Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Tuesday 25 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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Tuesday 25 August 2026

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 12:04 pm, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

The SPEAKER (12:05): General business, notices of motion 9 and 53 and orders of the day 5 to 6, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 5 pm today.

Petitions

Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Paynesville flotilla

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) presented a petition bearing three signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that there is currently no permanent Marine Rescue facility for the volunteers who provide accredited marine rescue services to the community of, and visitors to, the Gippsland Lakes. These volunteers deliver an essential emergency response service across one of Victoria's busiest inland waterways, yet they do so without a permanent base located on the Paynesville foreshore.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly identify a location for the future base of the Paynesville Coast Guard on the waterfront in Paynesville.

Maroondah Hospital

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) presented a petition bearing 372 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that the Victorian Labor Government has abandoned the people of Melbourne's east by walking away from its commitment to fully rebuild Maroondah Hospital, leaving residents without the healthcare infrastructure they were promised. For years, local families were promised a world-class hospital for the eastern suburbs. At the 2018 election, the Government promised a new children's emergency department which it failed to deliver. At the 2022 election, it promised more than $1 billion for a full redevelopment of Maroondah Hospital which it also failed to deliver. Those promises gave false hope to patients, nurses, doctors and communities across the east that better healthcare was on the way. Instead, the 2026–27 State Budget contains no funding to deliver the full redevelopment of Maroondah Hospital. Maroondah Hospital is one of the busiest hospitals in the eastern suburbs, caring for a growing population. Patients and healthcare workers continue to rely on ageing and inadequate facilities, placing strain on emergency care, surgeries, cancer treatment and mental health services. This is not just a broken promise. It is a betrayal of the communities that rely on Maroondah Hospital for essential healthcare.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the Government to immediately restore funding for the full redevelopment of Maroondah Hospital and honour its commitment made to the people of Melbourne's eastern suburbs by delivering the complete hospital rebuild as a matter of urgency.

Youth crime

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) presented a petition bearing 2558 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that communities across Victoria are concerned about repeat youth offending, violent public disorder and property crime. Petitioners are concerned that the current youth justice framework limits the ability of police and the courts to respond effectively to repeat offending and serious violent behaviour by some young offenders aged 12

and 13 years, reducing accountability, limiting opportunities for early intervention and rehabilitation, and undermining community confidence in the justice system. Petitioners are also concerned by the increasing involvement of young offenders in serious violent crime and the impact this is having on community safety and confidence in the justice system.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly amend the Youth Justice Act 2024:

1. Remove mandatory pre-court diversion requirements for young persons charged with serious and violent offences;
2. Strengthen the ability of Victoria Police to charge and bring before the Children's Court young persons alleged to have committed serious public order, property or violent offences;
3. Young offenders who engage in serious violent behaviour shall be mandated to participate in appropriate intervention, education or rehabilitation programs to promote accountability and reduce reoffending;
4. Strengthen recognition of victim safety and wellbeing within the youth justice system; and
5. Review the operation of doli incapax to ensure serious public order, property and violent offences can be appropriately considered by the courts.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Committees

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2026–27 Budget Estimates

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (12:07): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee on the inquiry into the 2026–27 budget estimates, together with transcripts of evidence.

Ordered that report be published.

60th Parliament End of Term Report

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (12:07): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, the *60th Parliament End of Term Report*, together with appendices.

Ordered to be published.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Alert Digest No. 11

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (12:08): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 11 of 2026, on the following bills, together with appendices:

Associations Incorporation Reform Amendment Bill 2026

Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 – house amendments

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

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

Liquor Control Reform and Other Acts Amendment (Reducing Alcohol-Related Harms) Bill 2026

Planning and Environment Amendment (Agricultural Land and Food Security) Bill 2026

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

Ordered to be published.

Annual Review 2025: Statutory Rules and Legislative Instruments

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (12:09): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, the *Annual Review 2025: Statutory Rules and Legislative Instruments*, together with appendices.

Ordered to be published.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 – Order under s 17B granting a licence over Lynch's Bridge Historic Precinct Reserve

Health Complaints Commissioner – Report 2025–26

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notice under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule 20 *(Gazette S402, 10 July 2026)*

Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 – Government response to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's Report on the Inquiry into 2024–25 Financial and Performance Outcomes

Parliamentary Salaries, Allowances and Superannuation Act 1968 – Compliance Officer – Statement of Findings under s 9H – Ordered to be published

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

Brimbank – C219

East Gippsland – C165

Glen Eira – C240

Hume – C283

Melbourne – C496, C497, C500, GC296

Mount Alexander – C106

Moyne – C82

Port Phillip – C218, GC296

Surf Coast – C147, C150

Warrnambool – C222

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Land Act 1958 – SR 113

Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 – SR 114

Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990 – SRs 111, 112

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 99, 113, 114.

Bills

Firearms Amendment Bill 2026

Council's agreement

The SPEAKER (12:10): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Firearms Amendment Bill 2026 without amendment.

Corrections Amendment Bill 2026

Council's amendments

The SPEAKER (12:10): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Corrections Amendment Bill 2026 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.

Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

Council's amendments

The SPEAKER (12:11): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.

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

Council's amendments

The SPEAKER (12:11): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Racing Legislation Amendment (Entity Governance and Other Matters) Bill 2026 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.

Electoral Amendment (Miscellaneous Matters) Bill 2026

Firearms Amendment Bill 2026

Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026

Royal assent

The SPEAKER (12:11): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Electoral Amendment (Miscellaneous Matters) Bill 2026, the Firearms Amendment Bill 2026 and the Fishing, Hunting and Outdoor Victoria Bill 2026.

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

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

Appropriation

The SPEAKER (12:12): I have received messages from the Governor recommending appropriations for the purposes of the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026 and the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill 2026.

Business of the house

Standing and sessional orders

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) (12:12): I move, by leave:

> That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended on Wednesday 26 August 2026 to allow the Speaker, following the prayer and Acknowledgement of Country, to invite members to stand for a minute's silence, if they are able, to honour the service and sacrifice of Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart, who were tragically killed in the line of duty at Porepunkah on Tuesday 26 August 2025.

I know that both the Minister for Police, the honourable member for Frankston, and the Shadow Minister for Police, the member for Berwick, are attending memorial services in Wangaratta and Bright today and tomorrow, which is most appropriate. Certainly, as I was Minister for Police at the time of these murders – and murders is what they were – and given the serious injury to a third police officer, I know that it is most appropriate for the Parliament to give consideration to a minute's silence tomorrow to pay our respects both to their families and to all police members who work hard every day, 24/7, to keep our community safe and also to acknowledge the role their families play in supporting them and the importance of making sure that they continue to get home to their families every day after keeping us safe in the community. Our thoughts are with all members of Victoria Police in what is a very challenging and difficult week for them and the families of those members who were killed in the line of duty.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Motions by leave

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (12:14): I move, by leave:

> That this house notes that the Israel Defense Forces has cleared itself of any wrongdoing in the murder of Australian aid worker Somi Frankcom –

Leave refused.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (12:14): I move, by leave:

> That this house expresses solidarity with union members at Quantem fuels, who will walk off the job in West Melbourne in my electorate this Thursday after Quantem sacked union delegates in 2024, and calls on Quantem to meet with the union and actually pay their workers fair wages and give them fair conditions.

Leave refused.

Business of the house

Program

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) (12:15): I move:

> That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 27 August 2026:
>
> Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026
>
> Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026
>
> Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026
>
> Associations Incorporation Reform Amendment Bill 2026
>
> Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill 2026
>
> Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026.

In moving those matters I would say also that it is a very significant business program of some six bills for the Parliament to give consideration to in the Assembly because the Carroll Labor government will continue to deliver for hardworking Victorians. We do not know whether those opposite will be delivering very much, because they do not care about working people. They only care about doing the bidding of others in the community.

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

The SPEAKER: Leader of the House, come back to the government business program.

Anthony CARBINES: This week we will be debating the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill 2026, which will make significant reforms to prioritise the safety of victim-survivors and ensure perpetrators of any form of interpersonal violence are held to account. It is about responding to the voices of victim-survivors. It is about listening to their concerns and taking action. It is a bill that will establish a standalone criminal offence of coercive control and abolish good character references at sentencing for all offences. The 'good bloke' defence will be a thing of the past.

I might say also that I know Rosie Batty will be in the Parliament this week, and we welcome her here to play a role in hosting members of Parliament and other members of the community. I know that that is occurring with other members, including the Attorney-General. I know that we welcome her here and the advocacy and work that she has displayed over a long period of time. Certainly I was a member of this place when we stood for Rosie Batty when she spoke in this chamber to indicate her heartfelt experiences and her support for the community. I do know that there is a member of that Parliament who has been preselected by the Liberal Party who did not stand for Rosie Batty then and I am sure will not stand for her now.

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

The SPEAKER: I encourage the Leader of the House to come back to the government business program.

Anthony CARBINES: We will also be debating the Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026. This bill makes practical improvements to the Victorian workers compensation framework to make sure it is fair for injured workers, employees and the wider Victorian community, because safety at work is not negotiable for the Carroll government. It is about fair compensation for those unfortunate enough to be injured at work. The bill demonstrates that Victoria is not only a safe place to work but also a place where we want people to be able to invest and grow. But you also need to be investing and growing your workforce and looking after them to make sure they get home to their families, which is very much just as important as it is in some of the matters that we have already touched on this morning in motions by leave. Everything we can do to keep people safe at work we must do.

One of the important ways of helping working families is to make sure they have access to high-quality and effective education and training. This week we will debate the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026. It will strengthen protections for Victoria's apprentices and trainees, making the system safer and fairer for our youngest workers, who are a particularly vulnerable cohort.

We will also be debating the Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026, strengthening laws around integrity and governance in local government and ensuring public decisions are made fairly and transparently. Along with many people in this place, as a former local government councillor, I know integrity and governance in local government is critically important. We look forward to the further debates and the reforms that we can bring to this place across those matters this week.

We also understand that working families rely heavily on local government representatives to be efficient and effective in delivering the services they rely on and to ensure determinations about ratepayers money are responsible and effective. We will be debating the Associations Incorporation Reform Amendment Bill 2026, another bill that is about protecting workers. Our government understands they deserve access to safe, fair workplaces and proper and effective representation.

Finally, we will be debating the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026. These are important changes for working people once again, including Victorian public service staff and

Victoria Police. We worked closely on these matters with the Police Association Victoria. I know how important these changes are. These are changes that relate back to the previous dark days of the Kennett Liberal government, when rights for workers were palmed off to Canberra, but of course carved out from that were Victoria Police members, who lost those rights. Those appeals and having their rights protected at work were taken away from them – they were excised out by the Kennett government. It will be a Labor government that will bring those rights back for Victoria Police members. I am very proud that that legislation is coming before this Parliament. No-one else has been able to deliver it, but a Carroll Labor government will make sure those rights of Victoria Police members at work are protected and brought back through this Parliament. I commend a solid business program to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:20): I rise to speak on the government business program. What a mess this Parliament is. What a mess this government business program is. We had six days left of Parliament and the government had over four years to work out how they would manage a legislative program over that four years, and they have got to the final days of their government – the end of days for the government – and have worked out that time is running out and their delivery for the community has not lived up to expectations, and now the government are in a mad panic to try and make up for all of the errors they have made in relation to community priorities. That is why we now know that we will not be sitting for five more days after today. An additional week of sitting has been announced – to do what? Who would know? You would see, in what has returned to this place today, what is being considered in the Council this week and what there is an indication of being brought into this chamber, that the program has not facilitated and the Leader of the House has not spoken to how all of those things will be managed. That is important, because if you are on top of your job, if you are on top of managing the program, you will know how you are going to manage these things.

We know that we will probably sit late tomorrow evening, only briefly, because the plan for valedictories has not fully been thought through, and now we have to fit valedictories in, which of course we all should be here for. I am not in any way reflecting on the valedictories occurring, but it is just a sign of mismanagement of the chamber's time. All of these things should be managed in a way that these things are managed well. We expect, I would presume, working from home at some stage to be brought back into the chamber – perhaps this week – though we would put on record that despite a press conference last week, no amendments have been moved to the bill. What are the amendments?

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Speaker, as much as I appreciate the crystal-balling of the member for Brighton, I ask, on relevance – which he has been keen for us to adhere to on this side of the house – for him to perhaps go to some of the six substantive bills and the three that are forecast for amendment. He might want to cast some commentary on those matters.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, I remind you that it is the government business program we are debating.

James NEWBURY: Thank you, Speaker, and I have been very, very careful not to make any political comments and rather to talk about managing the chamber. I think some latitude thereof is reasonable, considering we will need to understand how we will bring through work that is being done in the Council and potentially amendments to other bills that the government is seeking to move through the chamber this week. It is only reasonable to understand how we will facilitate those items around a proposed government business program and, as the Leader of the House identified, amendments that are returning from the Council. When it comes to managing this chamber's time, you do need to take into account the work in the Council and those amendments coming through, and that is why I raised the work-from-home legislation, because I suspect there will be amendments. The government has announced that there will be amendments but has not made any public release about that, so it is reasonable to talk through how this chamber will facilitate that. But I take the Leader of the House's point. For working from home, as there have been no amendments moved by the

government despite their public promise, it is probably a fair thing to surmise that nothing will happen with that legislation this week, and I take the Leader of the House up on that point.

Further, I understand that the government is considering further IBAC reform and there will perhaps need to be time afforded for that legislation. The Premier, last Thursday from memory, announced an intention on IBAC. The Premier announced that, so I think it is reasonable that we consider that. That is why we oppose the program.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (12:25): It gives me great pleasure to rise this afternoon and make a contribution in favour of this amazing government business program, a jam-packed government business program. It is always a great pleasure to follow the member for Brighton, who does seem genuinely aggrieved that he will have to travel 11 kilometres from Brighton for an extra few sitting days.

Members interjecting.

Dylan WIGHT: I cannot hear myself think, Speaker. According to him, the member for Brighton is most certainly the smartest person in this room, so I thought that he would have known that coming to Parliament, debating legislation and voting on it is a pretty significant part of his job. And if we need to take a few extra days to get this jam-packed legislative agenda that the Carroll Labor government has done then that is exactly what we will do. If we have to sit late some sitting nights, that is exactly what we will do. If we have to come back for a few extra days during school holidays and in grand final week, that is exactly what we will do, because this government, the Carroll Labor government, is committed to supporting working people here in Victoria. That is exactly what this government business program this week is all about, member for Murray Plains. That is exactly what it is about.

A member interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: Oh, no, I meant Murray Plains. We have got six bills on this government business program, the vast majority of which will make the lives of working people in our state better.

We will start with the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026. As the member for Ivanhoe rightly provided commentary on, a former Liberal government in the 1990s, led by Jeff Kennett, gave our industrial powers away to the Commonwealth government. This bill will refer relevant components of industrial powers. Workers out there in Victoria – we have obviously got two systems, one here in Victoria, one federally – deserve representation. This bill, like I said, will make the lives of working people better.

An incredibly important bill which I know has been some time coming on this government business program is the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill 2026. We know that family violence, domestic violence, is a scourge on our society, and there is an epidemic out there. This government, for the last 12 years really since opposition when we announced a royal commission, has worked day and night to try and improve that, particularly for Victorian women. I represent the constituency of Tarneit, which is inside Wyndham. The member for Werribee will know that 23 per cent of all family violence cases in the state of Victoria are committed in Wyndham. That is amongst a population of 340,000 people. If you talk to local police, 50 per cent of all their calls are related to family violence matters. It is an absolute epidemic all over Victoria but particularly in our outer suburbs.

For it to continue to be legal – and this will fix that – for somebody to go to court on a family violence matter and be convicted and perhaps be going off to prison and then have the capacity for somebody that they have known to provide a reference on how good their character is to try and influence or lower that sentence deserves stronger words than ‘not fit for purpose’. It has long been diabolical and a debacle, member for Brighton.

James Newbury interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: I would not start, member for Brighton. Like I said, this government business program – every single piece of legislation on it, everything we will debate this week – will make the lives of working Victorians better. That is the commitment this government has made. In November Victorians will have a binary choice between that – *(Time expired)*

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (12:30): I rise to talk on the government business program. As the member for Brighton said, we are opposing it this week. The member for Tarneit was just talking about one of the bills coming through, the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill 2026. My constituents in the Latrobe Valley carry heavy hearts because, in the seat of Morwell, the Latrobe Valley and East Gippsland are unfortunately rated number one and number two in the state for reported cases of family violence. It is something that we are working hard on, but we always seem to be in the top two places. Regional Victoria does not miss out, unfortunately, when we talk about these subjects. So to have this particular legislation come through – especially with coercive control as well, and to put measures in place against being able to write a good character reference, which should not carry any weight at all, moving forward, when accusations are brought up against people – I think most people will be standing and talking about this in the chamber.

The Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026, which is coming through, will be good to stand up and talk about. I have a lot of people in the Latrobe Valley community that unfortunately, through their jobs and their work, engage with WorkCover, some at a good level and some at another level, where payments for their rehabilitation are sometimes lacking. It will be good to stand up in the chamber and put a couple of the cases forward and put names to the faces of some of the people that come in and sit in my office. When they come into the office talking about WorkCover matters they are at their lowest ebb. It is probably the final step that they have left to be able to come and talk to us. It is a lot of trades, obviously. We have a lot of tradies around the place.

As I am a former tradie, I will also rise and make a contribution on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026. I talk to a lot of tradies and business owners in the Latrobe Valley as a former plumber, and I still talk to and catch up with the building fraternity. For a lot of plumbers, the red tape that they have to jump through these days to actually be allowed to employ somebody – it will be good to be able to stand up and talk on that. One of the things we do know, right around the state, is that our level of house builds is falling behind where it should be, and the availability of a great workforce starts with apprentices being able to move through TAFE and be educated for the four years. It does make it really hard. The completion rates are something that I would like to touch on also as we move through that bill. It is so much harder to get apprentices to our TAFEs, because normally they are young and do not have a licence and rely on public transport or mum and dad to be able to manoeuvre them around to jobs before they get their licences.

The Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026 is another one that is on the program. The Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026 is also up for debate, and the sixth and last one – this is how many bills we have to try and cram in in a sitting week – the Associations Incorporation Reform Amendment Bill 2026, will be a really interesting one. I am looking forward to the member for Mildura leading off on this, because there are a lot of issues within this bill, so to hear her articulate in her words where that sits will be very pleasing. As I said, we will be opposing the government business program this week.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (12:35): It gives me great pleasure to rise and contribute to the government business program debate, because we have a slew of very important legislation before the Parliament in this sitting week. I know we are coming back for an extra week, and as the member for Tarneit elucidated and spoke to quite well, that is actually part of our job. So although it is going to hit during my birthday and it will be the first time I have attended work on my birthday, having been a teacher and always had school holidays off, I do not mind being here, because we have got

important work to do, and the people of Victoria rely upon us to turn up and to pass the legislation that they need to ensure that Victoria is a safer and better place for people to live in. It is literally part of our job, so I have got no complaint about turning up. I will be looking forward to sharing the day with all my colleagues here.

There are six very important bills on the government business program this week, and many have addressed a number of them. There are a couple that I would like to go to in particular, and people probably will not be surprised that the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026 is one that I am looking forward to contributing on. I know that apprentices and trainees are often and overwhelmingly young and it is sometimes their first foray into working life, so ensuring that this more vulnerable cohort is better protected and taken care of is fundamentally important. They are our tradies of the future, and I think to give them the best start in their working life is really important. It is incumbent upon us to be able to legislate to ensure that occurs wherever possible.

In terms of schools, and schools as places that should be sanctuaries and safe, not just for students but for the staff within them, including the principals, the proposed amendments contained in this legislation I think are quite key to ensuring that we can help, because there has been a rise of awful behaviour directed towards teachers and principals. We have seen this insidious trend increasing, where they are subject to abuse. Sometimes it is verbal; sometimes it is physical. None of it is acceptable, and wherever we can we must ensure that the protections for them are easier for them to be able to work with. There is a scheme – and I am just looking through my notes; I have lost the name of the scheme at hand – that is there and designed for principals and other senior staff to be able to ensure that schools are protected from abusive parents or associated people coming to schools, and it needs strengthening. It needs bolstering, and that is what this legislation will do. It was reviewed. A statutory review was required. They have looked at it. Engage Victoria has taken on submissions from others who have opinions on this, and we now have a piece of legislation which is going to ensure that it is fit for purpose. I know several principals, deputy principals and senior teachers who have told me that over the years this has become a more concerning issue. No-one should go to work and be abused. We looked at legislation last week to ensure that we have retail workers and workers in transport as well being more protected in their workplace, and we need to ensure that educators have protections for themselves and for the students to ensure that schools are places of education not conflict.

There is other important legislation we are dealing with. In fact all of it is important, but another one that I seek to speak on this week is the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill 2026, and like the member for Tarneit and the member for Morwell as well spoke about, good character references should not form any part of someone's defence or mitigate what occurs there. If someone has been abusive, if someone has committed family violence, it should not matter that others may think that they are a good person outside of there. At the end of the day the damage they have done is what should be judged and assessed, and the sentencing should be appropriate there. In terms of coercive control, this is a huge step forward in calling this out and legislating on it. It is such an insidious form of family violence. This legislation goes to the heart of addressing that and ensuring that people can be safer, because family violence is a scourge, as has been described. The numbers are awful. They are appalling. Everything that we can do to try and reduce it is worthy. I commend the program to the house.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (12:41): I rise to speak on the government business program, which, as the Manager of Opposition Business has said, we are opposing. The reason we are opposing this program again is because of the shambles that this government is in. Once again we see a program in the house that demonstrates to Victorians how desperate this government are: desperate to look busy, desperate to look like they are legislating, desperate to look like they are helping Victorians when in actuality that is simply not the case.

We have had nine sitting weeks this year, nine weeks where we have been able to come into this place time and again to legislate on the important issues and things that are affecting everyday Victorians

every single day. They have had nine sitting weeks of opportunity to legislate and take action on crime, on cost of living and on youth crime in the wake of tragedies like the death of Van Viet Truong and people like Aidan Becker. There has been opportunity after opportunity to bring important legislation, as the government says, to this place. They have had this entire year. In fact they have had 12 years in government to be able to move important legislation. But here we are, with six days to go of Parliament, now adding another three – an additional week – simply because they have not got their act together. We are in a state of desperation because of this government, who saw fit to spend time in the chamber, wasting the Parliament's time, debating frivolous motions attacking the opposition.

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Speaker, I have given a minute for members to be relevant to the government business program or refer to the government business program –

A member interjected.

Anthony Carbines: Additional sitting weeks the Parliament has not even considered.

Annabelle Cleeland interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Euroa, I make the rulings. Member for Warrandyte, come back to the government business program.

Nicole WERNER: To the government business program at hand for this week, there are six bills that they are trying to smash through in the three days that we have this week and then another three days next sitting week. They are trying to get all of this urgent legislation through. What did they say? They said it is a 'jam-packed agenda'. Well, I can tell you, it has not been a jam-packed agenda this whole year. They have spent time debating motions and attacking the opposition frivolously. They have spent the Parliament's time attacking the opposition with motions that have nothing to do with legislation. That is what this government has done. They saw fit to spend taxpayers money and Parliament's time on debating frivolous –

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Speaker, saying it more loudly does not make it any more relevant. I would ask the member to come back to the government business program, which they have failed to do for 2½ minutes.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the House, I remind members of the correct way to raise a point of order. There is no requirement for commentary around a point of order. Member for Warrandyte, come back to the government business program.

Nicole WERNER: Can we look at the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill 2026. This bill proposes changes to Victoria's response to family violence and coercive control, including changes to risk assessment, protection for victim-survivors, good character requirements and fines relief. We know that with coercive control specifically this is incredibly important. We know on this side of the house that it is, nearly 100 per cent of the time, a precursor to domestic violence. In fact there is a very, very topical conversation around gender-based violence that is going on right now in the public domain, and rightly so. We understand how important an issue this is, so important in fact that we actually moved to introduce a private member's bill on this. We brought a bill to the house last year – that is how critical this is, coercive control and criminalising coercive control – and what did the Labor government do? They opposed it and they voted it down. When we looked to criminalise coercive control in this house, this government voted it down. This government opposed it. This government said no to that, and now they are bringing a version of – *(Time expired)*

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (51): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, 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, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (24): Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Anthony Marsh, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Otto Powell

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (12:51): It has been a big couple of weeks, but I would like to start by congratulating Otto Powell on completing the 2026 Victorian parliamentary internship program. I thank him for his hard work and valuable research into our road maintenance. Members should have a look at that because he has done some very good work there.

Deakin University Battery Research and Innovation Hub

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (12:52): I also want to mention a great visit to the Deakin University Battery Research and Innovation Hub, which is in our patch, to hear more about Sodium Batteries Australia. This is quite an interesting idea. I mean, it is not the first in the world, but this is something that we can have as an option here for some of our data centres that could potentially not use lithium batteries but use sodium batteries, which are less likely to catch fire. It might be something we all want to think about. Big thanks to Justin Begg and the team down there for showing me around and to Deakin University, who are doing great work with them.

