, principals and education support staff in my electorate of Narre Warren South. The value of our education workers cannot be underestimated. They are dedicated individuals who show

up every day to help our kids learn, grow and thrive. As a former teacher I can attest to the passion for education that education workers have in their profession. As a parent I have seen the difference that a great teacher can make in kids' lives, and as a local member of Parliament I have been really lucky to meet many principals and see the commitment that they have to their school communities.

I welcome the Carroll Labor government's recent EBA offer, which has been endorsed by the Australian Education Union and locks in Victorian teachers as the best paid in the country with the best conditions. I thank our hardworking teachers and school support staff across my electorate for everything that they do, and I also acknowledge the many local AEU delegates that have come and seen me. They are from my community, I have met with them, they have shared their experiences with me and I have been grateful to hear all of that. The agreement itself recognises that great public education values the people who work so very hard to deliver it, and it aims to ensure that our teachers feel supported and have the time and resources they need to have a sustainable career doing the job they came into teaching to do. I look forward to sharing that response from the minister with my community.

Electoral system

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (17:28): (1813) My adjournment is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for the Premier to take measures to increase public understanding of preferential voting before the next election. It is time to talk about how preferences work. This November Victorians will vote to elect the next state government, decided by whichever party wins the majority of the 88 seats in the lower house, made up of local members representing their electorates. Our preferential voting system makes sure that when Victorians vote, each vote counts. In each electorate voters need one person to represent their area. The way our system works, voters rank candidates as number 1, 2, 3 and so on. This preferential system exists so that no-one's vote is wasted. If a voter's first choice cannot win, their vote still counts. First, all the number 1 votes, called the primary votes, are counted. If a candidate at that point has more than 50 per cent of the votes, they win. If not, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated. People who voted for them do not have their ballot papers thrown out; each one is passed on to whichever candidate the voter has marked as their next preference – their number 2. Then the count is checked again, and this process repeats with the candidate with the fewest votes eliminated until one candidate gets more than 50 per cent of the vote. That is how preferential voting works. This process of elimination guarantees a clear majority winner, one that every voter's ballot has had a say in deciding.

In the upper house, voters have two options: they can vote above the line, numbering the parties in the order they prefer; or they can vote below the line, voting for individual candidates, not just the party they are with. At every step it is Victorians' own choice of preferences that decides where their vote goes, and anyone's how-to-vote card is simply a suggestion for how they should order their preferences. Parties do not decide voters' preferences, Victorians do, numbering the boxes on their ballot in their preferred order.

I speak to people all the time who tell me, 'I never voted for Labor. I don't know how they got in again.' Well, Victorians' number one votes are important, but it is also important how they order their preferences after that, and often that is what decides the election outcome and who is in government. It means Victorians' vote 1 is important – their preferred winner – but it also matters how they are ordered after that. If Victorians want to vote for a party that will reduce crime, lower costs and deliver a government that works, they should put the Liberals and Nationals first. Every vote will count this November; it is time for a fresh start.

And finally, on indulgence, we thank you, Speaker, for your service to your community and for your time in office and wish you the very best for the future.

Language schools

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (17:31): (1814) I am going to add my thanks as well, and I will try to do it later perhaps without reducing myself to tears. My adjournment matter this evening is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the action I seek is an update on how the Carroll Labor government is supporting language schools. I recently attended the Zimbabwean Saturday school in Cranbourne East and was welcomed by extraordinary leaders, parents and teachers. But the stars of the show were the students, who taught me important and useful phrases in Shona and Ndebele. I would like to acknowledge particularly the teachers: firstly Ravai Makwara, Katra Mawoyo, Shelter Chimombe and Nomsa Mzamo. I would like to thank and acknowledge our sparkling and clever students: Tafadzwa Mombeshora, Romana Mwandiambira, Tawana Mwandiambira, Taylor Bare, Levi Bare, Mason Bare, Mudiwa Mapfunde, Munaye Mapfunde, Dylan Josaya, Tiana Josaya, Shona Vomo, Zuva Vomo, Ruvarashe Chimombe, Robyn Chimombe, Challotte Mapwanya, Zara Mapwanya, Joshua Mawoyo, Ezekiel Mawoyo, Hayley Makore, Linah Aseka Esatiah, Vuyo Aseka Esatiah, Mpho Muregi and Msizi Muregi. I look forward to the minister's response and to sharing it with the community.

North East Catchment Management Authority

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (17:33): (1815) Speaker, can I echo the comments of my colleagues and congratulate you on your contribution to Bendigo West and to this place. My adjournment is to the Minister for Environment in the other place, and the action that I seek is that the minister instruct the North East Catchment Management Authority to take some action against farmers who live on or close to creeks and rivers that flood. From time to time we find people disposing of rubbish, and for the want of better words, dead animal carcasses that are not buried but put in a hole somewhere, and then when places flood, these carcasses float to the surface and start going downstream and end up in vineyards and orchards and everywhere else, which is not a very pleasant occasion, I can tell you, because carcases can hang around for two or three months.

Peter Bettio owns a property near Edi Cutting on the King River. During flash flooding of the river, which occurs usually once or twice a year, he is constantly inundated by rubbish and the occasional dead cow from upstream. As I say, these may have died two or three months earlier but have not been disposed of properly, and during flash flooding these animals float downstream and get wedged amongst his grapevines and trees, and when the water subsides, these animals become his problem. The action that I seek is that catchment management address this problem, which has been going on for years, and stop rubbish and dead animals floating downstream in flash flooding occasions.

Residential tenancies

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (17:34): (1816) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing, Building and Precincts, and the action I seek is for the minister to progress amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 to address the very small proportion of social housing residents who pose a serious risk to the livelihoods and safety of other residents and their neighbours. Anyone who works with community housing and public housing, as we do, as I know you do, Speaker, as I know the member for Broadmeadows here does, the minister in his capacity as the member for Ivanhoe, the member for Ashwood – many of us in this place work closely with our public housing and community housing tenants, and all of us who do know the nature of this particular problem.

In Preston and Reservoir we have over 3000 people who are living in community housing or public housing. The vast, vast majority are wonderful people who make a really positive contribution to our community, but unfortunately a small percentage – a very small percentage – less than a per cent, I would certainly say, are people who cause huge difficulties for other residents in their buildings and their areas by engaging in repeated violent, unlawful and anti-social behaviour. It is clear, I think, to anyone who engages with these issues that those individuals require a housing set-up that has more support and pays more attention to safety than some of our low-support housing provides.

Think, for instance, of the most recent Housing Australia Future Fund round from the federal government. We are very grateful to our federal Labor colleagues for their support for social housing, but social housing as they have recently provided for in round 2 is funded at a rate of $17,000 per apartment per year. We welcome that subsidy, but everyone in the sector knows that that subsidy is not enough for high-need residents, and we cannot therefore have the situation that high-need residents are left in low-support housing where they cause immense problems for what are often very vulnerable other residents. We see the tragic situation where people who have fled family violence are forced to flee it again and where refugees who have come to this country where their biggest priority is safety and security are not given safety and security in housing for which we are responsible. Tragically in Reservoir in Seston Street we had the death of Melonie McKay, and our thoughts of course are with her children and her family. But those were circumstances where complaints had been raised, as I understand it, on a repeated basis about the behaviour of an individual, and action was not taken.

I disagree very fundamentally with the notion that anyone has an unalienable right to just keep the housing they are in. I think it is something that our social housing review looked at and came to the right conclusion that further reform is needed. We have undertaken some reform in this area, but realistically it is still too hard and too slow to transfer out, with the appropriate supports, people who are genuinely making life difficult and indeed who are damaging the broader agenda of social housing that all of us in this place support by increasing the perception that social housing is not safe. I thank the minister and his team for their consideration of making those further changes to the Residential Tenancies Act.