Daffodil Day

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (12:52): We also celebrated Daffodil Day. We raised $1000 thanks to Ashburton Family Dental, which was good work.

Avila College

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (12:53): Lastly, I want to thank the good people down at Avila College for coming in today and having a great chat with me just before in Parliament. A special shout-out to Sophia McCann, Laura Savaglio and Timothy Weber for bringing them in. This is a fantastic school in my patch. The world is a very safe place with the young ladies at Avila College coming through.

Road maintenance

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (12:53): The potholes in Manningham are out of control. They have never been this bad. Our state roads have never been in such a poor condition. Why wouldn't they be when the state government is putting every cent it has got into the Suburban Rail Loop at the expense of road maintenance? Road maintenance has been cut under this government. As a consequence, Doncaster Road is in terrible condition, and Manningham Road and Templestowe Road are in poor condition. Recently on Newmans Road more than a dozen cars were damaged at night from a pothole that developed within 12 hours. Many people were left thousands of dollars worse off. But remember it was Labor's own upper house MP Sonja Terpstra, who I might add is a member for this area, who said the residents want these kinds of potholes. Never before have we seen a government so out of touch. We will see the public's anger and resentment at such an out-of-touch government come out at the November election.

Ben Duffy

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (12:54): I conclude by congratulating Ben Duffy, the 2026 Manningham Citizen of the Year, a great and inspirational young bloke who ran 52 marathons in 52 weeks, all to raise money for the Pat Cronin Foundation, for which he should be congratulated. The community thanked him and rewarded him as our citizen of the year.

Spirit of Anzac Prize

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (12:54): I rise today to celebrate many outstanding people and community organisations that continue to make Ballarat such a great place to live. Well done to Loreto student Bilyana Holloway, who has been named one of just 12 recipients of the 2026 Premier's Spirit of Anzac Prize. Wishing you all the best, Bily, for your upcoming study tour of Vietnam.

Eureka Gymnastics Club

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (12:55): Congratulations to Rahel and Daniel, co-presidents of the Eureka Gymnastics Club, and to the committee, the coaches, the judges and the volunteers on another successful annual invitational competition, held over the weekend. Well done to all the gymnasts who competed and to the families who support them every step of the way.

Frank Bourke Oval

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (12:55): I am proud that we have new, modern, accessible facilities at Frank Bourke Oval. As the home of the North Ballarat Football & Netball Club and the North Ballarat Cricket Club, this vital community asset will ensure people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds can participate in local sport and recreation.

Ballarat Scouts water activities centre

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (12:55): It was also a great pleasure to join with the Ballarat Scouting community to officially open the upgraded Ballarat Scouts water activities centre at Lake Wendouree. This facility will enable young people to develop water safety skills, confidence, teamwork and leadership.

Wendouree electorate office work experience students

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (12:56): A shout-out to Scarlett and Oli, who joined the Wendouree electorate office for work experience last week. We loved having you and hope you developed new insights into the important role of a local MP.

Ballarat's Best Pie competition

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (12:56): With August drawing to a close, get on the Ballarat pie trail. Do not miss out. Support local business.

Country Fire Authority Lakes Entrance and Metung stations

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (12:56): We have got another fire season approaching. We are on the cusp of it, and it looks like being a bad one, from all reports. There are a lot of things that we need to do better with the CFA, but Lakes Entrance and Metung fire brigades need new stations. We have the land; we know what sorts of stations are to be built. The government promised before the 2022 election that Lakes Entrance was imminent. Nothing has happened in four years. For goodness sake, can we just get on and build at least one of them?

Patient transport

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (12:57): I want to raise the issue also of the Victorian patient transport assistance scheme. I have raised this a number of times. The government have said time and time again they are going to fix the waitlists. They have not done that. The website says that payments will be made five days after approval. That is absolutely hopeless when approval is taking several months.

We have got outstanding claims going back to May. Can we get on, get that resourced and get those payments made imminently?

Bairnsdale hospital

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (12:57): The final point that I want to raise is about the Bairnsdale hospital petition. I launched that with our new candidate Gemma Rendell a few weeks ago. We have over 2000 signatures on that – 1400 online and over 800 in hard copy. We need that new hospital – the first stage is an ED to stop the ramping – to cater for current and future population demand. I encourage everybody in my electorate to get online and please sign that petition.

Member for Brighton

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham) (12:58): Recently a constituent of mine brought to my attention some extremely wasteful electorate office spending by the member for Brighton – expenditure that would not pass the pub test in either Sydenham or Brighton. This egocentric piece of self-promotion by the member for Brighton came not in one volume, not in two volumes but in three volumes of around 260 pages entitled 'Selected parliamentary speeches'. Everyone in this chamber knows a parliamentary speech is for free online. You do not need to print it and waste an estimated $120,000 on a look-at-me exercise – a waste of money so indicative of his arrogance. It is the same arrogance that we have seen in this chamber by the member for Brighton towards Labor women. He has called me, personally, unpleasant, nasty and a slug whilst I was giving an update on pads and tampons in this place. But this is not just behaviour towards Labor women. He has also done it to Liberal women. In fact there are Liberal women that have left the party, in particular 85-year-old Jan Cooper, who he filmed and harassed at the last election, and former Bayside mayor and long-time Liberal member Felicity Frederico, who was bullied in preselections. Integrity and respect are not high on that member's agenda.

Brendan Rowswell

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (12:59): Brendan James Rowswell, my twin brother, was born on 29 October 1985 at Sandringham Hospital to Leslie and Josephine. He died on Wednesday 22 July at Alfred hospital at the age of 40, having received dignified and expert clinical care. The Alfred nurses are indeed angels dressed in scrubs. Brendan grew up in Beaumaris. He was elected school captain at Stella Maris primary school. He went on to St Bede's College, where he sharpened his debating skills and fell in love with history and literature.

His Catholic faith, gifted to him by his parents, provided a foundation and framework for Brendan from an early age. He served at the altar, he attended four World Youth Days and in 2015 he was installed as a Knight of the Order of Malta. At the University of Melbourne Brendan studied politics and history, later returning to complete a master of public policy and management. His career was built on relationships and conviction. He was an adviser in the Howard government, then manager of public affairs of the Victorian Farmers Federation before rising to managing partner at CPR Communications & Public Relations, advising organisations like CSL, the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research and Headspace. Through his work with Dementia Australia he helped secure a $230 million federal funding boost for an insidious disease that affected both of our parents. The former CEO of that organisation Maree McCabe noted that Brendan's work positively impacted the lives of tens of thousands of Australians.

In 2010 he married Sara-Jane Bossard, and they had a son George. His second son Henry was born to Lucille Keen in 2024. Nothing mattered more to Bren than his boys. He became engaged to Georgia Nicholls in December 2025, and together they were forging a new way forward. He is with Dad now, probably sharing a Carlton Draught, catching up on lost time and preparing the way for both Mum and me. May he rest in peace.

West Tarneit train station

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (13:01): West Tarneit station will officially open on Sunday 13 September, delivering better access to public transport for local families and helping to ease pressure on nearby Tarneit station, which has more than 1500 car spaces – it is one of the largest station car parks anywhere in the network. West Tarneit station will feature a four-bay bus interchange and more than 1100 services added to the local Tarneit bus network, providing more frequent and convenient connections. But we are not stopping there. More nine-car VLocity trains will run during the morning and afternoon peaks, increasing capacity by 50 per cent and creating space for more than 12,000 additional passengers.

While we are encouraging commuters to use the improved bus network to access our stations, we know West Tarneit will also need more car parking as the area continues to grow. Land has been set aside for additional parking on the northern side of the station, but we need the necessary access roads delivered. That is why I am calling on council and developers to get on with building the access road off Davis Road and the extension of Modesto Drive so we can unlock the site and get this much-needed car park built. I am proud to be part of a government that is investing in essential infrastructure for Melbourne's west, not cutting it.

Oil and gas exploration

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (13:02): The laws to protect our oceans in Australia and Victoria are completely broken. Right now oil and gas companies can basically take whatever they want from drilling in our oceans, make billions shipping it overseas and pay next to no tax. Apparently when they are done, these same companies can just walk away from the toxic rubbish that they leave in the oceans and leave taxpayers to foot the bill. It is a giant legal loophole, and I would like to thank the Wilderness Society, who recently exposed this with a court case.

The Wilderness Society took Australia's offshore oil and gas regulator to court, arguing that our laws mean that companies should have to prove that they have put money aside for the clean-up once they close their oil and gas wells. But unfortunately they lost the case, because apparently Australia's laws are so weak that gas companies do not actually have a legal obligation to clean up the mess that they leave in our oceans. Now it is the Wilderness Society who is left to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars in court fees and the taxpayer who is often left to pay to clean up the mess that these companies leave in our oceans. What an absolute joke. Clearly we need urgent law reform in Australia. The amount of oil and gas rubbish in our oceans at the moment will cost $60 billion to clean up. The Greens in power would change the law to make fossil fuel companies wear this cost, not taxpayers. Labor, however, seem content with leaving the laws as they are and putting taxpayers and our wildlife at risk.

William Ricketts Sanctuary

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (13:04): It is wonderful to see the excitement surrounding the reopening of William Ricketts Sanctuary in Mount Dandenong. Many locals and visitors from near and far are thrilled to once again be able to experience this unique and much-loved place.

Monbulk Primary School

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (13:04): I had a wonderful visit with the prep students at Monbulk Primary School last week, who interviewed me about my role as an MP and my thoughts on life in Monbulk. Then they showed me their beautiful maps – and as a former geography teacher, I have to say they did a great job – and their future plans for their town. There are some budding town planners and visionaries in that room, I can tell you. Popular items at the top of the wish list were lolly shops, toy shops and a giant water slide that goes all around the town It sounds like a lot of fun to me.

Kokoda Day

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (13:04): I was honoured to attend the Kokoda Day service at One Tree Hill earlier this month, where we reflected on the courage, sacrifice and resilience of the

very young boys and men of the 39th Battalion who served along the Kokoda Track and those who never returned. It was a moving occasion and an important opportunity to ensure that their stories continue to be remembered. The primary school students of Belgrave South acquitted themselves beautifully in singing the national anthem, which they do every year.

Vietnam Veterans Day

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (13:05): I also attended the Vietnam Veterans Day service in Croydon, commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan. I know it is a particularly significant day for many of the veterans and their families across our hills community, which is home to six RSL sub-branches. It was a privilege to stand alongside them as we honoured their service and sacrifice. Lest we forget.

Government performance

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (13:05): Under the Labor government Victoria suffers the highest unemployment rate at 5.1 per cent, which is the highest unemployment rate in the country and higher than the Labor government forecast in their state budget handed down just a few months ago. What is really worrying is that youth unemployment in Victoria is now at 11.8 per cent. Under the Labor government Victoria has the highest youth unemployment rate in the country, higher than the Australian average of 10.7 per cent. Youth unemployment in Melbourne's west is the most troubling, currently at 15.6 per cent, closely followed by Melbourne's north-west at 14.1 per cent.

Behind all these statistics and percentages are young people that this Labor government is failing. Today around 74,000 young Victorians do not have a job. Labor has cooked the economy. State debt is a quarter of the economy, soaring to record levels. Taxation is the highest in the country, adding to the cost of living. Businesses are leaving the state. There are less jobs, and vocational education funding under this Labor government is the lowest in the country.

This comes at a time that youth crime is at record highs in Victoria, with youth offenders committing 48 per cent of aggravated burglaries, 62 per cent of robberies and 58 per cent of carjackings. Our young people deserve better than this. They deserve a strong economy that enables opportunities for them to fulfil their potential in education and in work. They deserve a government that works. Our young people deserve hope and to be valued, and that is exactly why I will keep fighting for a better future for them.

Broadmeadows electorate events

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (13:07): I had another wonderful week with community, celebrating Mawlid with Professor Dr Sheikh Salim Alwan OAM, respected religious leaders, the Muslim Welfare Trust and the Hararian Organization, and again tonight being hosted by Waqar, Samina, Abeer and Kaif and the hardworking team at Qadri House, Karachi Street Food, and Azhar and Sabin from Taxviser. Suraya Cultural Forum hosted a beautiful celebration of language and tradition through the sharing of poetry and deeply moving stories at St George Chaldean church in Campbellfield. I was honoured to cut the ribbon at the Fawkner Chemist Discount Centre celebrations in Bonwick Street, and I thank Ahmed, May, Dalia, Meena and all the pharmacists for the important work they do in community.

I attended incredible Onam celebrations with the Glenroy Residents Association for Malayalees and Glenroy secondary school last Sunday; with Father Gigi Mathew Vakathanam and the St Mary's Indian Orthodox community at St Matthews on Saturday; commemorating service, sacrifice and 60 years since the Battle of Long Tan at the Glenroy RSL last Sunday; blessed to visit Antonine College for the Feast of the Assumption with His Excellency Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay and Father Richard Jabbour and the member for Greenvale. I joined volunteers at Oak Park Pascoe Vale Neighbourhood Watch, and I thank them; the SES Fawkner unit and Fawkner and Hume Neighbourhood Watch, who run the free safer plate program; and I supported women's leadership

with the Australia New Zealand Lebanon Chamber of Commerce and Industry. I also take this opportunity to – (*Time expired*)

Ambulance services

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (13:08): My friend recently called 000 with uncontrollable bleeding and excruciating pain. There were no ambulances available in the entire Hume region, and she was told to call a taxi. Brian Mounsey called an ambulance for his 92-year-old mother-in-law Norma Walker in Kilmore, who suffered a fall and was bleeding from the head, and was told there were none available and to drive her himself. This is also the story of Lorraine Jones and Pamela Ellis and too many regional Victorians. This is the state of Victoria under the Carroll Labor government.

Victorians are desperate for a fresh start, and nowhere are Labor's failures more visible than in the state of our regional health services and ambulance stations. Locals in Benalla have seen ambulances parked out the front of our station but few know why: the garage doors are broken, so paramedics have to manually open and close the doors every single shift. This is a town of 14,000 people. It is clear evidence that regional Victoria is not getting its fair share. It is little wonder our region has some of the worst ambulance response times in the state, with barely a quarter turning out on time.

I asked to visit the station. The regional director opposed it, so I escalated it to the CEO of Ambulance Victoria. It was handed to their legal department, who rejected my visitation. I represent this community and I cannot get through the door. I am appalled at the politicisation of Victoria's public service, but I want to thank our paramedics who go above and beyond despite the lack of support from the Labor government. My promise to the community is that the Nationals will stop the waste and end the corruption.

Gendered violence

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (13:10): This week I had a call from a friend. She was distressed, and she was telling me about how she had a conversation with her 14-year-old daughter about doing self-defence classes together. I told her how I had had a similar conversation with my 24-year-old daughter. Why? Because nearly one in three women have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, and these stats are showing things are not improving. Only approximately 8 per cent of sexual assaults are reported by victim-survivors, and we must ask why. Look at recent events, where three teenage boys who were charged with sexual assault against a 14-year-old girl in Sydney were described as 'badly behaved boys' and are yet to be expelled from their elite private school, against uproar from the community. More recently, when sexual assault allegations were made against well-known sports stars the same familiar conversation was heard: players had 'found themselves' in this situation, positioning men in a sympathetic light, perpetuating the good old 'boys will be boys' narrative. Why in 2026 are we still having this conversation? Why are we asking women what they are wearing? Why is she drinking? Why has she gone to that hotel room? Why are we asking her to prove herself in the court of public opinion? Yet we are so willing to see men's actions as a mistake or poor judgement. A woman's choice of clothing, her occupation and her decision to enter a hotel room in the early hours of the morning do not forfeit her right – *(Time expired)*

Drouin traffic management

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (13:11): I want to talk today about the congestion in my local town of Drouin. It is no secret that I have brought this up time and time again in this chamber. I have sat down with the Treasurer and virtually pleaded with her to have infrastructure investment into Drouin to ease the congestion in the town. So I was very pleased last week when the Leader of the Nationals came to my electorate and we announced that we are going to build the Weebar Road roundabout with the significant investment of $3 million, something I have been asking the government to do for the last three years. Thankfully the people of Drouin will get this infrastructure, which they deserve, but it is disappointing that the government could not invest in this town. It would

have unlocked 2000 house lots if the government had done this sooner – 8 per cent of what they need to do in Baw Baw shire.

Gippsland housing

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (13:12): Also, I and the member for Morwell have attended two homeless forums – one in Traralgon and one in Warragul – over the last two weeks. It has been an absolute pleasure to be there listening to the community and not beating up the government about why we have so much homelessness but having constructive conversations about how to fix it. We are well above the state average in both of our electorates. The most disappointing part to this was that both times the government was invited, and the government did not show up. I think that shows a lack of respect for Narracan and Morwell.

Werribee electorate police resources

John LISTER (Werribee) (13:13): Whether it is driving the fire truck, working with our local paramedics and SES or giving our police the resources they need, community safety is my priority. When it comes to policing, people in the Werribee electorate are served by some of the most dedicated officers in the country, and the Labor government is backing them in with our force now the largest in Australia. In Wyndham there has been an 8 per cent increase in the number of general duties officers and dozens more division-wide officers based out of Werribee police complex. We have also supported more specialist units and programs to target key crime concerns, like our proactive policing team; our embedded youth outreach program, partnering youth workers with officers in key areas like shopping centres; and our youth crime taskforce. While there are more police on the beat in Wyndham, it is clear we need to go in a new direction on some of those critical issues facing our community, in particular crime.

We need more visibility and flexibility for our PSOs. We have extended the hours of PSOs at Werribee and Wyndham Vale train stations, with the new day shifts not only protecting commuters but also assisting police to apprehend offenders in nearby shopping areas, something I saw myself only a few weeks ago in Comben Drive. We have also got PSOs and police officers patrolling Werribee plaza, and I welcome the announcement that we are extending. Every time I visit our police station I see dozens of sworn officers completing admin duties. This is why the government backs the Chief Commissioner of Police in his plan to get police out from behind desks and onto the road. I welcome the announcement that the chief will be rolling out reservists from 7 September to the Werribee police complex. Across this program it means around 16,000 policing hours have been relieved.

Prahran electorate housing

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (13:14): Recently I joined residents of the Horace Petty estate in South Yarra, my very special public housing estate, to host a barbecue. I would like to make a special mention to Ana Rufatt-Ruiz, a long-term resident of my estate and tenant representative, who assisted me in putting this barbecue on. We had a community room full of my local constituents. Across the Prahran electorate we have seven public housing towers, but they are now all slated for retirement or redevelopment. I have got 1 Surrey Road, 2 Simmons Street, 259 Malvern Road in South Yarra, 25 and 27 King Street, 150 Inkerman Street in St Kilda and 49 Union Street. But for many of the residents that are living here, particularly those that are over the age of 55, the prospect of moving is deeply distressing. Many of these people are vulnerable. They are really happy in their homes and they simply do not want to move. They do not want to move, and they have not been given transparency from this government to explain to them the reasons why, their right to return or where they will go in the interim. I have worked with these communities. These are my communities and I absolutely adore them. I will stand by them. I am absolutely appalled by the fact that Labor and the Greens say they represent the most vulnerable in the community. My community is hurting. They need a voice and they need to have people listen to them. They do not want to move, and I will back them.

Mernda Central College

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (13:16): Congratulations to the students and staff at Mernda Central College on their fantastic production of *Alice in Wonderland Jr*. They did a clever job bringing Wonderland to life, and you could see how much work, confidence and creativity had gone into the performance.

Mernda swimming pool

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (13:16): There is another Alice in Wonderland story playing out in Mernda. In Wonderland Alice eats something and grows bigger. She drinks something and grows smaller. Seven years ago Mernda was looking at a 50-metre pool for around $60 million. Today the price has grown to $85 million, while the pool has shrunk to 25 metres. But after all these years the community just want to see the pool centre built. The Victorian government has already committed $30 million to the precinct, including $10 million specifically for the pool. That $10 million is in line with what the state contributes to other councils for pools elsewhere, and other councils managed to bring their projects together with support from different levels of government. Yet council now says this pool will only proceed if external government funds at least half the cost. So after seven years the project is more expensive and reduced in scope, and there is still no certainty it will actually be built. Even the Mad Hatter would have difficulty understanding that. Mernda has waited long enough. We want our pool.

Lindiwe Londeka

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (13:17): I was pleased to recently attend and speak at the book launch of Lindiwe Londeka, who is an incredible advocate for our African diaspora in the outer south-east, via AFMVICCARE. Lindi's book is titled *There is Hope for the Tree*, and it tells the story of her own journey and her remarkable life of service and support to the community but guided by her Christian faith. It really is a beautiful book. I have been lucky to know Lindi throughout my time as the member for Narre Warren South and was honoured to be there to celebrate that accomplishment with her. She has worked hard as a coordinator at AFMVICCARE, a not-for-profit-based organisation that is highly valued for its role in supporting our South Sudanese migrants throughout my area and surrounds. The organisation has support programs that span from homework clubs through to sport clubs, with a focus on keeping kids and young people engaged in school. She has led women's sewing classes; as I said, homework clubs; culturally appropriate mental awareness programs for mothers and children; and during the pandemic she played a crucial role supporting food support to the elderly at that time. It was fantastic to join her and all of her many supporters in the community. I am so grateful for the contribution she makes and the commitment of these clubs and individuals, as they change people's lives every day.

Country Women's Association of Victoria

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (13:19): Every year for 91 years the creative arts committee of the Country Women's Association of Victoria has held the *State Creative Arts Exhibition*, and this year it was held in Geelong at the Geelong West town hall. I was delighted to be invited to the official opening on Friday and to also attend the afternoon tea. It was a great opportunity to meet the state president Ms Marie Vassallo and other Victorian CWA members from across Victoria. Many of the CWA members and their friends and family came to Geelong for the two days of the exhibition, enjoying the hospitality of our beautiful city, including Pakington Street. The many items on exhibit showed the extraordinary talent of CWA members and included embroidery, knitting, crochet, patchwork, quilting, art, photography, preserves, cookery, toys, dolls and many other handmade crafts.

Geelong electorate housing

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (13:20): Also last week I joined the Minister for Housing, Building and Precincts to officially open the Thomson housing project. Eighteen walk-up apartments that were built in the 1950s have been replaced with 54 brand new social homes, with a mix of one-, two- and

three-bedroom apartments. Five per cent of those apartments are Disability Discrimination Act 1992 accessible units. This new housing is surrounded by single residential houses, near Tate Street Primary School and has great access to public transport and amenities. We then moved on to the Myers Street housing development, which includes 117 apartments.

Cranbourne electorate community

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (13:20): I had a terrific weekend. It started on Friday night at the Amazing Grace, and I am going to take the opportunity to thank Adam Sadiqzai and his family for the extraordinary hospitality that they extend. It was a great day hitting the doors on Saturday, talking to people about free dental for all Victorians. Then on Saturday night I attended the Cranbourne CFA dinner. I would like to congratulate our captain Deb Jackson, the first woman to lead our terrific team, and her extraordinary crew of volunteers. I am so proud of the people who make up our local CFA, and I feel particularly grateful to them for putting their lives and their time on the line. I am always happy to spend time with other emergency services, so this is an opportunity to say a great thanks to the Cranbourne SES unit. It is always good to spend time with them. Thanks to the Amstel Club for hosting – club of the year, they were, and they are not far from my place. The hospitality was amazing and, as always, the food was sublime. We are such a strong community in Cranbourne. Our emergency services and our clubs are what make us strong.

Bills

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

Council's amendments

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Part heading preceding clause 7, omit this heading.
2. Clause 7, omit this clause.
3. Clause 8, omit this clause.
4. Clause 9, omit this clause.
5. Clause 10, omit this clause.

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) (13:22): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

In making some brief comments on the amendments from the Legislative Council, the government supported these amendments in the other place, albeit somewhat reluctantly. The intent of the provisions the amendments remove was to clarify Racing Victoria's existing powers and functions as the thoroughbred regulator in this state. The government saw nothing particularly controversial in that. These are powers RV exercises on a daily basis and has done so since its establishment some quarter of a century ago. But to secure the other important reforms in the bill we have agreed that more work needs to be done on the governance arrangements for the thoroughbred racing industry. That is a much more significant piece of work than we are able to deal with here, and that is why we have agreed to these amendments. We will now go away and seek further advice from the racing integrity commissioner and others on these matters. But in order to secure the important governance and integrity reforms that the government always considered to be the substantive purpose of the legislation we somewhat reluctantly agreed to the amendments passed in the other place, and I commend them to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (13:23): I will just speak briefly, as the shadow minister is in Porepunkah for the commemoration of the first anniversary, as you would expect him to be. I understand these amendments initially came from the member for Gippsland East as the then Shadow

Minister for Racing, and we therefore will support them. The shadow minister now has worked through these amendments, which were originally, as I am advised, developed by the member for Gippsland East. On that basis, as they are amendments initiated by the coalition, we will support them.

Motion agreed to.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house's decision.

Corrections Amendment Bill 2026

Council's amendments

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 1, line 5, after "considerations" insert "and to further provide for persons detained in police gaols".
2. Clause 1, line 5, after "considerations" insert ", to provide for a review of the operation of certain amendments to that Act".
3. Clause 2, page 2, line 1, after "of this Act" insert ", other than sections 5AAA, 5AAB and 5AAC,".
4. Clause 2, page 2, after line 3 insert –

   "(3) Sections 5AAA, 5AAB and 5AAC come into operation on 8 September 2027.".
5. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 5 –

   '**5AA New section 111AB inserted**

   After section 111A of the **Corrections Act 1986 insert** –

   "**111AB Review of certain amendments**

   (1) The Minister must cause a review to be conducted of the operation of the amendments made to this Act by the **Corrections Amendment Act 2026** (other than section 5A of that Act).

   (2) The review must be commenced no later than 3 years after the day after the day on which the **Corrections Amendment Act 2026** receives the Royal Assent.

   (3) The review must be completed no later than 6 months after it commences.

   (4) The Minister must cause a report of the review to be laid before each House of the Parliament no later than 14 sitting days after receiving it.".'.
6. Insert the following new Clauses to follow clause 5 –

   '**5AAA Police gaols**

   In section 11(3) of the **Corrections Act 1986** –

   (a) for "The" **substitute** "Other than in circumstances of extraordinary emergency, the";

   (b) for "(if any)" **substitute** "(not exceeding 14 days)".

   5AAB General power to authorise transfers of detained persons

   After section 104DF(2) of the **Corrections Act 1986 insert** –

   "(3) In determining the maximum period for which a person transferred from a police gaol to another police gaol under this section may be held in the police gaol, any period that the person was held in a police gaol prior to the transfer must be included.

   Note

   See also section 11.

   5AAC New section 133 inserted

   At the end of Part 11 of the **Corrections Act 1986 insert** –

   "**133 Transitional – Corrections Amendment Act 2026**

   Section 104DF(3) applies, on and after its commencement, in relation to a detained person whether they became a detained person before, on or after that commencement.".'.

7. Clause 6, lines 12 and 13, omit "the first anniversary of the day on which it receives the Royal Assent" and insert "8 September 2028".
8. Long title, after "considerations" insert "and to further provide for persons detained in police gaols".
9. Long title, after "considerations" insert ", to provide for a review of the operation of certain amendments to that Act".

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Victim Support, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Community Sport) (13:24): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

The government is supportive of the amendment brought forward by Legalise Cannabis Victoria in the other place for a three-year statutory review of the reforms introduced. The government is aware of the time-sensitive nature of the bill in light of the Supreme Court of Victoria's recent decision. However, we also acknowledge the engagement from various stakeholders in the sector. As such, the government believes a three-year statutory review is sensible to ensure that these reforms are operating as they are intended.

The government is also supportive of the amendment brought by the Greens in the other place. This will ensure there is a consistent maximum amount of time a person can be held in police jails: 14 days. To ensure government has sufficient time to implement these operational changes, the government introduced an amendment for this to come into effect in 12 months time, from 8 September 2027.

I just want to say thank you to those across the Parliament, including the shadow minister, and stakeholders in the sector who have contributed to and engaged on this bill. The government supports the amendments.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (13:25): As the minister said, work was done across the chamber in relation to these amendments, and again we will not be opposing them.

Motion agreed to.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house's decision.

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.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (13:26): I am pleased to rise and speak on the Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026. I am glad to make it in time; my son was admitted as a lawyer today, so it was very exciting to be down at the Supreme Court getting photos with the family and doing what proud dads and family members do. But I am back here in time to speak on a very important matter, and that is the local government legislation amendment bill.

This bill has been billed as the biggest local government reform since 2024. It amends the Local Government Act 2020 and the City of Melbourne Act 2001 to do three things: to implement the outstanding integrity recommendations from IBAC's Operation Sandon and the Whittlesea commission of inquiry, to create a local government fair jobs code and a new regulator to police CEO compliance with it and to lift the permitted differential rating ratio for the City of Melbourne so it can rate vacant and underutilised land more heavily. The governance changes are largely uncontroversial. It creates extended power to declare the offices of the mayor and deputy mayor vacant; fixes the councillor standdown framework; and creates mandatory leave for councillors contesting state elections, mandatory model governance rules, a new statutory framework for CEO employment and

remuneration, tighter conflict-of-interest reporting to the chief municipal inspector and annual reporting by the principal councillor conduct registrar.

The opposition's objection is that much of the bill will only be operational later, by ministerial regulation, and of course we have not seen what that ministerial regulation will be. So a lot of that is going unchecked, and with the importance of this particular bill, we are still relying very heavily on what the minister may or may not do with it. We have seen good form – or bad form – by the previous minister, the member for Bentleigh, who I think has had, under his watch, up to five councils be dismissed, placed in administration and put under suspension. I do not suggest that that was right or wrong, but they have certainly been very, very busy. It is important to ensure we get this stuff right, so that is why the regulation, in terms of what we are looking at today, is very, very important.

The other thing is that the fair jobs code, in particular, is a cost of living for ratepayers that could force contracted services such as waste and leisure back in-house and open the door for weakening rate capping. We know just how important cost of living is to many ratepayers. You hear it all the time. You hear many complaints about issues like the amount of taxes. We have had 70 new taxes under the Andrews, Allan and now Carroll government in 12 years. That is 70 new taxes. And then on top of that you have got issues in terms of rates that have continued to increase, albeit now they have been capped, and then other fees and charges all along the way. So when there is potentially an issue with opening the door for more cost-of-living pressures, then of course we are very concerned about that, and I will be introducing some amendments very shortly. I will make a point of this and talk a bit about this later, but one of the announcements that we have made is weekly waste collection to ensure that people can have their bins collected weekly. I know that is a big issue, certainly in my area of Glen Eira and many other electorates that are having their waste collected fortnightly. That has been certainly welcomed by many residents.

The report also argues that the standdown fix should be retrospective to the start of the current council term, since as drafted it does nothing about vexatious or private prosecutions that are already afoot. I will go into that. The government has agreed to some amendments on the vexatious claims, which we welcome, but I must say that it was our suggestion to do that, and I am pleased that the government has at least taken some of our amendments on board. Which brings me to wanting to commend the member in the upper house and our Shadow Minister for Local Government Mrs McArthur, who has been so diligent in contacting councils and stakeholders to ensure their voices have been heard. We know that is not very much symbolic of this government. In fact we have seen many residents, we have seen stakeholders and we have seen councils that have been completely gagged and silenced. You only have to look at these activity centres that this government is imposing on local councils without any voice for local councils. This government is a government that claims to be consulting. They do not consult even with their own, and that is why we have seen three premiers in 12 months, or a couple of years anyway. It is a revolving door of premiers. It is a backbench that does not trust the frontbench. It is a divided government and a government that does not consult with local councils, so is it any wonder that many councils do not trust this government? That is why, when we have this bill before the house, it does not surprise me when this government has done little consultation. However, Mrs McArthur has done the government's job for them – no surprise again. The opposition is doing the work for the government yet again.

I will draw the house's attention to a letter that was drafted to the current Minister for Local Government. I do not know how many ministers for local government we have had in a few years. I think there have been about seven ministers for local government. Again, it simply shows that this government does not care or is absolutely incompetent – either one. They do not care or they are incompetent. Who knows?

Juliana Addison interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: Six, seven. Who knows? But what we do know is that this is a government that is absolutely incompetent. So we thought on our side that Mrs McArthur in the other house, the

Shadow Minister for Local Government, would help out the government. We wrote to the current Minister for Local Government. This letter was urging the government to fix the flaws in the local government legislation that is before us, and it certainly said that there are significant concerns about several aspects of the bill, particularly in relation to the local government fair jobs code and regulator, mandatory model governance rules and new CEO employment requirements. The government is asking Parliament, which is us, to establish a legislative framework before supporting the regulations that have been developed, which I mentioned earlier, or publicly released. It is also suggesting that that has not been consulted upon. I think this is very important, member for Wendouree, to get this into *Hansard*, because this letter is very, very important:

> That is simply unacceptable, especially when the Local Government Fair Jobs Code, a union-designed intervention –

underline the word 'union'; more cost, more waste –

> could severely limit contracting, labour hire –

flexible working arrangements –

> … drive up costs for councils and harming small businesses.
>
> Stakeholders have also raised that the Bill mandates CEO reporting of every councillor conflict of interest allegation with no guidance for handling vexatious or baseless reports, that its stand-down trigger applies prospectively only and so does nothing to prevent further vexatious private prosecutions before royal assent …

On the vexatious thing, I acknowledge that the government have taken that up in their amendment, or I believe they will. We will wait and see, but we are informed that at least part of this letter was accepted in terms of the vexatious reports. So when people listening to this report say the opposition do not know what they are doing, clearly we do know, because we have written to the government with a series of suggestions, and when it comes to vexatious claims the government has listened to the opposition.

The final one, 'council premises', is left undefined, creating legal uncertainty for the candidate leave and standdown provisions if they are running for election. On this point, under standing orders, I wish to advise the house of amendments to this bill and request that they be circulated. We will be moving those amendments forthwith. The reason that I do this at this point in time is because in the letter we gave notice to the government that we would be moving these amendments. Again a hardworking Shadow Minister for Local Government has done the homework and given information up-front to give the government the opportunity to come on board in a bipartisan way.

The member for Point Cook is smiling because he knows that is the right thing to do in a bipartisan way – to get on board, to ensure we strengthen local government – because that is what we should be doing in this house. We should be working hard to ensure that all tiers of government are working hard and being strengthened. I see the member for Point Cook has moved into his chair or out of his chair. He might want to take a point of order, but surely not because he is all about the bill, the member for Point Cook. There are our suggestions and our amendments –

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: Deputy Speaker, clearly the member for Point Cook is a fan, but I cannot even hear myself with the member for Point Cook cheering me on. I am delighted, but I do want to be able to at least hear my own voice.

Our bill keeps without amendment the provisions of the government's bill which are broadly supported by the sector. But these are the amendments we are talking about: the process for declaring the office of the mayor and deputy mayor vacant, which improves accountability while preserving procedural fairness for the office-holder; and technical corrections to the standdown framework relating to mandatory training and allowances for the prosecution of council decisions made during

councillor absence, ensuring councillors are not unfairly disadvantaged through no fault of their own, and that is strengthening the process, which is a good thing. I would have thought that the government would have said it was on board with that. The third one is the continuity arrangements for arbitrators and conduct panel members whose appointments expire mid proceeding, which prevents matters having to recommence and avoids unnecessary delay and cost. This is a cost-of-living measure because, if you stand somebody down midway through their term and then you start again, it is just another cost to reappoint. Why not just extend the term to ensure that they do their work to the end of the proceeding rather than stopping mid proceeding? The annual reporting requirement for the principal councillor conduct registrar improves transparency in Victoria's current councillor framework.

Where the bill differs is it does fix the problems in this sector and some of the issues which we want to talk about now in particular – which we would hope the government would be considering getting on board with – around the local government fair jobs code and regulator, mandatory model governance rules, CEO employment framework and proposed ministerial power to direct a council's internal dispute resolution process, ensuring that no associate regulations are created without evidence or justification. It is ensuring that we have got that framework there. Again, we are not unduly pushing cost-of-living exercises on some of these, particularly when it comes to the fair jobs code.

It confines the automatic standdown of councillors to matters commenced by a law enforcement agency and retrospectively removes private prosecutions as the trigger so no councillor is stood down, which the government has taken up. It requires councillors nominating for Parliament to take unpaid candidate leave from the day after their Victorian Electoral Commission nomination until 6 o'clock on election day rather than ending on the day the election result is declared, providing a clear end point instead of an open-ended period which can extend well beyond polling day, and many of us know what that is like.

It strengthens conflict-of-interest obligations while making CEOs reportable on apparent council breach to the chief municipal inspector; it provides for discretionary upholding of integrity without drawing council administrations into political disputes or requiring mandatory reporting of trivial, vexatious allegations; and it limits the scope of council premises by excluding private or personal attendance at council premises from the new offence provision so councillors cannot inadvertently be caught up in the offence while stood down on candidate leave.

We did ask for a number of those to be supported, and as I said earlier, the current Minister for Local Government did support the vexatious claims. We would hope that throughout the debate that we have today the government considers these other amendments that we are proposing and gets on board in a bipartisan way to strengthen this act. This is a significant change. It is one of the most significant changes that we have seen in local government. We have seen far too many issues which have been caught up in IBAC. We have got to get transparency. We have got to get accountability. We cannot see corruption happening at any level of government. We see it far too often, which we are dealing with at a state level, and we need to ensure we deal with it at a local level as well. I know IBAC has been kept very, very busy, and we are about to have another royal commission dealing with corruption on the Big Build. We continually see governments being caught with their hands in the cookie jar, so whatever we can do to strengthen that transparency and accountability is very, very important at local government –

Juliana Addison interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: The member for Wendouree continues to interject, but this stuff is very important and most people would agree with that. That is why we have done the homework, and we would hope that that certainly does happen.

I will just go through some of the changes in some of those provisions, particularly with some of the Melbourne City Council differential rates. This is an important area. The City of Melbourne has long

sought stronger powers to address vacant derelict buildings, arguing its rating powers under the City of Melbourne Act 2001 are more limited than other councils. Under the principal act, the former Cancer Council building in Carlton, which has been vacant for over a decade and is plagued by graffiti, vandalism and neglect, is a key example: a building sitting there for over 10 years, not being sold, not being turned into housing, no uplift, nothing. The amendment would allow the city to apply a differential rate specified in land categories to pressure owners to redevelop or activate vacant land sites rather than to raise revenue.

I think it is important to say that we do need to look at some triggers in terms of what we can do to get housing going in the state, particularly in our Melbourne CBD. I think we are at a point now where there are about 8000 homes that have been built that have never been lived in. To build those homes right now would be a lot more expensive. Some of the differentials in the new tax codes, particularly for off-the-plan, means that these homes were built prior to off-the-plan tax concessions, which makes them more expensive in some respects than some of the off-the-plan stuff that is being sold now. So we have an issue where you have got not enough homes being built and we do not have enough activation because it is too costly to get high-rise built in our capital city zones. We are not seeing the projects being ticked off. That is certainly being said – do not take my word for it, talk to any of the Property Council sectors and they will tell you. Talk to the Grattan Institute and they will tell you that these numbers simply do not stack up. I know that the government have got a plan to build high-rises everywhere they possibly can. It is very interesting because we are talking about a local government legislation bill here today, while at the same time, running parallel, this government are doing everything humanly possible to rip every power off council, to the point where I am surprised that they have not, in this legislation before us, tried to legislate to sack all of the councils and do all the work themselves from Spring Street. Certainly planning is all being done from Spring Street. So there will be no local involvement, there will be no local voice and there will be no third-party objections; it will literally be the government's way or the highway. That is what the government has been doing in terms of some of the planning changes.

Here is a classic example, where the Melbourne City Council has been asking for some more powers. Granted, that is being done here in this bill, but I think it should be consistent right across the board and especially when we talk about community, because we all come here to represent constituencies and we all come here to ensure that we can take up the fight for our electorates. Whether you are a councillor or an elected member of Parliament, you have a constituency, and those constituencies elect you to go out there and do the right thing. Councils have that, and I have spoken to lots of councillors and council officers that just cannot believe the fact that one of the most significant things in their role is planning, and they cannot consult on basic structure plans, on what is being built in their cities. It is just appalling that the government would do that and take away residents' rights. To think that people could wake up literally tomorrow and in their backyard have six storeys built, as of right, with no objection, if they live near an activity centre. They are not activity centres, they are high-rise, skyscraper centres. People's rights have been gagged, been silenced.

We know this stuff does not work. We know that in many cases they are not being built. There will be no consistency. There is no proper planning for all of this. We even know that the Suburban Rail Loop does not stack up. That was meant to be a transport project, which then was converted to a housing project with value capture. Now we are hearing that there is $11 billion which is meant to be captured through housing – again, no say from councils about how that works. We know that the government wants you to believe that they are going to strip $2 billion off a project that was costed five years ago at $34 billion. It is more like $50 billion. These numbers do not stack up. That is why it is really important to involve councils and consult with councils.

The waste stuff, with cost of living, I want to briefly touch on before I give others the opportunity to speak on this bill. I do think that is really important, because communities elect councillors to do the job of looking after some basic services. Council is very much the closest thing to many voters, because it is very much embedded in the community. The key elements that people expect from

councils are for their rubbish to be picked up and their roads and their parks to be maintained. They are the things that are the core responsibilities for councils. We do not want councils going out there and flying Palestinian flags and having 'free Palestine' activities or going on international delegations, doing trips around the world and running trade offices. We do not want that, but we want their core business to work. That is very much a cost-of-living thing, to ensure that we have rate capping and we have sensible management of council budgets.

I want to give a special shout-out to the Leader of the Opposition, who has very much taken that into account with the weekly collection of waste – absolutely imperative. I know that in Glen Eira, in Brighton and in Malvern – the two members that are here today – having fortnightly collection is just not workable. You have parents of big families that are running around doing the night run, trying to see where they can literally shovel waste into other people's bins because their bins are full. Under a Jess Wilson Liberal government we will have regular weekly waste collection, and that is something that councils should be doing and really leaning into and that we will be making sure we help councils to do. I think if you survey anybody, any residents, and you say, 'What's the job of council?', the job of council first and foremost is to pick up our rubbish. When they are not doing that, then they feel like, what are their rates for? That is something that we will help councils out with; we will make sure that we get regular weekly collection of rubbish. We will ensure that we have a council and community voice when it comes to planning, and we will make sure there is money there to fix local roads, because people are sick of the potholes. They are sick of them.

This government have not done their fair share of fixing potholes, and that is why we have announced $5 billion to fill and fix 1 million potholes. These are really, really important; they are basic. It is rubbish, it is potholes and it is crime. This is taking care of the basics, because this government has neglected them. That is what people will get in November, in 92 or thereabouts days. They will get a government that cares, that thinks about them, that consults and that gets involved in community.

That is why I hope that this government has the good fortitude to look at the amendments that we are putting forward today and to support our amendments. If the government support our amendments, we can work together in a bipartisan way to strengthen council. If they will not support the amendments, unfortunately we cannot support their bill.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka – Minister for Rural and Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Water) (13:50): Under standing orders I wish to advise the house of amendments to this bill and request that they be circulated. These amendments are simple, sensible and necessary. They are about protecting councils from avoidable disruption, making sure that private prosecutions cannot be used to throw council governance into turmoil. The house amendments will address the consequences of private prosecutions by providing that the automatic standdown provisions in section 229(1) will only apply to proceedings for offences commenced by or on behalf of a law enforcement agency and will clarify that a councillor is not to be taken as absent from a council meeting while they are stood down. To address the risk of private prosecutions being brought by individuals before the reforms can come into operation, the amendments will provide for their retrospective application. These house amendments are practical, proportionate and necessary. They close a loophole, they reduce disruption and they strengthen the operation of law.

Anthony MARSH (Nepean) (13:52): I am pleased to speak on the bill today. Having spent five years in local government, including three terms as the mayor of the Mornington Peninsula shire, I have seen firsthand what good local government can do but also the serious problems with Victoria's local government integrity system. There are reforms in this bill stemming from genuine issues identified through Operation Sandon and the Whittlesea commission of inquiry and sensible measures to address the loopholes exposed recently at Hepburn. We support genuine measures to improve transparency, integrity and accountability but have serious concerns with significant parts of this bill. If the Labor government wants to talk about integrity in local government, then it is time to talk about the integrity of the system Labor has created to police it and whether that system itself is independent,

transparent and accountable. This bill also gives greater power to ministers, regulators and government-appointed officials.

My concern about giving Labor ministers more power to intervene in democratically elected councils is not theoretical. Anyone wondering why just needs to take a look at Kingston. Last year the then Minister for Local Government the member for Bentleigh met with Kingston's mayor and Kingston's CEO. It was later alleged that he threatened the council with monitors unless it stopped pursuing a sensitive community grants issue involving a Labor-aligned councillor. Four months after that meeting, monitors were indeed appointed. As reported, the matter has rightly been referred to IBAC.

In less than a year those monitors, John Tanner and John Watson, have cost Kingston ratepayers almost a quarter of a million dollars. Just last month it was reported that Mr Tanner invoiced $2750 for work supposedly done on 30 and 31 February. There is just one problem: those days do not exist. Mr Tanner was also paid $1375 for work supposedly done more than six months before he was ever appointed, while Mr Watson reportedly submitted monthly invoices with total hours but no specific dates. These are government-appointed monitors paid to scrutinise council governance, yet they lack the very accountability they seek to enforce.

Compounding those concerns, monitors at both Kingston and Mornington Peninsula have repeatedly refused to put important views in writing. Monitors can spend months forming views and expressing views without putting them in writing to the people they affect. They may keep their own notes, but that gives councillors and officers no opportunity to challenge those views at the time they are made. If monitors form serious views about elected councillors, senior officers or council governance, those views should be documented and put to those affected in real time. If there is a problem, deal with it, rather than waiting six to 12 months to reveal in a final report what is then too late to challenge or address. Otherwise monitors retain enormous freedom to construct a narrative later, with little contemporaneous record against which to test it, and when those monitors are appointed by and report to a Labor minister, it leaves the door open to a narrative that suits the government of the day.

An integrity system should not allow history to be rewritten retrospectively, it should leave an audit trail. There is an extraordinary irony at Kingston: the one thing the monitors did put in writing was a confidential procedural fairness letter containing proposed adverse findings. And what did the metadata reveal? It showed that MinterEllison was involved in creating or editing that document. MinterEllison was also acting for the member for Bentleigh in his capacity as minister in litigation over his local government intervention powers. Curiously, the adverse letters were directed at non-Labor-aligned councillors and the mayor, who refused to do Labor's bidding. These monitors are supposed to be independent, so why was a law firm acting for the minister involved in their adverse findings at all?

When a minister is accused of threatening councils with monitors, monitors are then subsequently appointed and the law firm acting for the minister appears in supposedly independent monitor correspondence, this Parliament is entitled to question the independence of that process. Kingston is not the only reason to question the former minister's use of these powers. Just look at Whittlesea. The member for Bentleigh recommended the suspension of the then mayor Aidan McLindon for six months, based on a report from municipal monitors. This year the Supreme Court found the suspension was invalid, because the monitors had denied Mr McLindon procedural fairness, rendering the report invalid and leaving no legal basis for the minister to suspend him. So before Labor asks this Parliament to shift even more power away from elected councillors and towards ministers, regulators and government-appointed officials, perhaps it should explain why Victorians should have confidence in the powers that they already have.

I have experienced this system firsthand as mayor of the Mornington Peninsula shire, when Prue Digby and Rebecca McKenzie were appointed as monitors. Several councillors and council officers have told me they have no confidence in the monitors' impartiality. Some believe the monitors arrived with a preconceived view of the problems and have spent their time looking for evidence to support

it. Others believe they are there to manufacture a problem to justify their own appointment. Perhaps most concerning, though, is their selective inaction. The terms of reference cover councillor disputes, council–staff relationships, CEO arrangements and serious health and safety concerns, yet serious conduct issues continue in plain sight, complaints are made and arbitrations continue.

This bill seeks greater transparency in the councillor conduct panel system, and Mornington Peninsula shire shows exactly why that is needed. A serious misconduct proceeding involving allegations about a councillor's behaviour towards other councillors and shire officers is now in its 16th month and remains unresolved. The chair of the councillor conduct panel is Jo-Anne Mazzeo, and the proceeding raises serious questions about procedural fairness and transparency. There have been long periods with virtually no substantive communication while procedural demands continue. There are transcripts of what occurred in the many hearings, yet at the eleventh hour the proceeding appears to have taken a sharply different direction. Concerns about the disconnect have not been addressed in writing, and all indications are that this will now be all but dismissed. Is serious councillor conduct being swept under the rug because it does not suit the political narrative?

These integrity processes demand accountability from councillors while refusing to provide the same accountability themselves. Accountability cannot operate in one direction. Ms Mazzeo's conduct panel appointment expired before the proceedings were finished, yet she moved on to other Labor government appointments as a municipal monitor for Wyndham and has since been reappointed to the Northern Health board. The proceedings remain unresolved while appointments keep coming. Serious conduct and workplace issues continue at the Mornington Peninsula, yet I am told the monitors have focused on matters as trivial as where the mayor sits relative to the CEO during briefings. The lead monitor Prue Digby even dialled in to a formal council meeting from overseas and disrupted proceedings because of connection problems. Ratepayers are entitled to ask what exactly they are paying for. Why do these monitors appear so reluctant to confront serious conduct issues happening in plain sight? Is it because those issues do not fit the narrative of the Labor government who appointed them? Independence is not established by putting the word 'independent' in someone's title; it is demonstrated by whether inconvenient issues are pursued with the same enthusiasm as convenient ones. If the process cannot demonstrate its independence, transparency and procedural fairness, how can anyone have confidence in the report it ultimately produces? A report is only as credible as the process that produces it.