Lorne Parade Reserve, Mont Albert

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (17:37): (1817) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to urgently address a serious pedestrian safety risk at Windsor Crescent and Lorne Parade Reserve on the border of my electorate of Hawthorn and the minister's own electorate of Box Hill. Along the southern side of Union station, a dedicated pedestrian and cycling path runs from Windsor Crescent and continues around Lorne Parade Reserve. The path was delivered as part of the Union station level crossing removal project. It was designed to separate pedestrians and cyclists from vehicles and provide a safer off-road connection through the precinct. Immediately beside it is Lorne Parade Reserve and a children's playground. Yet footage seen by my office shows a hatchback travelling along Windsor Crescent, mounting the pedestrian crossing, turning onto the pedestrian and cycling path and simply driving along it. This is not a driveway. It is not a road It is a path specifically built for pedestrians and cyclists running immediately alongside a reserve where young children play. Alarmingly, I understand this is not an isolated incident. Local residents have observed vehicles entering the path on at least half a dozen occasions. The government said safety was a key theme in designing the Union station precinct. It deliberately built separate infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists and promised safer connections through this community. Yet somehow motorists can simply mount a pedestrian crossing and drive onto the very path that was built to keep pedestrians and cyclists separated from cars.

I want to acknowledge Sally Houguet, the Liberal candidate for Box Hill, who has been listening to concerned residents, visiting the area and advocating for action to address this risk. Sally brought this issue to my attention because locals are rightly asking a simple question: what is being done to stop this happening again? Disappointingly, I am to understand the minister, as the local member for Box Hill, has been aware of these concerns since June 2025, and it is now August 2026. The minister may only recently have assumed responsibility for roads and road safety, but he has represented this community for nearly eight years. He is now uniquely placed to fix this problem. The answer might be bollards, it might be a barrier, it might be altered kerbing or another treatment recommended by road safety experts. I am not asking the minister to accept my engineering advice. I am asking him, however, to have his department urgently assess this site and implement the appropriate solutions. If we build a dedicated infrastructure for our community to keep pedestrians and cyclists separated from cars, surely the very least we can do is keep the cars off it.

Don Bosco youth centre

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (17:40): (1818) Thank you for your service, Speaker. My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Youth, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide me with an update on the ongoing investments the Victorian Labor government continues to make for young people across Pascoe Vale to aspire, succeed and be supported.

As someone who grew up locally, a lifetime local and now a local dad, and having enjoyed the Don Bosco youth centre as a young person and with my kids, I was particularly concerned and disappointed to learn of the decision by the Salesians order a few weeks ago to put the Don Bosco centre on the market via a very limited EOI process which closed on Thursday 20 August. The Don Bosco youth centre and hostel has been part of the fabric of Brunswick in Melbourne's north for nearly 90 years. Built on land originally and generously donated to the Catholic Church by the local Danelli family in 1939, it was subsequently entrusted to the Salesians. Don Bosco was intended to remain a place dedicated to supporting young people in need in the spirit of Don Bosco, the patron saint for youth, in perpetuity for our community.

For almost 90 years it has been a place where young people could build friendships and strengthen connections. Whether through the youth hostel accommodation for those in need or the iconic trampolines, there are so many families with a memory or connection to Don Bosco. However, we also know that over those years the Salesians tragically failed in their duty of care to protect vulnerable young people and children from horrific and traumatic abuse – a gross betrayal of trust. That is why my community wholeheartedly acknowledges the Salesians' need to atone and raise funds in order to rightly compensate victim-survivors of institutional child sexual abuse and fulfil their legal and moral obligations. But at the same time, many locals, me included, are asking the question 'Why should our community have to pay the price for the sins of the Salesians?' That is why a community petition to save Don Bosco has now harnessed over 6000 signatures.