There are broader questions about appointments. Prue Digby has monitored Frankston, South Gippsland, Greater Geelong, Moonee Valley and now Mornington Peninsula. She chaired the Whittlesea commission of inquiry last year and was appointed to the Melbourne Water board. Rebecca McKenzie spent almost a decade as the CEO of Glen Eira, which overlaps the member for Bentleigh's electorate, and is a good friend of the former minister. She was appointed by him as a municipal monitor at Mornington Peninsula before later appointments at Hobsons Bay and on councillor conduct panels. I have already outlined Jo-Anne Mazzeo's appointments. Victoria has 7 million people, yet under Labor the same names keep coming out of the hat on boards, panels, inquiries and monitor appointment after appointment. There is nothing wrong with experienced people serving the public, but when the same small circle keeps appearing across taxpayer-funded roles, Victorians are entitled to ask: is this an independent –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The time has come to interrupt business for question time.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

The SPEAKER: I acknowledge in the gallery the Honourable Wade Noonan, a former minister and former member for Williamstown.

Members

Minister for Police

Absence

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:01): I wish to advise the house that for the purposes of question time today the Minister for Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy will take questions for the Minister for Police and Minister for Crime Prevention and the Minister for Public Transport will answer questions for the portfolios of emergency services and multicultural affairs.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Suburban Rail Loop

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. It was confirmed at PAEC that there is a total of $15.1 billion of capital expenditure provisioned for the Suburban Rail Loop over the forward estimates. Can the minister update the house on the revised figure over the forwards following the changes to the project announced today?

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:02): I thank the member for the question –

John Mullahy interjected.

Vicki WARD: which was indeed a Dorothy Dixer, member for Glen Waverley. I welcome their interest in this amazing project – orbital rail – which will transform our city. While this government is making sure that every single dollar invested in this project is invested wisely and well and that this project will continue addressing the –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question asked for just one figure.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Broadmeadows, you are warned. The minister was being relevant.

Vicki WARD: This is a great project. This Premier has gone through it. We have looked to make sure that every dollar is spent well and wisely. As the Premier advised today, we have saved a billion dollars and will look to save a billion more on this project, because unlike those opposite we are not here for waste. They will waste taxpayers money by shutting this project down.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question. In fact the minister has not even come to the question.

The SPEAKER: The minister has concluded her answer.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): How can Victorians believe the Premier has saved them $2 billion when his own minister cannot identify a single dollar removed from the forward estimates?

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:04): It is very clear that that question actually does not relate to my answer at all and barely relates to the first question. We have made it very clear where we have found savings and that we will conduct a technical review to find even more.

Ministers statements: dental services

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:05): Labor believes in a simple truth: if you need health care, you should get health care. And getting care should not mean having to raid your superannuation or take out a loan. For too many working families that is exactly what is happening when it comes to

dental care. They are putting off check-ups. They are ignoring aches. They are living with pain because they are paying other bills first. Every year 10,000 Victorians access their superannuation early to pay for dental care, taking out on average $25,000. That is why our Labor government will make dental care free for all Victorians. We will open up 10 free public dental care clinics, including three in regional Victoria. They will be open to adults and children every day at no cost. This means abscess treatments, root canals, extractions and fillings will occur. They will treat more than 100,000 Victorians every year. But 10 clinics are just the beginning. We know that when it comes to supporting working families those opposite tell them to fend for themselves. Labor steps in and solves their problems.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, ministers statements are not an opportunity for the Premier to attack the opposition.

The SPEAKER: The Premier will come back to his ministers statement.

Ben CARROLL: Labor is building the services hardworking Victorians need, like free dental care. This will change lives. This is what Labor governments do.

Suburban Rail Loop

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. Minister, what is the updated BCR of the Suburban Rail Loop following the changes announced by the government today?

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:07): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her question. As the Premier just said, we are building it for less and creating more. We are helping Victorians move around, and there will be more to announce.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): I do not think the minister knows what 'BCR' means. Even using the government's new cost of $32.3 billion, only $17.8 billion has been committed by the Victorian and Commonwealth governments. Where will the remaining $14.5 billion come from?

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:08): I would suggest that the Leader of the Opposition may actually want to revisit her maths.

Ministers statements: dental 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) (14:09): I am pleased to update the house on the work the Carroll Labor government is doing to deliver on two important areas for every Victorian. On this side of the house, our world-leading medical research sector will become home to 10 free dental clinics for Victorians. Already we lead the world around our medical research. It is an amazing team out there. I was in Parkville just yesterday. The precinct has some of Australia's top oral health research centres – some 60 per cent of researchers – that work around the clock to provide world-class dental outcomes right here in Victoria. Our state already is a leader when it comes to medical research. Now we are leading the way with greater access to dental care.

Can I say further that it is why Victorians continue to support the Carroll government's commitment to free dental care for children right through, at this time now, with our Smile Squad program. It is working very successfully, because dental health should never be determined by a family's income. We know that every child deserves an opportunity to grow up healthy, confident and free from preventable dental pain. Through the Smile Squad, children can access free dental check-ups and get treatment through their schools, making it easier for families to get kids the care they need when they need it most. It is backed by significant investment in our public dental programs and services to make sure that essential care happens across metropolitan, rural and regional communities. A strong public

health system looks like that: investing in the research that will save lives in the future and practical support today for families that need it.

That would all be under threat, though, with $40 billion of cuts to dental programs in this state. It would be under threat. I thank our researchers. I thank our health professionals and our dentists for the work that they do every day. Australians, and Victorians in particular, should know that innovation is encouraged, prevention is prioritised and every Victorian – every child – can access the health care they need when they need it most. Only the tooth fairy thinks that it would not happen – the cuts that are being proposed by those opposite. Those cuts we know will happen. It is only a Carroll Labor government that will put people first.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I seek your advice. I am concerned about the continual breaches of the rules of this place, whereby ministers statements are being misused in the outrageous way that they are to attack the opposition.

The SPEAKER: The minister has concluded his ministers statement. I do remind members, including ministers, about not attacking the opposition.

Suburban Rail Loop

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (14:11): My question is to the Premier. The Premier's declared political mentor – one of them – former Labor Senator Stephen Conroy says the Suburban Rail Loop project is a dog of a project that has totally sabotaged the budget, absolutely destroyed the Victorian budget and crippled infrastructure investment across the state. If the Premier believes this project is value for money, will he now release the project's contracts and current costings in full so Victorians can decide for themselves?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:12): We are building this project for less. We are also saving Victorians money, and an orbital line is needed for our state. We are building nation-leading infrastructure. I will leave it to those opposite to build their coalition with One Nation.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (14:13): If the Premier will not release the full contracts, will he now guarantee to Victorians that this project will not cost a dollar more than he claims it will?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:13): We have also announced today an independent technical review. A panel of experts will look at this project, and I will let them get onto their work. I will not take advice –

Matthew Guy: On a point of order, Speaker, with respect, on relevance, it was a very straightforward question on yes or no.

The SPEAKER: I cannot direct the Premier how to answer the question.

Ben CARROLL: We build nation-leading projects. They put 'For sale' signs on them.

Ministers statements: dental services

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Housing, Building and Precincts, Minister for Homelessness, Minister for Seniors) (14:14): Victoria is at its best when it has a government that delivers for all Victorians, and that is exactly what the Carroll Labor government is doing, because our plan for free dental will make sure Victorians can get the care that they need without worrying about whether they can afford the bill. And for older Victorians, that matters. It matters a lot. More than one in five Victorians are aged 60 or over. They have spent their lives working, raising families, volunteering and contributing to the social, cultural and economic life of our state. They deserve to age with dignity, and they should never have to choose between looking after their teeth and paying for the essentials. But too many do. The 2023 Victorian Population Health Survey found 22 per cent of Victorians aged 65 to 74 delayed or avoided seeing a dental professional because of cost, and for those aged 75 to 84 it was 14.2 per cent. National research from the Australian Dental Association

tells the same story. Cost is the biggest reason for older Australians delaying dental treatment, while almost half report painful or debilitating oral health problems. Dental care is health care. That is why a re-elected Carroll Labor government will establish free public dental clinics across Victoria, open every day and open to every Victorian. Unlike those opposite with what they promised in 2022, this is not a one-off payment –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, for the third time a minister is abusing their ministers statement to attack the opposition. This is just outrageous.

The SPEAKER: The minister was referring to a 2022 comparison.

Nick STAIKOS: In 2022 they proposed a one-off payment –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, my understanding is that *Rulings from the Chair* is very, very clear that comparing and contrasting with former governments and their administration is entirely in order but referring to an opposition yesterday or the day before is not.

Anthony Carbines: On the point of order, Speaker, the minister was referring to 2022 and had not had an opportunity to refer to his comparing and contrasting of past and present policies, and he should be able to do that.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Tarneit can leave the chamber for an hour and a half.

Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.

The SPEAKER: Minister, comparing and contrasting is fine with policies of previous oppositions or governments.

Nick STAIKOS: People I will not mention proposed a one-off payment. As opposed to that one-off payment, this is structural cost-of-living reform. The party that delivered Medicare is going to deliver free dental for Victoria.

Construction industry

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:17): My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. On 5 March the opposition asked the then Premier why Gatto-linked M Group companies were accredited traffic management companies. Following this, why did the minister's department choose to extend a $495,000 contract with M1 Traffic & Labour instead of cancelling it and striking M Group off the list of accredited traffic management companies?

Paul HAMER (Box Hill – Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:18): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her question. As our Premier has stated on many occasions, integrity is not optional under this government. That is why we have called a royal commission, and all of those matters will be dealt with under the royal commission.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, to assist the minister I provide the contract note for his reference.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. The minister has concluded his answer.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:18): How can the minister justify allowing Gatto-linked M Group companies to remain accredited traffic management companies five months after the government was put on notice about them?

Paul HAMER (Box Hill – Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:19): It is a matter for the Labour Hire Authority, and all other matters will be referred to the royal commission.

James Newbury: On a further point of order, Speaker, on relevance, if this government is simply a group of Gatto mates, they should just say it.

The SPEAKER: The member for Brighton knows how to raise a correct point of order, and that is not the correct way.

John Lister interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Werribee can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for Werribee withdrew from chamber.

Ministers statements: dental services

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka – Minister for Rural and Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Water) (14:19): I rise today to update the house on the impact of the Carroll Labor government's commitment to establish free public dental clinics in regional Victoria. Every Victorian deserves access to high-quality health care no matter where they choose to live, work and raise their families. For too many regional families, accessing dental care can be difficult, waiting months for an appointment or simply putting off treatment because the cost is too high. For families already dealing with cost-of-living pressures, a large dental bill can be the difference between getting treatment and going without, and that is why this announcement matters. Under our plan more than 100,000 Victorians will have access to preventative dental care each year. The clinics will operate with extended hours and will be open to everyone – adults and children. We will also back the workforce needed, providing relocation support to secure 20 clinicians for three regional cities, and deliver career pathway development, clinical scholarships and mentoring to upskill clinicians.

This announcement is about more than oral health. It is about prevention, it is about dignity and it is about cost-of-living relief. Those opposite are talking about percentage guarantees, and we are talking about outcomes and delivering the services that Victoria needs. With a $40 billion black hole in their budget, they need to be honest with Victorians about their planned cuts. I remind the member for Gippsland South –

The SPEAKER: I think we can all anticipate what the point of order is.

James Newbury: Speaker, respectfully, I am sure that you can anticipate my point of order because nothing has been done about it. This is the fourth minister –

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Brighton is warned about reflecting on the Chair. The minister will come back to her ministers statement without attacking the opposition.

Michaela SETTLE: Regional Victorians can compare the record of those in opposition when they sold off the Mildura and Latrobe hospitals and closed 12 hospitals in country Victoria: Eildon, Koroit, Mortlake, Murtoa, Red Cliffs, Macarthur – *(Time expired)*

Construction industry

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:22): My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Five Gatto-linked M1 companies are still listed as accredited traffic management companies by the department of transport. Which roads and projects are these companies currently working on?

Paul HAMER (Box Hill – Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:23): I have made it very clear to my department that if there are any allegations of impropriety on any Big Build project they are to be referred to the appropriate authorities, including to the royal commission.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, we have just put to the minister that Gatto is working on government sites.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:23): Given integrity is sometimes optional under Labor, will the minister guarantee that none of these five Gatto-linked companies will receive another dollar of taxpayer money?

Paul HAMER (Box Hill – Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:23): I reject the premise of the question by the member of the opposition. As I said in my earlier answer, integrity is not optional in this government, and that is why all of these matters will be referred to the royal commission.

Ministers statements: cost of living

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations) (14:24): The Carroll Labor government is delivering real cost-of-living relief for Victorian families, and now we are going further, with free dental care for every Victorian. A re-elected Carroll Labor government will open 10 free public dental clinics across the state, giving adults and children access to free dental care every day, including an annual check-up. When fully up and running, these clinics will treat more than 100,000 Victorians a year. This builds on Labor's Smile Squad, which has already treated more than 175,000 public school students and visited more than 1000 schools, making dental care free and easier for working families. We are also putting money back into household budgets through half-price public transport fares, saving people up to $850. We have also delivered the 20 per cent rego rebate, which is saving drivers up to $186 per vehicle and, might I say, was opposed by some opposite. There were some who called it a hoax and claimed most Victorians would not know how to apply for it, but more than 3.6 million Victorians have already proved them wrong.

These are the sorts of practical measures that only Labor governments deliver to make life cheaper and easier for working people. We know what is at risk. There are those who would cut $40 billion and put services like Smile Squad and cost-of-living support at risk, making life harder and more expensive for Victorian families. While a Liberal–One Nation government would cut, only a Labor government will keep investing in the services that Victorians rely on.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, again, this is the fifth minister today clearly in breach of the rules of this place, misusing ministers statements and ignoring your rules.

The SPEAKER: The Treasurer has concluded his ministers statement.

Constituency questions

Brighton electorate

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:27): (1768) My constituency question is to the Premier, and I ask: when will the Premier overturn his Labor government's longstanding decision not to improve safety on Hawthorn Road in Brighton East? Local residents have longstanding concerns about pedestrian safety near Melbourne Montessori College in Brighton East. Students, parents, teachers and local residents regularly need to cross Hawthorn Road, which is a busy state-controlled road. There is currently no convenient, safe pedestrian-operated crossing near the school. The nearest signalised crossing is hundreds of metres away. Last year a young student was struck by a car while crossing the road outside the school. Thankfully the student's injuries have healed, but it is proof that the danger is real and our children are not safe. The school, the community and I have advocated for improved pedestrian safety to the state government for many years and been ignored. The community is calling on the state government to urgently install a pedestrian-operated signalised crossing near Melbourne Montessori College. The community is also calling for any other traffic improvements that could make the area safer.

Laverton electorate

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (14:28): (1769) My question is for the Deputy Premier as Minister for Education. There are the 100 new schools that we have built, with 21 built in Wyndham alone – Dohertys Creek P–9 College, Garrang Wilam Primary School, Bemin Secondary College and Warreen Primary School. Then there are the schools we have upgraded: Sunshine College, Sunshine

Primary School, Albion Primary School, Ardeer South Primary School, Ardeer Primary School, Sunshine Heights Primary School, Dinjerra Primary School, Western English Language School and Sunshine Harvester Primary School. Then there are the non-government schools we have supported: St Paul's Primary School in Sunshine West, Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception Primary School and Al-Taqwa College, which is where I was just last week. Then there are our specialist schools, all upgraded and modernised as part of our commitment to expanding specialist education: Rosamond School, done; Western Autistic School, done; Jennings Street School, done; Sunshine Special Developmental School, done. Only Labor invests in our schools and our kids. We build schools and the Liberals close them. How much has the Carroll Labor government invested into building, upgrading and modernising schools in my electorate?

Murray Plains electorate

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:29): (1770) My question is for the Minister for Water and is in relation to Lake Eppalock. What information can the minister provide to the people of Rochester as to how Goulburn–Murray Water will be managing Lake Eppalock differently this year compared to the floods of 2022? In 2022 nearly all of the homes and businesses in Rochester, including the hospital, were flooded. The community is still recovering, and not all the houses have been repaired. Lake Eppalock is currently 93 per cent full, and heavy rain is falling over the area this morning. The whole town is so stretched to the max that they may flood again. Please, Minister, can you respond to their request asap?

Glen Waverley electorate

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (14:30): (1771) My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. How will the Carroll Labor government continue to deliver the best possible outcome for the Suburban Rail Loop while ensuring value for money? In Glen Waverley we are seeing the SRL take shape, and we know it will transform how people move around Melbourne's east. The SRL will connect our community with Melbourne's east, giving local families, students and workers easier access to jobs, education, health services and opportunities. Together with Melbourne Airport rail it will also make travelling to the airport easier, strengthening the connections our diverse community has with loved ones and business partners overseas. But there is a clear choice at the next election. Labor is getting on with delivering this transformational project. Those opposite have promised to pause and review it, creating disruption, uncertainty and the risk of leaving our community with unfinished works. Glen Waverley deserves certainty, not the opposition's delays, disruptions and short-sighted cuts.

Nepean electorate

Anthony MARSH (Nepean) (14:31): (1772) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education. Since May, Rosebud Primary School's oval has been closed because of large holes and divots that make it unsafe for students. I had the pleasure of meeting a parent along with school leadership last week to discuss this issue. It is the school's only green space, leaving students unable to play at recess and lunchtime. The junior cross-country has been cancelled, while athletics day has been held inside. The school has also been advised that the Department of Education has no funding available to restore it. One mother of two boys at Rosebud Primary School said:

> … my boys are really missing the oval …

They say:

> I don't want to go to school because we don't get to play on the oval at lunch anymore.

Minister, why should students at Rosebud Primary School be left without a usable oval, because the government is too broke to fund its restoration?

Lara electorate

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (14:32): (1773) My question is for the Minister for Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy. How will the government ensure a balance between the need for data centres and protecting residential communities? Recently, community members have contacted me about their concerns regarding the proposed development of data centres across the Lara electorate. In particular, they have concerns as a data centre developer has recently purchased land in the northern Geelong growth area, which is a future residential community. Many residents are worried about the impacts that data centres can have on community character and the demands that they place on energy and water. Residents feel that with many of these proposals there is a lack of clear information about the project for locals and there are limited opportunities for further input by community members. This has led to a feeling of uncertainty and frustration among the community. Community engagement is crucial when it comes to proposals such as these, and it is vital that residents can contribute their views and local knowledge to the decision-making process. As a local member of Parliament I will always back the community being a key part of the decision-making process, and I look forward to hearing from the minister.

Richmond electorate

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:33): (1774) Earlier this month I had the pleasure of visiting the smart, passionate year 6 students at Clifton Hill Primary School. They had some questions for the Premier and ministers, and I want to share some of them today. Students asked for stronger laws to address climate change and stop government corruption. Lots of students asked the Premier to stop the demolition of public housing in our community and make sure that everyone has a safe place to live. They want greener streets. They want cheaper soft serve, more parks, bike lanes and improvements to local pedestrian crossings to make their journey to school safer. And so many students asked for free public transport for everyone. So my question is to the Minister for Public Transport: will you listen to the students at Clifton Hill Primary School and make public transport permanently free for everyone?

Wendouree electorate

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (14:34): (1775) This Friday is Wear It Purple Day, a nationally recognised day that celebrates and supports LGBTIQ+ young people and promotes inclusion, acceptance and belonging. I am proud to stand with our LGBTQA community on Wear It Purple Day and every day of the year. In my electorate of Ballarat, many young people, schools, community groups and families will be taking part, as will I. Minister, how is the Victorian Labor government supporting young LGBTIQA+ people and their families in Ballarat and across Victoria? I am particularly interested in hearing about promoting inclusion, wellbeing and safety, and the help available to ensure every young person feels valued, respected and supported to be their authentic self.

The SPEAKER: Member for Wendouree, can you just state which minister you are addressing your constituency question to?

Juliana ADDISON: The Minister for Equality.

Shepparton electorate

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (14:34): (1776) My question is for the Minister for Public Transport, and the information I seek is the reason why Shepparton has not received increased public bus transport services. Infrastructure Victoria recommended Shepparton as the number one area to be provided with more public bus transport services, yet this has been ignored. It is astounding that it has been over 18 years since Shepparton has had a bus service review, and during that time the region has grown significantly. With the recent rollout of the much-needed increased V/Line train services the region has also been desperately calling for increased bus transport services. Not everyone has a vehicle or can drive, and they should be able to access local public transport, and for many there are

no other options. This is just another example of the neglect of the needs of regional communities, and we deserve our fair share of funding.

Preston electorate

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (14:35): (1777) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. My question is: for local council intersections with a significant amount of pedestrian activity, what are the Victorian government's recommendations regarding the choice between a roundabout and a raised intersection, and what is the best practice implementation of those formats? I ask this question particularly with respect to an intersection that I raised in May of last year, and that is the changed Hickford–Borrie streets intersection next to Reservoir Views Primary School. A school parent there, Christine Speziale, has now gathered 445 signatures asking council to undertake a review into the changes that they made there. It does seem that vehicles continue to go through that intersection very quickly, because the raised crossing is very shallow. It also seems that over a year later drivers are still confused by the pedestrian crossing markings and the stop line markings and knowing where they need to stop and give way. I do think it is important that we get these intersections right, particularly when they involve schoolchildren. Any information the minister can provide to assist a potential safety review would be greatly appreciated.

Bridget Vallence: Speaker, yet again I raise a point of order in relation to a number of unanswered questions from ministers, one being 14 months overdue. Questions to the Treasurer that remain unanswered and are overdue are questions on notice 2421, 3237, 3238, 3239, 3240, 3241, 3242, 3256 and 3340. Questions to the Minister for Economic Development that are overdue are questions on notice 3408, 3412 and 3413. Questions that are overdue by the Minister for Finance and remain unanswered are questions on notice 3420, 3422, 3423, 3427, 3430, 3431, 3435, 3436, 3439, 3502, 3503, 3504 and 3505. A question that is unanswered by the Minister for Skills and Training and is overdue is question on notice 3453. Questions that are overdue and unanswered by the Minister for Jobs are questions on notice 3484, 3485, 3486, 3487, 3488, 3489 and 3510. A question unanswered by the Minister for Education and overdue is question on notice 3210. A question unanswered and overdue by the Minister for Health is question on notice 3317, and a question overdue and unanswered by the Premier is question on notice 3316. My constituents are waiting eagerly for a response.

The SPEAKER: I ask you to hand your list to the clerks, please.

Bills

Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Anthony MARSH (Nepean) (14:38): There is nothing wrong with experienced people serving the public, but when the same small circle keeps appearing across taxpayer-funded roles, Victorians are entitled to ask: is this an independent integrity system or is this simply Labor's jobs for mates merry-go-round? These are not ceremonial appointments. Municipal monitors can have enormous influence over democratically elected councils and recommend further ministerial action. That is why their independence and transparency matters. Ironically, that same Whittlesea commission heard that Victoria's councillor conduct system was too slow, too legalistic and too drawn out, and it recommended an independent local government integrity commission. Instead, what do we get? More process, more regulation, more ministerial involvement, more Labor appointees and remarkably little accountability for the people exercising those powers.

We are now on our third local government minister in just over four months – the member for Bentleigh, the member for Box Hill and now the member for Mordialloc. Ministers come and go but the system remains, and the integrity system that flourished under the former minister deserves serious scrutiny before this Parliament hands Labor even more power. Political interference, jobs for mates,

selective inaction and the lack of transparent, contemporaneous records are not the hallmarks of an integrity system that should be handed more power.

Councillors and CEOs of councils should be accountable, but so should the monitors and conduct panels that police them, because an integrity system that cannot demonstrate its own independence has no credibility policing the integrity of anyone else. Before Labor asks this Parliament for more power to police local government, it needs to clean up the integrity of its own integrity system. Who monitors the monitors? Who holds the integrity system accountable? And why should this Parliament hand Labor more power before it can answer those simple questions?

John LISTER (Werribee) (14:40): It is a delight to speak on this bill, the Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026, a bill that is of particular importance to my constituents in the City of Wyndham as there has been much, much coverage about our local government issues in Wyndham. However, before I begin talking to the bill, I want to touch on a few comments made by the member for Caulfield in his contribution to the debate, talking about the idea of consultation, particularly consultation done by those from the other house.

I think many of us on this side saw Ms Crozier from the other house and her train wreck of an interview where she could not confirm how she had consulted with hospitals about her policy. The member for Caulfield cited the trash policy of the Liberal Party, around bins and the collection of bins. Did they talk to the City of Boroondara, a local government area which many of them are situated in as representatives? The mayor said to one reporter that this thought bubble would cost at least $3 million extra for ratepayers. This is what consultation looks like from those opposite: adding extra cost for ratepayers. On this side we are the party of rate capping and making sure that ratepayers get good value for the services that our local governments offer. This trash policy, the bin collection policy, is something stolen from One Nation in Western Australia. If you are going to steal policies, you can at least be honest with residents on the costs behind them.

That brings me to what consultation should look like and some of the work that I have been doing around this bill in the lead-up to this debate today. I have said on many occasions that my role here is to be the voice of the people in my community of Wyndham, to listen and fight for the changes we need. This Labor government has made it clear that we are taking a new direction on key issues facing our state, including integrity at all levels of government. Local government is so important, and its impact on everyday lives should never be understated. As such, Victorians, particularly people in Wyndham, expect our councils to act with honesty, strong governance and transparency.

Before addressing some of the broader detail of the bill, I want to share how circumstances in my community helped lead to key reforms we are legislating around mayoral positions. Since before being elected I was seeing in my community increasing concern about the governance and actions of councillors in the City of Wyndham. It was clear that some of the decisions being made were not meeting the expectations of all Wyndham residents on both sides of the river: the Kelly Park hall saga, returning state government funding for Wyndham Vale North Reserve, the ratepayer-funded security patrols in Truganina and library opening hours concerns. The correspondence and conversations I have had with the community about a range of curious council decisions have been overwhelming. Throughout all of these issues I worked in government to make sure residents' voices were heard by both Local Government Victoria and the responsible ministers.

However, there is one decision by a councillor before I was elected that has concerned me and the community the most. Former Liberal candidate, and now former mayor of Wyndham, Preet Singh was revealed, quite possibly by members of his own political party, to have provided a character reference to a person convicted of child sexual abuse. While he tried to apologise for the lack of judgement, there were moments when he further inflamed community concerns by appearing to diminish the offending and pass the community response off as politically charged. On several occasions I stood in this place and called out his inability to read the room. While somewhat delayed,

he has finally found his reading glasses and taken a good look around at the damage his staying on as mayor of our city was causing to the reputation of council.

While this was happening, my fellow MPs and I, representing Wyndham, were advocating to government for changes to the law to allow councillors to essentially stand down a mayor or deputy mayor. The reason why we found ourselves in this situation is because of legacy arrangements where we have two-year mayoral terms as defined in the Local Government Act 2020. However, in the City of Wyndham and across many other councils they have moved to only one-year terms for our mayors. The Local Government Act could not be triggered because of that wording.

We were also strong advocates for the appointment of local government monitors to look into the governance of Wyndham City Council. We welcomed the appointment by the minister at the time, the member for Box Hill, of Jim Gifford and Jo-Anne Mazzeo to the role of monitors and the work that has happened since then. We look forward to receiving their independent assessment of the situation and recommendations on how this can be improved.

I want to thank all of those community members who met with me, wrote to me and who I stood with at protests throughout this saga. I would like to take some indulgence and name the amendments regarding mayoral positions in clause 8 the Wyndham amendments, as a reminder of our community's advocacy to have this change made. These amendments set out a process for councillors to declare a mayor or deputy mayor position vacant, outlining due process for this and making sure that those people who are elected for a term to be the spokespeople of our communities best represent the expectations of that community. I would hope the member for Kew and the Liberal–National opposition support this bill wholeheartedly, in particular these Wyndham amendments. Anything less will show the people of Werribee and our western suburbs that they are happy to see this situation repeat.

This change in clause 8 is one of many this bill goes to in ensuring our local government sector meets community expectations. As has been mentioned by other speakers, it responds to recommendations from IBAC's Operation Sandon; other government initiatives, including the Whittlesea commission of inquiry; the government's 2022 commitment to create the local government fair jobs code and the regulator behind that; and it is part of a practical series of reforms to make local government stronger and more accountable. The specific amendments I have gone to are in clause 8, the amendments around the mayoral positions and deputy mayoral positions, but the bill also helps support better council integrity, accountability and governance. It strengthens conflict of interest rules. It improves those councillor conduct processes – something else which Wyndham has seen a lot of recently, with the suspension of our councillors on multiple occasions. It strengthens governance arrangements around CEOs, clarifies operational matters affecting councils and councillors and provides for a local government fair jobs code.

I would like to at this point pause and thank the Australian Services Union for their advocacy in this space. It is so important, when we think about it, when around 54 per cent of local government workers report an increase in insecure work over these past five years. When we talk about consultation and those on the other side talk about consultation with councils, I know I and many of my colleagues on this side have met with many council workers, not only through their advocacy around their enterprise bargaining agreement but also around this local government fair jobs code. I would like to thank the local Wyndham City Council reps who have spoken to me on many occasions about concerns and ways that government can help support workers at Wyndham City Council. And like many others here, I stood just outside in the last sitting week or the week before with local council workers and in fact caught up with a few people who I went to school with, which was rather lovely, and it was good to see that they are involved with the union.

There have also been some house amendments that have been circulated by government. As the minister at the time mentioned, this helps clarify a few different things, particularly around the retrospective application around the private prosecutions issue that we saw particularly play out in the

shire of Hepburn recently. Under section 229 of the act, a councillor is automatically stood down when charged with certain serious offences pending the outcome of proceedings. This local government amendment goes to what happens around that process and changes it so that it does not necessarily affect the operations of councils. Several councillors at Hepburn Shire Council – which has been reported quite widely – were stood down at the time around this private prosecution without the intervention of the Director of Public Prosecutions. I thought it was actually a rather interesting process that they used to do that, and credit to them. Councillors would have remained unable to perform their roles, democratically elected by the good people around Daylesford and surrounds to do that job.

These house amendments that the government has circulated address the consequences of those private prosecutions by providing that the automatic standdown provisions will only apply to proceedings for offences commenced by or on behalf of a law enforcement agency and clarifying that the councillor is not to be taken as absent from a council meeting while they are stood down, which would affect other parts in the legislation. If we do not act properly here, there could be delays, particularly around some matters that are before the courts at the moment.

To conclude, this bill puts integrity front and centre. To all of those who have contacted me about this legislation and the effect on Wyndham, thank you. I patiently await the report from the local government monitors at Wyndham, and I look forward to seeing confidence in the governance of our local council improve. The Carroll Labor government knows our local government sector delivers basic services for working people, and we will keep fighting for that.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:50): I rise to speak on the Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026. The Greens were delighted to hear that Labor said this bill would be addressing integrity issues in local government and acquitting its outstanding items in Operation Sandon. How disappointed we were when we read the fine print to find that it really did nothing of the sort. Operation Sandon was the longest running corruption investigation in Victoria's history. It found that over a nine-year period, two former Casey council mayors, as well as major parties and their candidates for other levels of government, were paid almost $1.2 million in donations and other payments by developer John Woodman for their support. Among many findings, that IBAC investigation identified that political donations, particularly from high-risk donors like property developers, presented a serious corruption risk in local government given the critical role that they play in planning decisions.

As it stands, there are no caps on the amount that can be donated to a council candidate in Victoria or the amount that they can spend. Lord Mayor of Melbourne Nick Reece received nearly $1 million in donations, including tens of thousands of dollars from donors with property interests and those with pending developments. This is not to say that he has done anything untoward, but at the very least it creates perceptions of conflicts of interest, and it shows how vulnerable councils are to corruption. While other states are looking at further iterations of donations and lobbying laws to protect against corruption in local government, in Victoria we have not even started. If this Labor government were serious about integrity, at a bare minimum they should have introduced donations caps for council candidates that mirrored caps for state elections, introduced real-time donations disclosures and banned donations from high-risk groups like property developers. When this bill was put together, it seems that Labor was still not serious about integrity. That was several weeks ago. Perhaps now under Ben Carroll, the Premier, who is talking a bit more of a big game on integrity, they might choose to support the Greens amendments to this bill, amendments that deal with donations in local government, when we move them in the Legislative Council.

A further glaring omission when it comes to integrity is the failure to address the absurdly undemocratic voting system in the City of Melbourne. Residents get one vote each, while businesses get two votes each, even if they are living interstate or overseas and have never been to Melbourne. Residents make up just 40 per cent of all the votes in the City of Melbourne, with businesses and corporations getting the majority say over what happens there. This bill amends the City of Melbourne Act 2001, and while it is there, it should return it to one resident, one vote, just like every other council.

It should also end the automatic enrolment of businesses and nonresidents and ensure that the donation caps and restrictions that I outlined earlier apply in the City of Melbourne as well. We will be introducing amendments in the Council to fix these problems.

A further area of disappointment is the failure to deal with the broken arbitration system. The changes made by this government to the Local Government Act 1989 in 2024 were justified by Labor not only on the basis that they would reduce the number of frivolous code-of-conduct cases but also create stronger protections for councillors experiencing bullying and discrimination. Since then we have seen both inappropriate application of the code of conduct and a total failure of the code to protect councillors from discrimination and bullying. When a complaint is made under the code of conduct, despite the 2024 changes, many essentially go straight to arbitration. Arbiters' rulings and sanctions have been inconsistent across cases, creating uncertainty for councillors and often disproportionate outcomes.

The parameters of an arbiter are also not well defined. The legislation states that they are free to make their own judgements. There are no guidelines and there is no transparency around how they choose from the suite of penalties that are available to them. Further, code-of-conduct complaints can only be lodged covering a specific instance that has occurred in the last three months, meaning that persistent patterns of behaviour, which we have all heard of in local councils, may not be captured. Behaviours like bullying often occur as a pattern, and the three-month rule stops councillors from being able to provide the context that is often necessary to get a fair decision.

Finally, the appeals process is problematic. In 2024 Labor removed the ability of councillors to appeal an arbitration decision at VCAT. Instead their only option is the Supreme Court. This was one of the many reasons the Greens opposed the 2024 bill. The changes make the appeals process financially out of reach for many councillors, starting at a minimum of around $5000 and ranging to many tens of thousands of dollars at the cost of the applicant. While intended to reduce frivolous appeals, this leads to appeals only being heard for those who can afford them.

These are all issues that we will seek to address in our amendments. This system is stronger when people have confidence in the process. Procedural fairness matters, and if we want the community to have confidence in the councillor conduct system, then councillors need to have confidence that they will be treated fairly within it.

With respect to some of the other changes that this bill makes, we are concerned about the lack of engagement with councils and the local government sector in developing this bill. This includes legislating governance rules that have not yet been written. We strongly support the aims and objectives of the new fair jobs code. Workers deserve security and certainty, and we should be moving away from privatisation and outsourcing. But we acknowledge that there has been concern expressed by some councils about the lack of consultation. As we understand it, all the details are yet to be worked out, and while we have been told that councils will be consulted with, many of them are rightly sceptical given Labor's terrible track record over recent years when it comes to engagement with councils.

With respect to the issue of councillors who are seeking to run as candidates in state elections, we understand and agree that there need to be guardrails so that someone's role as a councillor is not leveraged to further their interests as a parliamentary candidate. It certainly seems reasonable that once somebody officially becomes a candidate – that is, when they lodge their nomination with the Victorian Electoral Commission – they should absolutely take leave. However, to require mayors and deputy mayors to stand down when they have declared their intention to run as a candidate is far more open to interpretation and manipulation, and we do not believe the changes that are suggested are in fact justified.

One of the few things that we strongly support in this bill is regarding section 229 of the principal act and closes a loophole in the existing act that created a serious threat to local democracy, as was recently

highlighted in Hepburn shire. In 2024 Labor amended the Local Government Act to remove safeguards around the standing down of councillors. The changes meant that any councillor facing a criminal charge, regardless of whether it was initiated by law enforcement or a private citizen, from a certain threshold would automatically be stood down and their allowance suspended. In March this year the mayor of Hepburn shire was automatically stood down under these provisions after a private citizen paid a small fee at the Magistrates' Court to lodge a private prosecution against him. It was at this time that the minister became aware of the loophole in our laws and the potential risk that existed for other councillors across the state. There was time to introduce a fix then, but the warnings were ignored by the government, and nothing was done. Fast forward a month, and four more of Hepburn shire's seven councillors were stood down due to the same individual taking out prosecutions against them, while the CEO resigned. This left two councillors unable to make quorum or function as a council. This should have triggered urgent legislation to be brought to the Parliament last sitting week to deal with the situation, and we wrote to both the Premier and the minister offering our support for such an approach. Fortunately, the DPP intervened and dismissed the cases last week, so the councillors have been reinstated, but the stress that they endured could have been avoided. If the process had dragged on, as it may well have done, Hepburn was headed for administration, denying that community their democratically elected representation.

This bill closes that loophole by specifying that only criminal prosecutions initiated by law enforcement agencies and meeting a certain threshold can lead to a councillor being stood down. While there is still time for problems to emerge at other councils given how long it will take for this bill to become law, a fix is in sight. It should not have taken this crisis at Hepburn for this to change though, and the fact that it did, and the broader problems with this bill, speak to the ongoing failure of this Labor government to respect councils as a democratically elected level of government in their own right.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (15:01): I am very happy to speak to the house amendments that are essentially seeking to close a loophole and reduce disruption. I will just pick up on a point about our Labor government and the way we engage with local councils. Back in 2022, when the City of Port Phillip sought to close three kindergartens, it was our Labor government that stepped up to save these local services. Through our Building Blocks partnership with the City of Port Phillip we have committed up to $16.5 million to support six projects and up to 307 kindergarten places. The Greens political party are bagging us out on the way we engage with councils, but we provide some pretty significant grants that help to support early childhood education, and I would have thought that that would be an important value to protect, just saying. I did not see them chipping in there. I just thought I should put that out there.

I know that at Eildon Road the renovations are well underway. One little caveat I will put is that I would hate to think that the process of renovating – these refurbishments – would be utilised by the City of Port Phillip in any way to vitiate their responsibilities when it comes to child care. I am not saying they will, but these are just things they might want to be careful about. Hopefully we are steering in the right direction because obviously when we have put forward and are delivering these grants for the local community we expect the council to truly honour that early childhood education and care all the way. If the Greens political party want to throw little bombs our way, they need to take a little bit of care and pay a little attention to detail when it comes to what we provide in terms of pretty significant grants across many fronts – not only early childhood education but many fronts.

Coming back to the house amendments, they are about protecting councils from avoidable disruption, and they are about making sure that private prosecutions cannot be used to throw council governance into chaos. Importantly, these amendments provide for the retrospective operation of reforms to the councillor standdown provisions. There was a particular catalyst involved. The situation was that several councillors at Hepburn Shire Council were recently stood down following private prosecutions brought by a member of the community. Those charges were dismissed after the Director of Public

Prosecutions took over the proceedings and reinstated those affected. Without – or but for – the DPP's intervention, councillors would have remained unable to perform their roles.

What will these house amendments do? The house amendments will address the consequences of private prosecutions by providing that the automatic standdown provisions in section 229(1) of the Local Government Act 2020 will apply only to proceedings for offences commenced by or on behalf of a law enforcement agency and clarifying that a councillor is not to be taken as absent from a council meeting while they are stood down. To address the risk of private prosecutions being brought by individuals before the reforms can come into operation – I am about to speak to the retrospective element – the amendments provide for their retrospective application. Without these arrangements, councillors facing private prosecutions before the bill commences would still be affected by the current standdown provision.

If we do not act properly here, we leave the door open for more disruption in the meantime, and that is certainly counterproductive and really not embodying proper operation of the law. That is exactly why these amendments are needed. It is about making sure standards are applied fairly, properly and in a way that cannot be misused to create dysfunction. So the house amendments are practical, proportionate and necessary, and it is certainly the right and proper thing for us to do, to be putting forward these house amendments. I hope that they are duly embraced by those opposite. It seems, from the tenor of the debate, that there is consensus at least on these matters, though I note that the opposition have a number of other amendments that they are seeking to make. Nevertheless, I do hope that these particular amendments, which are abundantly practical and sensible, will be embraced for all the right reasons.

I did want to pick up on another point made by the member for Caulfield, who covered many issues. It was a wide and far-reaching debate, but I just want to zone in on one point in particular. He was talking I think about the power of councils and planning et cetera, and we have got to cut through and see what is behind that. I think it really was a bit of a smokescreen. It was a smokescreen for, 'We're locking down certain suburbs. We're not touching them. Don't worry about millennials and beyond and allowing places like Melton and others to carry the load when it comes to expanding housing in our state.' We know that we certainly do have to think about younger generations, and that is exactly what we are doing, particularly when you think about significant activity centres that are proximate to good public transport and/or sites where we are developing good public transport for all the right reasons. We know that many younger generations, but not exclusively, want in a very pragmatic way to be able to live not too far from where they work and/or they want to be close to accessible transport so that it is as easy as possible, looking at costs et cetera for the daily commute, for them to moderate those costs.

We do have half-price fares. I should note that our government is always thinking about cost-of-living priorities for Victorians. We have half-price fares for the remainder of 2026, but it certainly is a commonsense approach when you are thinking about where people want to live and making sure that they are able to access good public transport. Therefore the corollary of that is the ability to reduce or mitigate congestion on our roads, because we know that the more cars that people take, even if they are electric vehicles – I am a proponent of electric vehicles. I have a hybrid myself, but we know that a vehicle on the road is still adding to congestion, and therefore the more active and public transport that can be encouraged, the better.

Therefore, coming back to the argument about power and councils et cetera, the actual intent of the state government, which is a sound one, is to make sure that we are listening to the needs of Victorians and making sure that they are able to have access to good-quality housing which is proximate to good-quality public transport so that they are not forever reliant on vehicles which add to congestion and therefore also blow out the times for the commute to and from work every day and the other services that they may need. Therefore I think in trying to smear the intent of the state government when it comes to planning and controls with regard to the development of housing now and into the future – it actually has a very sound basis, and it is not about attacking or undermining councils. On the

contrary, it is about making sure that we listen to and follow through on the needs of current and future Victorians.

It is all about choice, of course. Victorians can live where they want to. If they want to live further out and have a bigger garden et cetera, that is all fine. I know that where I live, in Southbank, many people are choosing actually to live in smaller properties. They might just have a few plants on the balcony, but they are in very close nexus to local schools, to the arts and to all the good stuff and great public transport. Moving away from this mindset that apartments are sinful and the dregs of the earth to one where they can be quite comfortable living and convenient for people as well would not hurt the opposition – just something to think about. This is broadening out that discussion when it comes not only to obviously the house amendments – which are extremely important, and we can see the catalyst and the very logical solution to close the loophole – but also to the heart of the rationale of what is behind planning controls, which is thinking about fellow Victorians now and into the future.

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (15:10): To refer to what the member for Albert Park was talking about in regard to apartments, people over on this side love apartments – no issues whatsoever. We love living in apartments – I live in a townhouse now – and living in the city it is really important. But what we are speaking today about is the Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026. Let me begin where there is common ground. Local government is the tier that is absolutely closest to the people that we serve. It collects the bins, it maintains the parks and it runs the libraries and the maternal and child health services that families in Prahran, in Windsor, in South Yarra, in St Kilda East and in parts of Southbank that I look after rely upon every single day. When integrity fails in local government, public confidence in every level of government is damaged. The Liberals and Nationals do not come to this debate opposed to reform. In fact we absolutely embrace reform. We support proportionate measures that strengthen integrity, transparency and good governance, and we accept that Operation Sandon and the Whittlesea commission of inquiry identified real failings that require a legislative response. Some of what is in this bill is sensible, and frankly it is overdue, but that is not the whole of this bill and that is why we cannot support the bill in its current form.

I want to deal first with the amendments circulated by the government overnight, because they absolutely matter. They do two things. They ensure a councillor who has been stood down is not disqualified from office simply because the standdown kept them from meetings for four consecutive months. More significantly, they remove private prosecutions as a standdown trigger retrospectively so that a councillor stood down because of a vexatious private charge is taken not to have been stood down and is entitled to the allowance withheld from them. The opposition support those amendments, and we welcome them because they are almost word for word the position we have been putting to this government for weeks. We said the prospective operation of this provision was a drafting flaw and that there is no statutory or common-law barrier to Parliament applying it retrospectively to the start of the current council term. The presumption against retrospectivity is a rule of interpretation, not a constitutional limitation. We were told it could not be done. Now it has been done overnight, and I am pleased, but it does rather illustrate that this bill has come to the house before it was ready – no surprise when it comes to my colleagues on the other side.

Hepburn shire was not a hypothetical problem. Five of its seven councillors were stood down on private charges. The council could not function, and the minister was preparing to appoint an administrator. The Director of Public Prosecutions struck those charges out on 5 August but the loophole survived. The same tactics have reportedly been threatened at Latrobe City Council and the Rural City of Ararat. Until this bill passes a person can be removed from an office they are elected to hold by anybody that is willing to file a charge.

That brings me to the heart of our objection. The bill establishes a local government fair jobs code and a fair jobs code regulator. It does not tell this house what the code says. It cannot, because the code has not been written. Members are being asked to legislate a compliance regime, an annual assessment obligation and a public naming power and to take the regulations entirely on trust. We know three

things about this code. It received $5.4 million in the 2026–27 budget, without notice to the sector beyond the Australian Services Union. The minister's own evidence to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee suggested the sector had not been consulted and the code was yet to be developed. Days later the ASU stated publicly that the code would target outsourcing, labour hire and casualisation. That is not a governance reform, that is an industrial relations intervention designed elsewhere and delivered through a bill about council integrity.

The evidence base does not support it. Municipal Association of Victoria survey data across 54 councils shows permanent ongoing staff average 75 per cent of the workforce, and 92 per cent of councils exceed national benchmarks for long-serving employees. Commonwealth Fair Work protections already cover job security and casual employment arrangements, and the people who will pay are the ratepayers. That is you and I. That is the people of Prahran. If contracted services in waste collection, leisure centres and maintenance are forced back in-house and costs rise, under rate capping, when costs rise and revenue does not, services will be cut. Regional and rural councils already carrying the sharpest workforce pressures will feel it first and worst, and the small family businesses holding those contracts may simply lose their work. Meanwhile the person carrying personal responsibility for compliance is the council CEO, who cannot delegate it and who cannot be publicly named for failing a standard that has not yet been written. The fair jobs code is the most egregious example. It is not the only one. The mandatory model governance rules were developed under non-disclosure agreements and have not been released to the sector or the public at this point in time. One set of rules is to apply to 79 councils, from the City of Melbourne to Buloke shire.

The CEO employment framework is the same story. Greater consistency is broadly supported, but the technical working group has not yet been formed. On conflict of interest, a CEO must report on apparent councillor breaches to the chief municipal inspector, with no requirement to investigate first and no guidance on vexatious reports. That places a matter of political judgement on the administrator and blurs the very lines this bill is trying to sharpen. And 'council's premises' is not defined – not here and not in the principal act – so a council candidate on leave could be caught by an offence carrying 120 penalty units for taking their child to a council library.

The candidate leave provisions go directly to my electorate. The principle is sound – once a person is formally nominated for Parliament, they should not simultaneously exercise public office, draw the allowance that comes with it and campaign for another job. The minister has described that separation as essential and as longstanding best practice. I absolutely agree with him. What I cannot reconcile is why a safeguard the minister calls essential does not apply to the very next election, at which it could absolutely operate. These provisions apply only when election day falls on or after 1 January 2027, that is, after the next state election. In Prahran the Labor candidate is Meghan Hopper, presently the Como ward councillor at the City of Stonnington. Labor has promoted her in both capacities, and she is serving as a councillor and a candidate for Parliament at exactly the same time, which is precisely the arrangement this bill says must end. Labor have brought this forward, and yet they are not prepared to do it until after the election.

This makes no criticism of Meghan Hopper personally. That is from me. I do not criticise her personally. She is doing nothing the law prohibits. That is exactly my point. The government has written the rule, declared it essential and then set a commencement date so that it does not bind the government's own candidates at an election in front of us. It has left the people of Prahran in an absolutely precarious position. Here we have a local Labor councillor in Stonnington City Council voting on the Labor congestion levy to increase parking fees, implement a paid parking permit system in the City of Stonnington and fund the Labor government's congestion levy. It is extraordinary – and she stays silent on inappropriate development that the Carroll government's activity centres are having on our local area. Furthermore, where is her opposition to the unregulated tobacco shops absolutely littered along Chapel Street? That regulation is the responsibility of the Carroll Labor government, and unfortunately while you have got a Labor councillor that is currently also a Labor candidate it is hugely problematic.