It is in this community spirit of good faith that I welcome and call on the interested parties to come together to help facilitate a positive outcome: (1) the Salesians should extend the official expression of interest process to allow for more time for genuine interested parties to be consulted, engaged and participate, (2) the Salesians should ensure that any proposals they receive or will receive from interested proponents on the future of the site will make provision for and maintain an ongoing presence for youth recreation services and spaces, namely, via the community not-for-profit sector and (3) considering the significance of the Brunswick site to the local community, the Salesians should be transparent with locals about why they decided to sell Don Bosco ahead of their various other assets. Exploration of alternative assets should also be considered. I understand the Salesians reported $290 million in property and plant equipment in their 2024 audited accounts.

It is also Merri-bek council that has an important role to step up here. Beyond their symbolic motion of 12 August, council needs to acknowledge that it is predominantly the role and responsibility of council to own, manage and operate local community facilities, including youth facilities. The original vision of the Oxygen Youth project that I was a founder of was to establish youth hubs in the north, centre and south of Merri-bek. The original vision of the Oxygen Youth hub in Coburg was to complement the offerings of Don Bosco in the south. Now Don Bosco has become available, council has the chance to fulfil its role and contribute towards this vision being realised. As part of this they should consider and be honest with the community about whether they would acquire or contribute towards the future site acquisition or whether they could partner with a future owner or a not-for-profit organisation, including through contributing and other measures.

Responses

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy, Minister for Major Events, Minister for Medical Research, Minister for Racing, Minister for Economic Development) (17:43): The member for Gippsland South raised a matter for the Minister for Education regarding action on the Mirboo North secondary and primary schools' local

stadium. The member for Broadmeadows raised a matter for the Minister for Planning, with the action to deal with matters of a public notice period on the planning and an extension of the application for a data centre at the former Ford site in Campbellfield. The honourable member for Bulleen, who is no longer with us, raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport seeking action to campaign for respectful behaviour across the public transport network. The member for Narre Warren South raised a matter for the Minister for Education seeking an update on how the EBA for teacher, principals and support staff is supporting those great workers in our schools in his electorate. The member for Warrandyte raised a matter for the Premier, seeking action to take measures to ensure voters understand the preferential voting system.

The member for Cranbourne raised a matter for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs seeking an update on how we are supporting Saturday language schools, particularly the Zimbabwean Saturday school. The member for Ovens Valley raised a matter for the Minister for Environment in the other place with regard to the North East Catchment Management Authority seeking action to support farmers, particularly along those creeks and rivers that are prone to flooding. He went into detail about those matters. The member for Preston raised a matter for the Minister for Housing, Building and Precincts seeking changes to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 so social and public housing providers can evict tenants if required. The member for Hawthorn raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety seeking action to minimise pedestrian risks at Windsor Crescent and a local reserve in his electorate. The member for Pascoe Vale raised a matter for the Minister for Youth seeking action to outline supports for young people in his Pascoe Vale electorate, and he reflected on the magnificent work of the Don Bosco centre in his electorate. I commend all those matters to you, Speaker, for further action.

May I also add my congratulations to you, Speaker, following your decision not to contest the next election in Bendigo West. I thank you for your service as a fellow member of the class of 2010. There were not so many of us on this side of the house in 2010, so it is always a small reunion group, and growing smaller all the time. I also say to you, having been married in your electorate to a Maldon girl, I know from regular visits there over a very long time, at least in the 16 years that you have been here, the regard that people have for you in your electorate. It comes through all the time in the conversations that I hear and the actions that I have seen locally over very many years. That is something I am sure you draw great comfort and strength from. I certainly wish you every success. I know in-laws and others in my family alone will be sad but also really thrilled and pleased for you, and not only for what you have achieved here. The journey that we have had together has been something that I will always remember. Go well, and thank you very much.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, Leader of the House. As always, I thank the clerks and our parliamentary staff for supporting us this sitting week. The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 5:47 pm.