We have not simply come here to criticise. The Shadow Minister for Local Government has introduced the Local Government Amendment (Stability of Councils) Bill 2026, and that bill keeps what the sector supports: the improved process for declaring the office of mayor or deputy mayor vacant, the technical corrections to the standdown framework, the continuity of arbiters and conduct panel members whose appointments expire mid-proceeding and the increased differential ratio for the City of Melbourne so it can act on derelict properties. That is a better bill, and it is before Parliament today.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (15:20): I also rise to speak on the Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026 and the circulated amendments, and particularly, if I can, on those parts of the bill that enhance of course the integrity of our system and also those that deal with CEO appointments and with the important issue of council rates. But as we just heard from the member for Prahran, people have taken this opportunity to, I suppose, speak quite broadly about the importance of local council and also the way in which local council and state government work together, and I do want to perhaps make my case for supporting this bill in exactly the same terms. I think all of us in this place have our first and foremost responsibility to the local communities that we represent. And of course, as all of us who do that know – I know many MPs here, particularly on our side, do that very well, and I am looking across at some of them now – doing so requires working so very closely with local government. And in fact many, many of the things you are trying to achieve you can only achieve when you have a good local government that works well and a local government that can make good decisions. And unfortunately, even in my own experience so far and certainly in my observations, that is simply not always the case.

We have been fortunate in Darebin council, which is our local council, that after the 2024 council elections we saw a real improvement in governance and decision-making across council, and that has really allowed us to get a lot of projects done that are very important to people locally in the community. We are working at the moment together to provide some funding to upgrade Gellibrand Crescent Kindergarten, a very longstanding kindergarten up in the Merrilands area that we are looking to expand because of the changing demographics in that part of Reservoir. We also hope once that work is done to work together with council to further upgrade JS Grey Kindergarten in West Preston for similar reasons. We work very closely with council on urban greenery, which I think is a really important agenda in our part of the world. People would like to see more trees, more vegetation, particularly across those parts of Preston and Reservoir that are currently relatively sparse compared to the metropolitan average. We have some great work that Minister Dimopoulos in a former role set in train, where we are planting a thousand trees across Preston and Reservoir, but that has required working very closely of course with council on the land, the locations and the maintenance. And there is also some work that is being undertaken at the moment with Melbourne Water on the Regent linear reserve. There has been a longstanding challenge in that region, part of Reservoir and Preston, that there has been this reserve there that has simply got nothing on it largely, except for sort of unmown introduced grasses. We are very hopeful that between Melbourne Water and council we can actually get some planting going there. But again, that is part of the important work that we as local representatives try and do with council.

Many people in this place will be familiar with the challenge that we need to work very closely with council on road safety, and often when we are doing so we are working on intersections that literally bring together state roads and council roads in the same intersection. We have a somewhat infamous example, which is the Boldrewood–Broadway roundabout in Reservoir East – unfortunately a very poorly designed roundabout. If we had our time again, we would design it very differently. It has got two lanes. It has got five entries. It is an absolute mess. Three of the roads going into it are council roads and two going into it are state government roads, so we are working closely with council at the moment not only on applying the school zone there, which has improved the safety, but now trying to get some electronic signs up and going so that people who come to the intersection who do not know it as well – and local residents know it very well – recognise that there is in fact a school zone across that particular intersection that we are working with council on.

We are also very pleased to receive some funding to upgrade AG Davis reserve, which is, again, a project that is going to be partly funded by council and partly funded by our Victorian state government. We are still working through some of the details of that upgrade, particularly the need for some shade sails there. It is just another example of the many, many local projects that we need to work together on. As a state government we are collaborating actually in this case with the federal government to put in some significant new social housing at 61 Johnson Street. This is a topic we have discussed extensively with the community. But even a project like that, which is a federal government project, requires us to work with council on the parking arrangements and the local roads, which again are their responsibility.

We are also working on some matters to do with Darebin Community Sports Stadium and the maintenance there. We have somehow ended up in a slightly unusual situation where the Victorian government owns the asset – it is on Department of Education land and we own the building – but Darebin council is responsible for the maintenance. I think some further work is being done and needs to be done to get those maintenance arrangements right at that stadium. We do have a problem for some of the people playing sport there at the moment where some of the ceiling insulation is actually falling onto the courts. As you would well imagine, if you are playing any sort of sport that requires moving around quickly, as most sports do – a lot of basketball is played there – it is a huge problem to have parts of the insulation in the building falling onto the ground. We hope again to work closely with council to see some improvements there. I know Luke Van Rijn and everyone at the Darebin Basketball Association in particular are keen to see some further expansion of that facility beyond maintenance. That will certainly be a matter we will have to work closely with local council on. There is an interesting idea actually that they may want to build a new basketball facility down at TW Blake reserve, which we would really welcome.

We are currently in the process of expanding Preston High to a second campus. The location for that will be on Cramer Street on what was formerly Melbourne Polytechnic land. But again there is a real challenge there: if we are going to get that building right, particularly if we are going to provide the students of that new campus with safe pedestrian and cycling access and also access to the oval and the playground that are there, we will have to work very closely with council to ensure that we maintain the open space and the land corridors needed to provide that access. There will be a need for conversations between Melbourne Polytechnic, Development Victoria, Preston High and Darebin council to get that right. It is an important issue we look forward to working closely with council on.

As you would know, Acting Speaker, the bill also touches on rates, and I would just like to briefly note that this is an area of important consideration – just how we set up rates. A lot of people think a lot about economic inequality, which is a very important topic in our society. Most of the levers that go to income inequality are levers that the federal government has. But I do not think it should be underrated that council rates, as a broad-based land taxation system, are actually really important for inequality. I know something we have spoken to previous ministers about is just whether those arrangements could be more progressive and particularly whether there is an opportunity with vacant land taxes to allow councils, as we do at a state government level, to levy those differential vacant rates on buildings that are not being used. As you would probably know, Acting Speaker, from your own experience, at the moment councils can apply differential rates to vacant properties, but it is a very old-fashioned taxation arrangement. The only way that they can know that a property is vacant is if it is literally a vacant bit of land that they can drive past and see has no buildings on it.

When we look at how the vacant residential land tax is done at a state level, we now have a much more sophisticated approach where the State Revenue Office have access to utilities data and things like that, so they can see when a building is not being used. Certainly something that has been talked about and I think has got some real merit in this space is whether or not we allow councils access to the same system. I know right across Preston and Reservoir there are many buildings sitting very obviously unused. It really frustrates people when they are commercial buildings on High Street. I do not have to think very hard to think of the huge one just up from our office on the corner of Bell and High streets

that is just sitting there at the moment providing nothing but a home for pigeons and rats. We would love to see that be put to better use. Allowing council to levy a vacant rate on that would hopefully encourage those landowners to think a little bit more about possibly either developing it themselves or alternatively, if they do not feel they want to, selling it to someone who has the opportunity to do so. There are a whole lot of spaces where I am so pleased to see that we as a government are moving on rates reform, and I certainly commend the components that are here in the bill before us on exactly that front.

Then of course there is the integrity stuff. The member for Werribee is here, and I thought he spoke very well to what I believe he called the Wyndham amendments. I will not cover that territory except to say of course, as the Premier has made very clear, that integrity is absolutely vital in politics. It is vital to us locally in Preston and Reservoir. There are some allegations that sometimes fly around on social media – we probably all get them as MPs – that apparently we are all corrupt. I certainly say and put on the record in the chamber that we do not take donations from anyone seeking to influence government. In fact locally our campaign team do not take any donations except from our friends, our family and from local Labor Party members. I can say on a personal note that I do not own any property except for the house that is our residential home. I have never owned an investment property in my life. I have certainly never taken money from a businessperson for the purpose of influencing anything – not a gift or anything like that. I do not own any financial assets except for our family home. We certainly think integrity is very important in our local campaign, as it is important at a local council level. For that reason I will commend this bill, particularly those measures that enhance integrity, to the house.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (15:30): I rise to speak and make a contribution on the Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026. The bill specifically seeks to increase the integrity and governance standards of local councils across the state by implementing recommendations from the Operation Sandon report and the Whittlesea commission of inquiry; improving the operation of the Local Government Act 2020; enabling the establishment of a local government fair jobs code and a framework for monitoring and enforcing compliance with the code by council chief executive officers, being the CEOs; and amending the City of Melbourne Act 2001 to increase the ratio between the lowest and highest differential rates for the City of Melbourne.

As someone who served six years in local government, including four years as mayor of Greater Shepparton City Council, I have seen firsthand the importance of ensuring good governance and integrity. Councillors must be held to the highest accountability and expectations. I have also seen the importance of working with the three tiers of government, advocating for your communities and ensuring that state, federal and local government have a really great synergy. I saw the impact that that has on their communities.

It is also worth mentioning, while I think of it, that the Greater Shepparton City Council will be in Parliament House next sitting week, showcasing our amazing region and all the industries and businesses. It is an opportunity to really showcase who we are to the Parliament and visitors coming in during the next sitting week. I encourage everyone in the house to make sure they attend that.

I also understand from local government the opportunities and the challenges that councils can face every day. Local government is the level of government closest to the community. Victorians rightly expect their councils to be well managed, financially responsible and focused on delivering outcomes for local communities. It is where residents often turn to, and strong communities rely on strong local government. Too often we see disruption in councils, and at times councillor issues and behaviours have a significant impact on the council and the broader community.

We must do all we can to ensure that local government does function well and that those given the privilege of being elected representatives of their communities act with the highest level of integrity and in a respectful way but are also supported. It is really important. I did often see firsthand in-house bullying with councillors or the breakdown of relationships. We need to make sure that local

government has the measures in place and has the legislation at its fingertips so that that can be managed. It can be a harsh environment when you go into public life, as we all know in this place, but with the role comes an enormous responsibility to the people you serve, something that should never be taken for granted or compromised. Victorians deserve local governments delivering for the people. As we have seen from previous incidents and cases, when governance failures and corruption are brought into the public spotlight, it has a ripple effect on the community and erodes that trust people have in local government and their councillors.

I have two councils in my electorate: Greater Shepparton City Council and Moira Shire Council. With both councils I have a great working relationship. Back in March 2023 the Moira shire councillors were all sacked. At the time this took place there was no doubt there were very serious issues that had to be dealt with, and severe consequences. The community will be left without councillor representatives in Moira shire until 2028, another two years away, in line with the next local government elections. This decision has had an enormous impact on the community, and I know firsthand how much the support of local councillors on the ground means to the locals. It is because of these circumstances and failings that change needs to happen so that this does not happen again.

It is important to acknowledge all the work that the current Moira shire CEO Matt Morgan and the administrators are doing. Having no councillors is a huge gap. I must say that having fly-in administrators who move to a community where they have no connections or history in the town is challenging and also really frustrating for the community. Local government is the level of government, as I have said, closest to the community. The community want to know their local councillors, and they want their local councillors to represent them. There is a reason why we have elected representatives voted in by the people, and it is a shame that the democratic right has been taken away from the people of the Moira shire. It should never get to that, and change is needed.

There was another recent incident where, as we know, municipal monitors were appointed to Wyndham City Council after its former mayor refused to resign despite a unanimous vote of no confidence from fellow councillors. It was clearly a debacle. There needed to be procedures in place that were not there. The community deserved better.

There clearly need to be better processes in place, but we also must have the right protections in place for councillors. The councillor code of conduct has had some serious weaknesses, which during my time in local government I saw firsthand and which caused some significant issues amongst the councillors and the staff. But I do want to acknowledge the many wonderful councillors who do the right thing and who work tirelessly for their communities. We need more suitable people in local government. We need more local community champions that want to come into that space.

A change that did happen in the Greater Shepparton City Council at the last election was that they went to single-member wards, which I feel has not worked well. In two of the wards we only had one candidate, which gave one choice for those wards. Hopefully the result that came from that election will encourage others, because there was a huge amount of feedback, with the community being unhappy with not having choice at that election.

In regard to the bill, both the IBAC's Operation Sandon in its special report and the Commission of Inquiry into the Whittlesea City Council found a number of deficiencies in council processes. Operation Sandon investigated corrupt conduct involving property developers, councillors and council officers, primarily at the City of Casey. IBAC's 2022 report made 34 recommendations to strengthen local government integrity and accountability, most of which have already been implemented. The bill implements the remainder, covering mandatory model governance rules, CEO employment arrangements, strengthened conflict-of-interest reporting and enhanced principal councillor conduct registrar reporting. One recommendation not implemented is a ban on political donations. The Whittlesea commission of inquiry, established in 2025 following the return of elected councillors after four years under administration, examined governance, the councillor code of conduct, the CEO role and legislative framework at Whittlesea. It made 17 recommendations, 13 directed at the Victorian

government, covering mayoral accountability, councillor code of conduct, CEO arrangements and legislative reform. The government says the bill gives effect to several of these, including the process for declaring a mayoral or deputy mayoral vacancy. New governance rules strengthen CEO arrangements and expand dispute resolution.

We broadly support the governance and integrity reforms arising from Operation Sandon and the Whittlesea commission of inquiry where they clearly strengthen transparency, accountability and local government. However, several provisions in the bill will only be operationalised by ministerial regulation and risk harming council CEOs, councillors, small business and ratepayers. Chief among these are the local government fair jobs code and regulator, which present a major cost-of-living risk for ratepayers and open the door to weakening the rate-capping regime that protects against rate hikes. The government is establishing the legislative framework for the code and regulator before consulting the sector or realising the regulations it will enforce. CEOs will be responsible for compliance subject to annual assessments, with the regulator able to investigate and publicly name noncompliant CEOs. No independent sector-wide evidence supports the government's insecure work rationale. The Municipal Association of Victoria's survey data across 54 councils shows permanent, ongoing staff average 75 per cent of the workforce, with 92 per cent of councils exceeding national benchmarks for long-serving employees, and existing Commonwealth Fair Work protections already cover job security and casual arrangements. The code could force contracted services back in-house, undermining service delivery in areas like waste and leisure and raising costs for ratepayers while exposing CEOs to public naming for noncompliance they cannot delegate. Regional and rural councils face the sharpest impact, given existing workforce pressures, and consultation to date appears to have favoured unions over local government and industry peak bodies.

Another amendment the bill seeks to enact is regarding the employment and performance management of a council CEO. It is one of the most important decisions that a council can make, and it is incredibly important that councils approach this responsibly with the attention and detail it deserves but also while having the appropriate independent oversight mechanisms in place to support sound decision-making.

Another aspect of the bill I will briefly touch on that I would like to speak to from personal experience is around some amendments the bill makes regarding when a councillor stands for election in this place. Like me, there are often members that have come to this place from local government. I feel that it was a really great grounding before I came into state government. The bill attempts to deal with introducing a requirement for councillors to take a leave of absence when nominating for Victorian state elections, something which has been best practice for managing conflicting duties and ensuring that there is a clear separation between the role of a councillor and of a candidate.

I did this when I ran for state Parliament four years ago. At the time I was serving as mayor of Greater Shepparton City Council. In announcing my intention to stand for office in this place as the member for Shepparton I resigned as mayor and took a leave of absence, because it was the right thing to do. I really think when you have a conflict as mayor and you are wearing that hat it is difficult to wear two hats. It is important that we have correct measures in place so the council can manage that, because the community have a very high expectation that when a mayor is representing their community they should not be running around campaigning and advocating. They must be very, very clear of their position at that time. I support the amendments to the bill.

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park) (15:40): I am pleased to add my comments to this important bill, the Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026. The bill sets out to continue to provide the changes needed so that communities can have confidence in the way that their local government operates and represents their needs and their interests. From time to time we will have bills such as this one presented. Importantly, I rise because my community in Whittlesea had a commission of inquiry into the behaviours, if you like, of one councillor in particular who was also mayor at the time, but also other matters to do with the administration of the council.

There are many other reforms in this bill that arise from other inquiries, including Operation Sandon and the special report that came out of that, and the government's commitment to creating a local government fair jobs code and regulator. All of these things touch on very critical issues of accountability and expectations around how councils – local government – are to function within a modern frame of understanding and expectations by Victorians.

Councils, we note, shape the everyday lives of Victorians through the services that they provide. They manage significant sums of money that are collected through annual rates. Victorians quite rightly expect councils to operate with honesty, transparency and strong governance. I do want to note the fact that I know that councils have worked very hard, as a general rule, as a level of government over the years to improve training for councillors to ensure that they come to their elected positions with a clear understanding of what we mean by ethics and ethical behaviour and how they can avoid putting themselves in very compromised situations, sometimes simply by wanting to do the right thing. There are stringent conditions around how to manage conflict-of-interest rules; improve councillor conduct processes; strengthen governance arrangements around the CEOs, because they too can sometimes fall short of what communities expect; and support better council integrity, accountability and governance all round. Importantly, the bill does provide for a local government fair jobs code and establishes a regulatory framework for that code.

There are various other amendments that are being made, as the bill makes very clear. I do want to go to issues that occurred in the City of Whittlesea. Sadly, the recent history of the City of Whittlesea has seen the council dismissed after an investigation and report by Yehudi Blacher, a well-regarded senior public servant who was recently retired at that point. The council was dismissed for about four years in late 2020. Democracy was restored, if you like, as part of the regular council elections that were held in October 2024. During that time the work of the commissioners was pretty thorough to ensure that they were able to get the council administration to a point where ratepayers and residents were confidently able to vote and see a new group of people come in in October 2024.

However, sometimes individuals themselves can foul the nest, if I may say that. Unfortunately we had a situation where, as a result of those elections, a mayor was appointed by the councillors by the name of Cr Aidan McLindon, who within a very, very short period of time decided that he was best off to represent the good people of Werribee at the time from the position of mayor and councillor in the outer northern suburbs of Melbourne. That did not go down very well at all with the local community – a community who had only a few months before then actually elected a new batch of councillors with a lot of promise from this particular councillor and mayor. The behaviour of this mayor knew no rhyme or reason. He was a person who put himself first and thought that he could very much plug into what was going on in Werribee. We then had a situation where the councillors with the laws that existed then were able to and did in fact pass a unanimous motion of no confidence in the mayor. I really want to commend each and every one of them, from a whole variety of political persuasions, who understood the gravity of the situation that they were faced with. What happened after that, of course, was that another review was done – a commission of inquiry yet again into Whittlesea. What was found and reported to the Minister for Local Government was that some very serious problems and behaviours had occurred. Further reforms were accepted by way of recommendations to the government, and they are contained in this bill.

Perhaps if I can just go to those particular matters, the laws that were somewhat deficient are now going to be addressed. For example, the bill that we have in front of us enables a council to declare vacant the office of the mayor or deputy mayor where that person was elected for a one-year term, and that is to deal with the very problems that we have seen. This reform gives councils that clarity and flexibility in being able to manage leadership positions when confidence has broken down. I say this advisedly: you had a unanimous vote of no confidence by all of the remaining councillors who passed judgement on one person who was absolutely bringing the City of Whittlesea and its ratepayers into disrepute. They had very limited ways of being able to manage the mayor and the conduct of the mayor, which very clearly blurred the roles and mixed up the loyalties, if you like, of the mayor at the

time. I am pleased that the government has introduced these reforms that strengthen local government by supporting continuity and proper governance arrangements and clarify the effect of a councillor being stood down under the act. That continues on throughout this bill. But I do sound a cautionary note that, with the acceptance of the commission of inquiry by this government, a monitor was put back into the City of Whittlesea and they are under notice. Every single one of them is under notice and under watch until at least, I would say, the end of this year. I certainly want to comment on the fact that the councillors and the administration seem to be working more clearly within what is expected in terms of the scope of transparency, good governance and ethical behaviour. That is squarely about representing the interests of local ratepayers and not potential voters on the other side of Melbourne, which is probably about 50 kilometres away. It is very important for the community for us to have delivered this.

With the very little time that I have left, I do want to commend the minister for the fine work that he has undertaken to bring this legislation and also the house amendments. He has worked very, very quickly to be able to deal with some matters that have recently arisen that have caused concern to local communities, and that is around several councillors' behaviour at the Hepburn Shire Council. This is very important because, again, it is about using the opportunities that are within this Parliament to act quickly to restore integrity.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (15:50): I rise this afternoon to talk about the Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026. In speaking on this bill I make the observation that the three councils that sit proudly under the watchful eye of the Polwarth electorate have not exactly been particularly happy with some of the proposed changes in this bill. They have each reached out to me in recent weeks saying they understand why some of these changes are being proposed following on from some of the government inquiries, at Whittlesea and Operation Sandon and others. There is always a need to make sure that when we have inquiries there is some follow-up and some changes are made. But an observation I would make on the operation of councils over recent years is we often talk in this place about how local government is the closest form of government to the community, and that is very true.

There is no doubt that good councils with good councillors provide often a very good service and great representation to their communities. I would say in their defence that Surf Coast shire mayor Cr Libby Stapleton, Colac Otway mayor Cr Jason Schram and mayor Kate Makin in Corangamite shire do a great job representing their communities, and I give the three of them a shout-out. I have managed in my job to maintain good relations with those three representatives. We have regular meetings and contact, and it is an important role that they play. They are at the coalface on many of the minute issues that happen from time to time but at the end of the day, particularly in regional communities, are very, very important issues. Those three mayors and their CEOs approached me and said, 'Look, we're happy to accept some of the changes, but once again this seems like state government overstep.' It is the state government actually trying to busy itself in the operations of these local communities and wanting to have more control, ultimately, over how they operate.

My three shires look after one of Victoria's busiest visitor areas, that being the Great Ocean Road. When you have your population many, many, many times over double and quadruple over a few months period, you cannot possibly be expected to do that with your normal, run-of-the-mill staff. With the demands that visitors from all over Australia and the world make when they come to our part of the Great Ocean Road, the community still needs to provide some basic services, but that cannot be done all year round. Communities like Lorne and Apollo Bay, for example, sit in their off-peak seasons perhaps in Lorne's case at 900-odd people and in Apollo Bay's case at maybe 1200 or 1500 people. Those communities balloon out to many tens of thousands of people over peak periods, and so a good council will need a flexible workforce. They will need to have arrangements in place where they can scale up and scale down, and there is a real concern amongst those municipalities that the local government fair jobs code and the associated bureaucracy – really only a 12-year-old Victorian Labor

government could dream up the level of bureaucracy – to match a new regulator are really quite a costly, burdensome imposition on a system that most of the community does not believe is broken.

The desire of those communities to be able to flex basic services – waste, rubbish collection, cleaning up after major events and operating extra services over peak periods are all pretty normal, run-of-the-mill types of operations that the community and ratepayers would expect their council to operate with. Yet this government is saying to them, 'Well, hang on a minute, we've done a backroom deal with the Australian Workers' Union and we're going to sit in the back blocks and we're going to sort of force employment options onto you, so we're going to tell you how and when and why you're going to employ people and how much you're going to pay them and how you're going to operate.' Unfortunately, if we look at the model that most councils have been forced to offload in our communities, and that is around many of the aged care services, with changes to aged care reform, many of our councils provided those services but it had just become too cost prohibitive. So one of the problems that we are finding in more remote regional communities is that it is a real struggle to find the workforce to provide those services, because the council operating structures, which are so much more burdensome than many other service providers, just are not able to necessarily provide the workforce at a cost that the community is prepared to bear.

One of the concerns I have about this is where the state government finds itself in a position where it wants to force a cost structure and an operating structure onto, at times, very small councils. I mean, Corangamite shire, at around 15,000 people, Colac Otway at around 20,000 and Surf Coast at around 25,000 people, are relatively very small municipalities that have very big flexing up responsibilities at certain times of the year. And the rest of the year they simply cannot afford some of the cost implications that a bill like this is likely to force upon them. So that has been one of the main concerns, and it is a shame that the government has not seen fit to separate out the two issues, because it is important, as I said in my opening comments, that the opportunity for reforms around Operation Sandon and the Whittlesea commission of inquiry come before this Parliament and get sorted out. Operation Sandon, of course, has been going on forever – since 2022, since the last election – and here we are at the death knell of this current Parliament and we are finally getting some action on it at a parliamentary level. So it is important, but it is a shame that this Parliament again is having to deal with a bill that is neither one thing nor the other, and it is mixing good and bad. It is mixing oil and water. It is creating a situation that many of us just cannot support because it is going to deliver perverse, unintended consequences. It is disappointing that, when you talk to the Municipal Association of Victoria and you talk to other interest groups in local government, they have all pointed this out to the government, which has been slow to pick it up.

We accept that this bill that is presented today is the first bill of a new minister, and I understand that he has been attempting to listen to the concerns from the industry and others, both in this house and the other, to see what we can do. So there are some amendments being proposed, but the opposition cannot see a reason why the local government fair jobs code and regulator cannot be dealt with separately to some of the other proposed changes in this bill.

Just as a more general rule when we talk about local councils, it is certainly my experience, in dealing with local councils now for quite some time, that they operate at their best and they provide the best services to the community when the local skills and expertise of the councillors from the community have an opportunity to operate at their best, and increasingly we have seen a dilution of influence of local councillors. We have seen government continually put restrictions and controls over the way councils operate, and I have always been very firmly of the view that, like all democracies, those that get elected rise and fall on the decisions that they make and the way they conduct themselves and how well they relate to and communicate with their community. I have often felt that we regularly try and bring regulation into local government that speaks to the worst performers rather than the best performers.

I would have to say at the moment that across my local councils, while many ratepayers might have their particular views on the wise operation or other of some councils, by and large they do a pretty

good job. They manage to keep the three councils in Polwarth operating quite functionally, but they are regularly hamstrung in the decisions they can make and in the way they liaise and communicate and work with their community simply because at some point in the past some councillor somewhere in the state has behaved poorly or badly and, as a result, the government has tweaked and changed and restricted all councillors' ability to communicate with their ratepayers. I think that is actually not the best outcome. I have a view that where possible we should embrace the councils that we have, allow them to function operationally and hold them to account at election.

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (16:00): I would never accuse the member for Polwarth of fake news, but I wish Hutch Hussein all the best in the upcoming election. The reason I do so is because the member of Polwarth seems to have missed a really significant problem in his community. He lauded Colac Otway council as having no issues at all – no issues ever, totally fine, 'Nothing to see here' – except on 31 January 2025 the monitor's report for that council landed. And what did they say? This is from the monitor's report:

> **In summary** I observed the following:
>
> > **A lack of understanding and/or acceptance by Councillors of their role**, with Councillors focused primarily on operational rather than strategic matters.

Richard Riordan interjected.

Mathew HILAKARI: I notice the member for Polwarth is keen to interrupt because it goes counter to exactly what he said a few moments ago. He said, 'Nothing to see here. All my councillors are great. They're going wonderfully. This is other people's problems.' It also says:

> **A failure by Councillors to fulfil their roles as leaders and stewards of the organisation** …
>
> **A culture of mistrust, blame and on occasion hostility**, with very low to no trust existing between Councillors –

the member for Polwarth thought it was all a CEO problem; it does not sound like it, not according to the monitor –

> some Councillors and the CEO, Councillors and Council staff, and Council and the community – resulting in dysfunctional relationships, inappropriate behaviour and poor governance

Oh dear, that is a little bit embarrassing, isn't it? I will continue:

> **A lack of accountability** –

again, the member for Polwarth interrupted to say it was all a problem with the CEO –

> Councillors were unable or unwilling to hold their peers to account in a constructive way, enabling poor, and in some cases harmful, behaviour to occur

Remember, this is all a CEO issue – definitely the CEO! – except according to the monitor who provided this report. It continues:

> **Poor decision making and delegation practices** contributing to poor outcomes and inadequate risk management

I wonder what that is all about. I look forward to reading the rest of the report later. It continues:

> **Breaches of Council's governance framework** including obligations outlined in legislation …

Richard Riordan interjected.

Mathew HILAKARI: I cannot believe you are lauding this council, member for Polwarth. I cannot believe the member for Polwarth is interjecting and was lauding this council in his speech – you can check *Hansard* in a moment – when this says:

> Poor decision making and delegation practices …
>
> Breaches of Council's governance framework …

> A failure to exercise Council's obligation as an employer …

I will just take a moment to talk about councils as employers. Of course we should talk to the ASU, the appropriate union that supports workers, because sometimes the leadership at council, both councillors and the CEO, get it wrong, so they need a robust, supportive union. I note the member for Polwarth is walking out of the chamber now. He has had enough. Number 8:

> A lack of understanding and/or concern in relation to the financial management of the organisation …

Well, there we go. That is what good governance looks like, according to the member for Polwarth. It is all the CEO's fault – except when it is all the councillors' fault. It is all about the community, except for the poor relationship that they had with the community. This is a community – and I do not know if the member for Polwarth got this right – of over 22,000 residents. They deserve a good council. They deserve a bill like this to pass through this Parliament, and they deserve the amendments which the minister has fortunately put together in a very timely manner. They deserve that because we deserve good governance at our councils.

By the way, the member for Polwarth said there is very little need for monitors and overadministration and a total burden on ratepayers. Well, five of 79 councils are currently under monitoring, and 17 of 79 were previously under monitors. That is 22 out of 79. Let that sink in for a second. That is more than a quarter of councils requiring monitors. That is a big deal, and that goes to all communities, not just metropolitan councils. It goes to all communities across the state, and Colac Otway council is a good example of it.

Now I would like to talk about the community that I represent. Both the councils, over the term of Parliament that I have been elected as a member, have been under monitors, and for good reason, Wyndham particularly so. I want to talk a little bit about Wyndham. Over the course of this term of Parliament, Wyndham City Council has transferred $36 million in developer contributions out of the area that those were produced in. That means householders in the community that I represent have had funds – money that has been delivered to build the sporting facilities, to build the swimming pools, to upkeep the area and make sure we have an even greater community than we have today – taken by council across to another part of the municipality.

I do not mind that councils make good decisions about the needs of particular parts of communities, but I do mind if they take developer contributions, because developer contributions absolutely should be spent in the community that collects them on the resources and facilities that they need to make our communities even greater than they are today. This $36 million of developer contributions, the only reason that it had the opportunity to be taken from our community is because some of it was collected 30 years ago. The law has changed since then, and for good reason: to prevent exactly this. Why was it that this $36 million was not a going political concern for the last 30 years? Because the budgets that are provided by Wyndham City Council are so opaque. There is a line item called 'Reserves' and it has over $3.7 billion in it. The notes to their budget talk about how it is mainly developer contributions, and of course that $36 million got lost in that. Of course they never extrapolated that out, unlike state government budgets, which go through all manner of projects and time out when they are due and when they need to be delivered and even look at the out years – because I know a member might raise this in just one moment – so we can account for the projects that we do. We set that out on a yearly basis for the forward estimates and beyond. This $36 million got lost behind the couch, according to the council, and suddenly they found it, and suddenly they decided with a change of the council to spend it somewhere else, not in the community that I represent, not in the community that put together those contributions as part of the developer contributions.

What does it mean in a practical sense? It means no pool in Point Cook of course, because if they spent the money at that time, they could have built a pool. It means that we are 12 basketball courts short in just the suburb of Point Cook alone. That means kids over at Eagle Stadium in Werribee have a 500-person waitlist just to play basketball. It means kids in the Altona Sports Centre have shortened games. What does that mean for the community that I represent? It means young people with not as much to

do. It means young people not working in a team sport. It means young people without access to wonderful mentors who are coaching or referees who are setting norms of behaviour. So it goes deeper than just being able to play basketball on the weekend or other affiliated sports; it goes to how our community progresses.

I did have Wyndham council in this Parliament appearing in front of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee some time ago, and at that point I did ask the CEO and the then deputy mayor, who has just announced that he will be resigning next year, what they had spent on IT processes, and they could not tell me. They could tell me all manner of things. They could tell me that the cost estimates that I had were wrong, but they could not tell me the actual cost to the community of these IT services. The real problem was not that they escalated in costs and that they had to cancel the contract and do another contract. That was not actually the real problem. The real problem was they were never up-front with their community about what had happened and it was hidden away in their budgets. Still today we do not know how much Wyndham council has spent on these IT processes. Good IT processes? Sure, but it should not have cost tens of millions of dollars on the way through and certainly should have been disclosed to the community. This is the sort of bill that helps to bring about some of the reforms that are required.

I also want to acknowledge the member for Werribee's declaration, in the limited time that I have left, that the Wyndham amendment is part of this bill, which relates to how you get rid of your mayor or deputy mayor when they have lost the confidence of the council. This is an important thing for the community that I represent. All of the councillors barring one, the mayor himself, said that that mayor should go because of his behaviour, and eventually he did after a long community campaign supported by the member for Werribee and supported by others. Eventually he did go, but he should have gone straightaway. This bill strengthens our accountabilities and our governance at councils. I do commend this bill to the house, and I look forward to its speedy passage.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (16:10): I love following the member for Point Cook. You do not even have to write a speech after you follow the member for Point Cook, because you can just talk about the things that he just raised. The thing that comes to my mind initially is that very old saying, the pot calling the kettle black. He talked about IT upgrades and cost overruns. Could I rhetorically ask the member for Point Cook: what happened with Myki? How many billions of dollars was Myki over? How was that reported? He talked about the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. Has there ever actually been a straight answer from a Labor minister at PAEC? I doubt very much that has ever happened.

Mathew Hilakari: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member is struggling to understand that there is a budget set out every year and delivered to this Parliament.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Lauren Kathage): That is not a point of order.

Peter WALSH: Yes, there is a parliamentary budget, and it is very detailed, but why have we constantly got cost overruns? Every major project in Victoria has blown out in cost, so despite what may be printed in the budget, they are not managed well. There has been a litany of projects. We could speak for hours on all the projects in Victoria that have had cost overruns.

If I come back to Myki, we are finally catching up with the world, where you can tap your credit card to get on a tram. We have finally got that. But hang on, on the two train lines that run into my electorate we have not even had Myki yet. Come on, there are a lot of people that live outside your little bubble here in Melbourne that do not get any of the services that you just take for granted.

You talk about IT upgrades. Greater Western Water – that went brilliantly. Being a customer of Greater Western Water here in Melbourne, I wondered why I had not got a water bill for a long time. Finally a water bill bobbed up in my email saying, 'We just had a little bit of trouble with our IT upgrades. We're not sure if we've billed you or haven't billed you, but could you please pay this bill?' If I remember rightly, I think the Victorian Treasurer actually had to give a letter of comfort to Greater

Western Water for $200 million because they had not collected their water bills. That was a way of making sure they were still solvent.

The member for Point Cook painted a litany of problems with the two councils in his electorate, but I think we can say there is an equal litany of problems with the state Labor government. I am not sure who we can appoint as a monitor. Perhaps the Carroll government, given it is a new start. Everything matters now: 'We're not going to have pot plants that we spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on for years.' That is going to be cut out. 'We're going to cut out the waste and corruption.' Oh, that is right. There was $15 billion worth of corruption on major projects – $15 billion. Yes, the member might have talked about some money going from one part of his local government area to another, but it did actually go into something. 'Oh, sorry, the $15 billion went into someone's pocket, but not the people that actually counted through that particular time.' Perhaps there should actually be a monitor for the Carroll government.

If you think about the spend in regional Victoria on infrastructure, member for Point Cook, it is 11 per cent of the infrastructure spend consistently year after year, with the independent Parliamentary Budget Office reporting that the spend in regional Victoria is way below the percentage of the population in regional Victoria. That is why we have our fair share guarantee, going to the election, to make sure that there is actually more money spent in regional Victoria so it actually equates to the percentage of the population that lives out there. We want to see that money spent in regional Victoria.

On local government, I feel sorry for councillors. Every time a Labor government mess with the Local Government Act 2020, they actually make the life of a councillor worse. I think there were a lot of people who held out hope when Adem Somyurek, as the minister at the time, actually had a review of the Local Government Act and was going to rewrite the Local Government Act. I thought there might have been some hope there that councillors could actually get some power back into their elected positions in their own municipalities. But that new act that the minister brought in at that time actually made it worse for councillors. Yes, local governments are constitutional creatures of state government and therefore the Parliament makes legislation that hopefully helps them manage their processes in a local government area, but what has happened under Labor is that councillors are constantly being disempowered from actually making decisions to run their own council.

Jade Benham interjected.

Peter WALSH: As the member for Mildura interjected – it is unruly to take it, but I will – they are decorative, and the CEOs are empowered as they are disempowered. That does not lead to people wanting to be in local government. It does not lead to constructive debate in the council chamber. Not having sat in a council chamber, as I understand it there are briefing meetings that are done in private where everything is laid out for the councillors. I have had complaints in my electorate from ratepayers that go to an open council meeting in front of the public and something is moved and seconded and goes through without any debate. Unfortunately at one council a councillor actually let the cat out of the bag and said, 'Well, I move the motion as per what we discussed at the briefing session.' That just blew the whistle that, yes, they had been told what was going on but he could not do it in public, because the CEO did not want him to. There is a whole issue about councillors being disempowered and the CEO and the senior staff being empowered.

You cannot raise anything with a council. We have got an issue in Echuca at the moment, and I actually rang up one of the councillors and said, 'Can I talk to you about this?' I got a rocket from the office saying, 'You cannot talk to councillors. You have to actually go and talk to council staff.' Why can't I, as an elected member representing that particular area in this Parliament, talk to a councillor about a particular issue? But 'No, no, no, you can't do that, you've got to actually talk to the director in that portfolio area.' What has the CEO got to hide? What has the CEO got to hide that they will not let councillors talk? This is a problem with the Local Government Act. This is a problem that the Labor Party has brought on local government here in Victoria. They have disempowered councillors. They effectively have no rights. Yes, they will get it wrong at times, but they are accountable to their

electorate. It is no different to the fact that a Labor government makes a mess of Victoria. They will be accountable to the electorate at the end of November this year. They will get unceremoniously thrown out of office, and a Liberal and National government will have to come in again to clean up the mess and try and manage our way through an absolute mountain of debt, a litany of contracts that have been signed that are bad contracts and a litany of projects that have been mismanaged over time.

I can remember from our time in government – to finish – that we actually invested funding into the Murray Basin rail project. It was a great project for regional Victoria and a great project to get trucks off the road, get freight onto rail, get it to the port and make the whole system a lot more efficient for our export industries. What happened? One person, former Premier Jacinta Allan, was the minister in charge of that project, and it went from bad to worse. It was mismanaged and the money was spent. Michael McCormack, as the federal minister, put in an additional $200 million to try and finish that project. That just fixed up the botches without going to any of the other new railway lines that needed doing. What was the minister's comment at the end of it all? It was a mess of a project, and with all the government funding spent, trains from Mildura were actually running slower to Melbourne than before the project was done, and what did the minister say? 'Well, that's a project for a future government, because I've stuffed it.' The last little bit is my words, but that is effectively what she said. Paraphrasing: 'I've stuffed this project, so a future government can sort it out sometime in the future.'

The Liberals and Nationals will be opposing this legislation. We believe it is time that the Labor government actually let local government manage their own affairs more and be accountable to their ratepayers, rather than be accountable to some faceless people and particularly some of the Labor hacks who are put in as monitors to oversee local government.

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Jobs, Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Defence Industry) (16:20): I move:

> That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

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.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (16:21): I am more than happy to rise to make a quick contribution on the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026 this afternoon. When we talk about fair work and working from home, the first thing that enters my mind is COVID, and this is obviously where this has come from. You cannot help but be a little reflective about that time. I would reflect, but it is also a little bit traumatic. The Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Act 2009 and the Victoria Police Act 2013 allow specified Commonwealth protections concerning fixed-term contracts and casual employment to operate for relevant non-executive Victorian police sector and local government employees; extend flexible working and pay secrecy rights to specified public office holders, executives and higher managerial employees; and permit law enforcement officers to bargain and workplace determinations to be made about a wider range of employment matters presently excluded from the referral. They also establish the relationship between the Commonwealth act, the future police enterprise instruments, the Victoria Police Act 2013 and the dispute resolution jurisdiction of the Police Registration and Services Board.

The act will commence on a day to be proclaimed or automatically on 1 November 2026. The amending act will be repealed on 1 November 2027 without affecting the continuing operation of the

amendments it makes. The bill refers specified workplace relations matters to the Commonwealth so that the Commonwealth Fair Work Act 2009 can apply to Victorian employers and employees who do not otherwise fall within the Commonwealth's remit. The referral was designed to provide broad national system coverage while preserving exclusions concerning matters regarded as integral to the state's constitutional capacity to determine the number, identity, appointment and senior management of its public servants, together with particular matters affecting law enforcement officers. The government links those exclusions to the principles identified by the High Court in *Australian Education Union; Ex parte Victoria*.

For background, this involves the scope of the intergovernmental immunity doctrine in Australian constitutional law. In the case of the High Court, it struck down a Commonwealth law on the grounds that it impaired the capacity of a state to function as an independent government, the first time that the court has taken such action. That judgement produced the following two practical impacts. First, some later Commonwealth reforms concerning fixed-term employment, casual employment, flexible working arrangements and pay secrecy have not applied uniformly across the Victorian public sector and local government. Secondly, law enforcement officers have remained unable to bargain validly or obtain federal dispute resolution and general protection coverage in relation to certain matters, including probation, promotion, transfer, fitness, discipline and termination. The bill narrows these gaps without making a wholesale referral of every matter presently reserved to Victoria. As a side note, Victoria Police members, if they are injured or off on a psychosocial injury, cannot then claim because of a little WorkCover loophole, because they are not technically an employee of the state. That is a real problem. I have had many officers contact me with regard to that little loophole, which is a real issue. How could such an oversight have come about, where police officers are not technically employees of the state and are thus effectively subcontractors, not allowing them to get proper WorkCover? We know WorkCover has been a basket case anyway, but I shall continue.

Going back a step, Victoria Police has come out against the background of difficult enterprise bargaining cycles, and it has caused deep consternation. This is a bit of a pattern by this Labor government too. There is a bill on the program – well, we think, later on this week – the Associations Incorporation Reform Amendment Bill 2026, speaking of workplace protections, that is going to essentially leave thousands of sworn police members without workplace representation, because this Labor government wants to get rid of any union that does not donate to the Labor Party. That is the sworn police association –

Dylan Wight interjected.

Jade BENHAM: No, it is not trash. That is what the Labor government in this place want you to think, that the unions that are not associated with the Labor Party, are not associated with Trades Hall and are otherwise incorporated in the state are not real unions and do not offer –

Mathew Hilakari: On a point of order, Acting Speaker: relevance.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Lauren Kathage): I believe the member is anticipating debate.

Jade BENHAM: Apologies, Acting Speaker. I know this is not something that the Labor government want to talk about. I thought that would have been up today, but we will get to that, and that will be an interesting debate when we get to it, won't it?

On the main provisions, this is a bill that we do not oppose – for now, this one. Without anticipating debate, the rest of the week might be a little more controversial. In part 1 of this bill, 'Preliminary', clauses 1 and 2 set out the purpose and commencement. On the amendment of the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Act 2009, clause 3 inserts different definitions, including of 'casual employee', 'fixed-term contract', 'enterprise agreement', 'workplace determination', 'emergency', 'major incident', 'tasking decision' and 'transfer'. A tasking decision is a temporary transfer of a law enforcement officer for up to 14 days to mitigate, respond to or undertake recovery operations following an emergency or major incident. While we are talking about this, this is actually an

incredibly important change, having had a major police incident in our community over the last few months – in fact a couple – that has greatly affected the police attending and the police responding.

Out in this part of the state, which may come as a surprise – it is over 12,000 square kilometres – there are three sergeants and one first constable. There was a senior constable; she is now gone. But when responding to a horrific incident like that, being able to transfer officers and to move officers around from one region to another is incredibly important. Of course because there are psychosocial and mental health issues that can arise, because police are doing such a hugely difficult job responding to some of these incidents, these police officers deserve every sort of workplace protection that they can obtain. So to have left a little loophole, which effectively means that some of these officers are not covered by WorkCover is – oversight is not even the right word. It is a gross injustice to have left the officers, who have been left for so long, without the workplace protection that they have required. I hate sending thoughts and prayers, but I can only hope that this offers some sort of comfort to those officers who I know now have been battling with this government to be seen and heard for so long.

There are other provisions. As I said, this is a bill that we do not oppose, but we do have some areas of concern. On the concurrent state and Commonwealth jurisdiction, the bill overlays the Victoria Police Act 2013, the Commonwealth act, future enterprise instruments or workplace determinations and the jurisdictions of the Fair Work Commission and Police Registration and Services Board. Although the concurrent operation provisions are carefully framed, disputes may arise about inconsistency, the scope of a dispute clause and the appropriate forum. It is a valid concern.

On general protection exposure and managerial decision-making, extending part 3-1 is not a substantive change. Promotion, transfer, fitness, discipline and determination decisions will need to be documented with particular care, because adverse action proceedings often turn on the reasons of individual decision-makers. On the unquantified financial and administrative effect, neither the bill nor the explanatory memorandum, nor the second-reading material actually quantify the expected number of additional Fair Work Commission proceedings, legal costs, training requirements or demands on the Police Registration and Services Board, so we do not know what it is going to cost. We just do not know. We often say the devil is in the detail. We are being asked to say yes, and in principle we do not oppose it, but we also do not know what the implication is on that bottom line. I think that is how Labor maths works anyway.

On this bill, also of concern is that the opposition could not get a bill briefing, which is incredibly concerning. There was wide consultation that did occur. Like I said, I know most members on this side of the house have excellent relationships with their local constabulary and consult with them often; sometimes it is on the record or sometimes over a beer at the footy, but we do consult with them often. But with almost no feedback received, other than from the Police Association Victoria, who obviously support the amendments, to not be able to get a bill briefing is – again, oversight does not do it justice either; it just seems like it is ill prepared. They realised there was a loophole here when a few former police officers made some noise – and so they should have. This has been going on for a long, long time. I am not going to take up any more of the time, given there is so much work to do on several bills throughout this week. Given that we have been told, how many times now, that we have to sit for an extra week, let us get on with it.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (16:34): I would like to think this bill is a net positive for workers. I was a little bit confused by the member for Mildura. We strayed into COVID and then pseudo unions – things that I do not think are particularly relevant to the bill. I would like to say that there was actually a bill briefing on 24 July at 1 pm. I hope that clarifies that particular concern that has just been raised. It was on 24 July at 1 pm. Perhaps something was lost in translation.

Juliana Addison: Did the member for Mildura hear that?

Nina TAYLOR: I do not know. Maybe they did not talk to each other. It is good to talk to each other. Anyway, I am just putting it out there. I think it is important to clarify that, because that was

quite a strong statement to make, inferring there was not a bill briefing. But we are very happy to clarify that there has been. I hope that clears up the concerns of those opposite.

The Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026 makes important changes. This is what it is actually doing, as opposed to some of the other interesting tangents that we went on for the last, I do not know, 10 or 15 minutes or so: important changes for the working conditions and entitlements of several cohorts of Victorian workers, including Victorian public sector staff and Victoria Police. That is what it does, and I think in anyone's language that is a net positive for those workers. The bill refers relevant components of our industrial relations powers to the Commonwealth, something the Victorian government has done from time to time as needed following the initial referral of our industrial relations powers in 2009.

Let us dive into this. What is the impact on law enforcement? For law enforcement officers the bill will enable more matters relating to their employment to be the subject of enterprise bargaining and be validly included in agreements, putting them in the same position as other public sector employees on these matters. That would seem to have a strong element of equity and fairness and therefore will work to the benefit and the betterment of the working conditions of those in law enforcement.

What sorts of matters are we talking about specifically? These include employment matters such as probation; promotion; transferring an officer from place to place or position to position, subject to a deployment exception of up to 14 days; assessment of physical and mental fitness; and matters around discipline and termination of employment. I think it goes without saying that we can see the relevance of these very important matters to those workers. Importantly, where provisions relating to these matters are included in a future enterprise agreement they will be subject to bargaining and ultimately to the approval of the government. Further, law enforcement officers cannot currently seek dispute resolution through the Fair Work Commission in relation to these matters, unlike other public sector workers who could seek to enforce terms of their enterprise agreement through the Fair Work Commission. We can see, even if we look at that element alone, the impetus for these very important reforms.

These amendments will ensure that law enforcement officers can bargain over matters in broadly the same way that all other public sector employees currently are able to bargain over these same matters. Where these terms are included in an enterprise agreement or workplace determination, they will now be able to be legally the subject of dispute resolution through the Fair Work Commission or enforced through the courts. Further, under our current industrial framework law enforcement officers are subject to a different standard when it comes to general protections claims under the federal workplace protections on the basis of any adverse action taken by their employer. These reforms mean that law enforcement officers will now have access to these protections under the federal legislation in the same manner as other public sector employees. That makes infinite sense to me and everyone on this side of the chamber, because we will always back in workers.

What about the impact on the VPS? For public sector workers the bill addresses the current disparity in how recent changes to the Fair Work Act 2009 apply to members of Victoria's public sector workforce compared to those in the private sector. Our changes will ensure that recent federal amendments to the Fair Work Act now apply to the Victorian public sector and to local council employees. This includes key changes the federal Labor government introduced in their closing loopholes legislation, such as the ability to request flexible work arrangements. This means more workers can seek to amend their working arrangements to support their needs as a parent, a carer, a person with a disability or an older person, something we know is critical to ensuring greater workforce participation and more inclusive working environments. That also seems to be pretty fair and reasonable, I would have thought, and I would hope that those opposite would see the reason in that. They have said they are not going to oppose the bill, so we are going to rely on that and hope that they continue to maintain that commitment to these important improvements in terms of the lives of VPS employees.

It also includes a ban on pay secrecy, meaning that employees are no longer contractually restricted from disclosing their pay and remuneration. It will also see limitations on casual and fixed-term employment applied to non-executive public sector and local government employees as a matter of law, codifying current practices across the public sector that restrict the use of fixed-term or casual contracts for roles that are in fact ongoing in nature.

Entrenching these restrictions aligns closely with our government's secure employment agenda – again, we can see the common sense in that ongoing work is certainly preferable to a casual arrangement – which preferences ongoing and secure forms of employment over non-ongoing and insecure employment models so that more workers have certainty about the future of their roles. Apart from anything else, you can think of the ongoing payments and commitments and liabilities that regular Victorians and others will have in their lives, whether it is their mortgage, their rent, covering insurance, being able to buy their weekly groceries, looking after their kids and so on or commuting et cetera – except for under-18s of course; they have free public transport, which is terrific. And we do have half-price fares for everyone else for the remainder of 2026. I am just putting that in there, thinking about workers and looking after the rights of working people in Victoria.

Fundamentally, this bill is about bringing the scope of bargaining and the conditions of our police, law enforcement, public sector staff and local council workers into line with their counterparts, not other weird tangents. I do not know where we were going – it was a little bit space cadet – but anyway, I am bringing it back to exactly what this bill is about. We are proud to deliver these reforms, which have been long advocated for by the Police Association Victoria and the CPSU. You can see we are there for listening, but also we have worked collaboratively to ensure that these reforms make good sense and can be practically applied.

I should reiterate also that on this side of the house we are always proud to stand with workers, and we will always look for ways to improve their pay and conditions. I think that that makes perfect sense, because when you think of the amount of time that they devote to a career and the sacrifices that they make along the way – but also the self-fulfilment in roles where they work really hard, as those in law enforcement and our VPS employees most certainly do; we appreciate and respect their terrific contribution to our state – in return we are backing them in, backing in good advocacy and making sure that we are providing further protections for their working conditions and ultimately a good work–life balance and being able to maintain the home and other responsibilities they may have but also fulfilling all their working duties as well.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (16:43): I also rise to address the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026. I am grateful to the member for Mildura for her earlier contribution. I do take responsibility also for something which the member for Mildura addressed in her contribution which does not bear any resemblance to truth or accuracy. I provided her with that information, being that the government did not provide a bill briefing to the opposition. In fact I am informed that that did take place, and I am grateful to the Minister for Industrial Relations' office for doing so and to their adviser Rebecca Andrews. For clarity for the chamber, this also took place at a point when I was on leave recently, and it was information that was not accurate but was put in front of the member for Mildura, which I am happy to take responsibility for.

Jade Benham interjected.

Brad ROWSWELL: I am very happy to take responsibility when I am at fault. I think that is something that my parents taught me was the right thing to do, member for Mildura.

As the member for Mildura has outlined, the opposition will not be opposing this bill. Needless to say, I am made aware by some of the comments of my colleagues, having spoken to them and been brought up to speed somewhat on the discussions around this piece of legislation, that the conversations had in relation to forming our position on the bill were quite lively and spirited. The position we have

landed on is to not oppose the bill, principally because of the position of the Police Association Victoria, who in fact support the bill before us.

The member for Mildura addressed in some detail the concerns of the opposition, which are worth restating. It is also worthwhile considering a broader conversation here around the handing over of state powers to the Commonwealth. There is a legitimate question mark over whether the federal Fair Work Commission is equipped to deal with the matters at hand, to have a specific understanding of Victoria's circumstance, to have a specific understanding of the Victorian public sector and local government employees and to have a specific understanding of the role and the professional engagement, professional circumstance, of Victoria Police.

It is entirely appropriate that a Victorian body investigate concerns relating to Victoria Police employees. I think that is the ideal circumstance. It is a great tragedy that IBAC investigates only 2 per cent of police complaints, police corruption, as the member for Mildura will know, having served on the Parliament's Integrity and Oversight Committee, as I did in the Parliament prior to this. I think that there is a resourcing question that needs to be asked and answered there. I do not think that is acceptable. The ideal circumstances for Victoria Police, who understand the circumstances of their officers and their employees, should be that they should have some part to play in investigating circumstances that require investigation, but I do not think it is necessarily the right thing to do for them to be investigating some 98 per cent of those complaints. But it is perhaps a better circumstance than the Fair Work Commission doing so.

I understand the position of the police association, and I do not disagree with it. They are best placed to offer their opinion on behalf of their members to the opposition, and it is something we have considered. It is something which has brought us to the point of not opposing this bill today. But I do think that there are some legitimate questions around the ability of that Commonwealth body to do what this bill enables them to do in an effective way, and I think that is yet to be demonstrated. I hope they can, but it is yet to be demonstrated.

This is what happens when there are two jurisdictions concurrently working with a similar purpose or in a similar area. As has been identified by the member for Mildura, the bill overlays the Victoria Police Act 2013, the Commonwealth act and future enterprise instruments or workplace determinations in the jurisdictions of the Fair Work Commission and the Police Registration and Services Board. It appears at face value to be an area of high complexity. But given some of the things that are required to be investigated, perhaps the answer here is not greater complexity but greater certainty and greater – what is the opposite of complexity –

Jade Benham interjected.

Brad ROWSWELL: clarity, simplicity. Greater simplicity would be ideal in the circumstance – general protections, exposure and managerial decision-making.

This bill, as I am sure you would be aware, extends part 3(1) on substantive change. Promotion, transfer, fitness, discipline and termination decisions will need to be documented with particular care. Adverse action proceedings often turn on the reasons of individual decision-makers. Then there is the final concern, being the unquantified financial and administrative effect.

We are in a circumstance where this is the operating circumstance that the opposition, the alternative government, finds itself in some 95 days before the Victorian state election. We are single-minded in having a depth of understanding and a depth of knowledge when it comes to what things will cost, because frankly I just do not think we can go down the same path of governing Victoria as has been displayed during the life of the Andrews, the Allan and now the Carroll governments over the last 12 years, where there is a framework, an understanding and a basic principle that 'things cost what they cost', to quote a former Premier. We are minded to have a depth of understanding about what things actually cost before we say that they are better than button-up boots and better than sliced bread.

I do not think it is clear, certainly from my understanding of discussions I have had with colleagues, that the government has a mature understanding of the full financial and administrative effect of this bill. Neither the bill's explanatory memorandum nor the second-reading speech materially quantifies the expected number of additional Fair Work Commission proceedings, legal costs, training requirements or demands on the Police Registration and Services Board. That remains a concern. Perhaps at this point in time it is important for us as the alternative government to indicate that we expect this legislation to be passed. We expect this legislation to be passed not only in this house but also in the other place and to be enacted and come into effect shortly afterwards. We reserve our right to monitor the impact and monitor the costs closely as the bill takes effect in the time ahead.

I will end in the 30 seconds I have where I began, by simply restating the earlier apology. My engagement with the government, and certainly government ministers' offices and their advisers on matters, has been largely quite productive and constructive, and for that I am grateful to them. Perhaps the Shadow Attorney-General, who was putting together this bill report in the first place, was expressing a frustration with the former Premier's office and engagement with them. That may very well justify the mistake, which I take responsibility for.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon) (16:53): I rise to support the bill, a bill which in many respects is quite technical in detail and is seeking to clear up some anomalies. It is important to understand why these sorts of anomalies exist. I would like to draw the house's attention to the impact of the French Revolution, because England and France were in conflict during the course of the French Revolution, and it became clear and apparent to the English that the French had a very well-organised police force as a way of ensuring that there was the ability to –

Brad Rowswell: My point of order, Acting Speaker, is relevance. However, just as a point of interest, I am wondering if you can share with us, or confirm for us, if the member on his feet is in the same seat that the former member for Broadmeadows Frank McGuire used to sit in?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Lauren Kathage): There is no point of order. Member for Essendon to continue, and I trust that it will come back around.

Danny PEARSON: Of course. The issue here is that there is a notion of separation of powers, which is the kernel of why there was different treatment in relation to Victoria Police officers. That goes back to the fact the English had a very different view in relation to modern policing. Sir Robert Peel – and I would have thought the member for Sandringham was a devotee of such an august representative as Sir Robert Peel – had the Peelian principles, among which was that the police are the people and the people are the police. That is why, for example, policing in England was devolved at a local level by having those boroughs. The Home Office in the mid-19th century sought to assert some level of centralised control in relation to the way in which policing was to be administered in England. That was rejected at that time, and it was only as a consequence of World War I, when there were a number of hostile actions – there were police strikes in 1918 and 1919, and we had our own police strike here in 1923–24 – that you saw that centralised power and control in relation to the police force. Why is this relevant? It is relevant because modern Western liberal democracies, particularly of a Commonwealth derivative, have taken the view that you need to treat these matters quite carefully.

The Kennett government made a determination back in 1996 that it would refer all its industrial powers on to the Howard government upon the Howard government's election on 2 March 1996. But they made a point that they did not want to provide the Commonwealth with a degree of oversight in relation to some of the industrial conditions that Victoria Police were experiencing, because the Kennett government made a determination, which was only fit and proper, that those matters should have been properly dealt with at a state level. That was all fair and reasonable. But the reality is that as time has gone on it has become clearer that there have been some levels of inconsistency and some sworn officers of Victoria Police have been disadvantaged, which is why this matter has been raised by the Police Association Victoria to try to resolve and deal with these anomalies and inconsistencies. It is entirely fair and reasonable that you have got that level of consistent approach in relation to the

way in which these matters should be dealt with. Again, these are relatively minor, but I would argue that it is clear that we need to make sure that there are those distinctions. Particularly if you look at the Victoria Police Act 2013, clause 10 refers to operational independence. It is important that Victoria Police has that level of operational independence. What we are trying to do here with this bill is deal with a very legitimate concern that individual members of Victoria Police are having in relation to the way in which their conditions are properly administered and dealt with and the way in which members can seek to raise matters if they feel that they have been disadvantaged. But there is a need to make sure that we get this balance right. Again, I think that is why we have got the balance right here on these matters.

I think as a nation we have been well served, and I think the member for Sandringham would be in full and hearty agreement with me that we have been well served, by having the English approach to the way in which justice is administered in this country, the antecedents of which go back to those Peelian principles of the early 19th century. We do need to make sure that there are those balances in place. You do want to make sure you have got that level of operational independence and that the leadership of Victoria Police can make up their own mind in relation to whether a crime should be investigated or not or what resources should be allocated to a particular issue. I believe that is a superior form of justice, as opposed to what you might see in other jurisdictions where the executive branch of the government directly controls and administers the way in which the police service operates. I think that is a dreadful model. I think that is a terrible model, and it has been shown that it can be open to abuse. You always must be mindful of these things, and that is why the way in which those Peelian principles were enunciated, I think back in 1829, with the development of that devolved structure in the way in which justice was administered in the United Kingdom has served countries like Australia and Canada particularly well.

The bill before the house does represent the work of consultation, dialogue and discussion between the government and the Police Association Victoria. I have got to say, having had a bit to do with the secretary of TPAV Wayne Gatt, he is a very effective secretary representing the interests of his members. In my discussions with him, both when I was the acting Minister for Police and Emergency Services for six months but also in my capacity as the Minister for Finance and the Assistant Treasurer, where issues like superannuation would crop up from time to time, he was a tireless advocate for his members. I always had a very strong and respectful engagement with Wayne. You always knew where you stood, because Wayne was always on the side of his members and he was a very strong advocate. It did not matter whether it was a relatively small issue involving a small number of his members or whether it represented the entire workforce of VicPol, Wayne was always forceful in his advocacy but in a very respectful and professional way.

The bill reflects those changes that were brought about by the Kennett government in 1996. Indeed it is entirely consistent with what you would expect from a modern Westminster liberal democracy that balances the rights of the individual – in this case serving officers in Victoria Police who are seeking to ensure that they have got an industrial instrument that fairly reflects their hopes and aspirations – while also making sure that we keep that operational independence, both in relation to Victoria Police with the Commonwealth powers and oversight and we have got that ability to ensure that we retain that operational independence as enunciated by clause 10 of the Victoria Police Act 2013. Those are fundamental principles, I think, that are important.

As I have got older I have developed a greater appreciation for the strength of the Commonwealth and the way in which those principles enunciated by the Westminster system have served Commonwealth nations by and large, not universally, but by and large very well. India would be a particular case in point where you would say it has not really worked well in the way in which the British administered that element of the Empire. But broadly these principles have served us well, and they will continue to serve us well. We must always make sure that we keep an eye on these matters to get the balance right, and I think this bill absolutely does. I commend the bill to the house.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (17:02): Following the member for Essendon, I endorse his comments on Wayne Gatt. He has no doubt had more dealings with Wayne than I have. But in my dealings with him, he presents a very level-headed and sensible approach certainly on most matters. I do not think there is any disagreement across the chamber on that particular issue.

The Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026, as we have heard from previous speakers, amends the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Act 2009 and also the Victoria Police Act 2013. The federal act refers specifically to workplace-related matters in the Commonwealth so that the federal act can apply to Victorian employers and employees who would not otherwise fall within their remit. What we are seeing here, like we see with many pieces of legislation that come into this chamber for debate, is alignment across the different jurisdictions within our country. Quite often, and in fact with a number of the bills that I have spoken on recently, it is about aligning our policies and our platforms with what we see across other states and territories in the federal jurisdiction. The basis of getting that uniformity is one of the reasons that we are certainly not opposing this bill. While it does provide that degree of national uniformity, it preserves the matters regarded as integral to the state's constitutional capacity. They are things like determining the number, the identity and the appointment of senior management within our public service together with particular matters affecting, as we have heard, law enforcement officers.

As we read in the second-reading speech, the reason we are here now is largely driven by a High Court ruling. That ruling within the High Court struck down a Commonwealth law on the grounds that it impaired the capacity of the state to function as an independent government. The judgement highlighted some Commonwealth reforms concerning fixed-term and casual employment and also flexible working arrangements and pay secrecy that have not applied to the Victorian public sector and local government. There we had this discrepancy across jurisdictions within our country. Secondly, law enforcement officers have remained unable to bargain validly or obtain federal dispute resolution and general protections coverage in relation to certain matters that involve their working arrangements. Those might be probation, promotion, transfer or discipline and then termination. The bill narrows these gaps by making a wholesale referral of every matter presently reserved to Victoria. The relevant Commonwealth reforms that this relates to – and they are relatively recent reforms – did commence at different times: pay secrecy rights took effect in December 2022; the strengthened flexible work regime commenced in June 2023; and the reformed casual employment framework, including the employee choice pathway, commenced in 2024 and is the most recent.

The police issue that has been put to members at different times comes against the background of what was an interesting enterprise bargaining agreement negotiation regarding Victoria Police. It is fair to say that certainly in some elements of the police force it caused quite a bit of consternation and a lot of very significant and heavy debate. Now, the changes in this bill do not relate to the current outcomes of the enterprise bargaining agreement; they will relate to future agreements, not reopening the current one.

The bill will allow specified Commonwealth protections concerning fixed-term contracts and casual employment to operate for relevant non-executive Victorian public sector and local government employees. It will extend flexible working and pay secrecy rights to specified public office holders, executives and higher managerial employees. And, as has been touched on by members on both sides of the chamber, it will permit law enforcement officers to bargain and workplace determinations to be made about a whole range of issues, some of which I touched on earlier but are currently excluded from the referral. Those are the changes that the Police Association Victoria has been seeking in its discussions with representatives on both sides of the chamber, and they are addressed in this bill. So in that regard, the advocacy has been well received.

Rather than commenting on those individual matters – and there will be some that will say that some in the public service should not have pay secrecy – the important thing here is that we have uniformity across the jurisdiction so that there is a level playing field. When I picked up this bill, went to the explanatory memorandum and had a look at the second-reading speech, it would have been good to

have mention of any potential financial impacts or any assessments or guesstimates or whatever you want to call them of what the financial implications might be, not as a reason for opposing this legislation but because it will create an increase in Fair Work proceedings, you would imagine. Having that forecast would have been handy around what the additional Fair Work proceedings were estimated to be. Legal costs, training requirements or demands on the Police Registration and Services Board are all matters that perhaps could have got a mention in the second-reading speech.

But in general, across the board, we support this. It is good to have uniformity across the states in as many areas as we can. That is not always possible, because in different states we have governments of different persuasions that hold different views, but generally speaking it is good to have some consistency across those different jurisdictions. I will conclude my speech by restating that we have a not-opposed position and wish the bill a speedy passage.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (17:09): I am pleased to have the opportunity to make a contribution on the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026. I will not be doing as the member for Essendon did, which was of course to give us some really important history about the French Revolution and make some comments in relation to how some of those historical matters relate to the piece of legislation that is before the house this afternoon. I do want to follow on from what I think has been a reasonably measured debate and make some observations around what the changes in this amendment will do, but also go to some of those elements around Victoria Police. I did hear other members mention the work of the Police Association Victoria and the men and women of Victoria Police. I, as others have done, want to take the opportunity to thank the members of Victoria Police for the incredible work they do in keeping our community safe and for the service and the sacrifice that they give each and every day.

I think one of the opportunities we have as local members, Acting Speaker Mercurio, as you are, is to be able to interact with those members and discuss a whole range of issues which go to the work of keeping the community safe. This change strengthens some of the provisions around the work that they do, and the matters that go to both the Commonwealth and the state and the importance of making sure that they have the best possible protections in place are indeed a focus of our team, and I want to acknowledge the work that has been done in making that happen. It also is worth mentioning the extension and the provisions around Victorian public service staff and understanding the importance of making those additional components around the industrial relations powers to the Commonwealth. The work that has needed to be done in terms of alignment and making for a better, more robust system is something that other members have touched on and something that I want to put on the record as well. Importantly, where the provisions relating to these matters are included in future enterprise agreements, further subject to bargaining and ultimate approvals for government, making for the amendments which go to strengthening those additional services and making for that better alignment, as others have said, are really important.

Whether it is this piece of legislation or other pieces of legislation that go through this house and over the road in the Legislative Council, we want to make sure that we are always providing for the very best possible protection, whether it be for Victoria Police or whether it be for some of those members of the Victorian public service that I mentioned earlier in the contribution. Making for a better system that provides for the best protections is something that the government remains focused on doing. From time to time, making amendments or changes that go to those protections is something that is really important. I think, certainly looking across the globe and having of course three levels of government in this country – local, state and federal – and speaking to people within my community and, as I think all members have the opportunity to do, speaking to various sections of legislation, parts of the constitution, different states and territories and then also you combine local government with that as well, there are a whole range of complexities that come with that.

In this legislation, in terms of those protections that I mentioned earlier in the contribution, in having those three levels of government but also having federal agencies, state agencies and municipal bodies, whether they be councils or, going to a state level, statutory agencies and the like, and making for

those provisions when they are tested, when an individual or an organisation needs that additional support or those services that are provided where you might have an issue or an incident, I think that is when it is tested. And when it is tested is the true measure of how the piece of legislation is used in an instance. What we see is that despite the incredible amount of work that goes into drafting and the incredible amount of work that goes into consultation – whether that be community consultation, discussions with agencies or discussions with bodies like the police association – and all of the work that comes with shaping a piece of legislation that comes before the chambers, both in the Assembly and in the Council, all of that then needs to be tested in a real setting. The disconnect between what that looks like on the ground compared with what a legislative body may implement or a series of changes to or the operational nature, if you like, of the way that the legislation is used is of course the real test of it.

What we remain committed to doing, and this takes me back to where I started in a lot of ways, is making for the most comprehensive and best set of safeguards and framework that we can put in place. We remain committed to doing that, and we remain committed to working with both those at a Commonwealth level and those agencies, which can be really particular, and in this case we have got an example in front of us. But more broadly, to have that system and framework in place is really important. What I think, certainly from a more technical level – and a number of members have spoken about a lot of the technical changes within this piece of legislation – and what we reserve the right to do is to make those changes to get this as strong as it possibly can be. The work that enables us to do that is looking at those practical examples of how it is dealt with and making for those provisions which we have gone to – and which other members I am sure in their fine contributions will go to as this moves through this chamber – and making sure that we have those provisions in place. Certainly for the support and the complexity of members that are in VicPol specifically, but also those other workers that are affected by this, we want to make sure that those safeguards and those provisions are in place. We want to make sure that we are able to do that work so that the framework is in place to support them at a time when they very much need it.

I heard other members speak earlier around the work of the association, and I do want to again make the observation that it is really important for those active, live, constant conversations to be happening. In the opportunity that I have had to perform various roles and in the opportunity that members from this side of the house have had on the government benches, to be able to do that work in a respectful, decent and honest manner is something that not just the community but those agencies and associations value. To have those conversations and to get to a place where we are able to deliver those changes that go to providing for a more robust system and the opportunities that we have got with this legislation today is something that we remain committed to doing. In making for those arrangements and those investments that we make through the budget and through other opportunities, it is really important that we continue to do that. It is really important that we have the opportunities to move forward in a sound, constructive and robust way.

I want to finish, in my final 10 seconds, by thanking and acknowledging the work of Victoria Police, our public service staff and all those that brought this legislation before the house. I commend the bill to the house.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (17:20): I rise to speak on the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026. This bill makes a number of significant changes to the operation of Commonwealth workplace protections in Victoria. It amends both the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Act 2009 and the Victoria Police Act 2013; allows specified Commonwealth protections concerning fixed-term contracts and casual employment to operate for relevant non-executive Victorian public sector and local government employees; extends flexible working and pay security rights to specified public office holders, executives and higher managerial employees; permits law enforcement officers to bargain and workplace determinations to be made about a wider range of employment matters presently excluded from the referral; extends part 3-1 general protections of the Commonwealth act to those newly referred law enforcement matters, while not referring them for the

purposes of part 2-3 unfair dismissal; establishes the relationship between the Commonwealth act, future police enterprise instruments and the Victoria Police Act 2013 and the dispute resolution jurisdiction of the Police Registration and Services Board; and expands bargaining rights and workplace protections for law enforcement officers in relation to a number of employment matters that have historically remained outside the Commonwealth workplace relations framework.

Victoria referred a significant proportion of its workplace relations powers to the Commonwealth in 2009; however, that referral was not unlimited. Victoria needs a workplace relations system that provides fairness to employees while also allowing public services and emergency agencies to do their jobs effectively. The challenge with this bill, therefore, is getting the balance right. Certain matters were deliberately excluded because they were regarded as being integral to the state's constitutional capacity to manage its own public sector workforce and, importantly, its law enforcement agencies. Those exclusions have their origins in constitutional principles considered by the High Court, including *Re Australian Education Union; Ex parte Victoria*. As a consequence, subsequent Commonwealth workplace reforms have not always applied uniformly to Victorian public sector and local government employees. The bill before us seeks to address some of those gaps. It extends protections relating to flexible working arrangements, pay secrecy, fixed-term contracts and casual employment. These are protections that already apply to many workers within the Commonwealth workplace relations system. There is therefore a clear argument for greater consistency. Workers performing their duties in Victoria should not necessarily receive different workplace protections simply because of the constitutional arrangements applying to their particular employer.

The bill also seeks to address a different set of issues affecting law enforcement officers. It would allow future enterprise agreements and workplace determinations to deal with matters including probation, promotion, transfer, physical or mental fitness, discipline and termination of employment. Matters relating to physical and mental fitness are not simply employment issues when it comes to our police force; they are wellbeing issues. By allowing these matters to be considered through enterprise agreements and workplace determinations, law enforcement officers will have greater opportunities to advocate for fair, transparent and supportive processes regarding their health and fitness for duty. Importantly, this may help foster conversations about early intervention, access to support services, rehabilitation pathways and the protections available to officers when they are experiencing mental health challenges. We ask our police officers to protect our communities every single day, and it is only fair that we ensure there are appropriate workplace mechanisms in place to support them when they need assistance themselves.

Strong mental health support is not only good for individual officers, it is good for policing, good for workforce retention and ultimately good for community safety. We often speak about the physical dangers faced by our police officers, but we do not always acknowledge the psychological toll of their job. Victoria Police's own reporting shows that there were 538 mental health injuries recorded in 2024–25 alone. A landmark mental health study found that 16 per cent of Victoria Police employees met the symptom criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder, while rates of suicidal thoughts were higher than those seen in the broader community. These statistics remind us that behind every uniform is a person who carries the weight of the traumatic events they witness on behalf of our community. If we expect our police officers to protect us during our most difficult moments, we must ensure they receive the support, care and workplace protections that they need when facing their own challenges.

These are important matters. They are also matters that have historically been excluded from Commonwealth bargaining arrangements because they are closely connected to operational command, integrity and the effective functioning of law enforcement agencies. That is why the safeguards contained in this bill are particularly important. The bill does not simply hand all of these matters over to the Commonwealth system without qualification. There are important exclusions, for example, the expanded referral does not cover uniforms and equipment. It also excludes certain tasking decisions, including temporary transfers associated with emergency or major incidents.

Importantly, the bill preserves a 14-day tasking or deployment exemption, allowing law enforcement agencies to respond to emergencies and major incidents without those immediate operational decisions being compromised by the new industrial framework. There are also protections around transfers associated with disciplinary investigations and certain integrity matters. These safeguards recognise a fundamental principle: workplace rights are important, but law enforcement agencies must retain the capacity to respond quickly and effectively when public safety is at stake. The bill also makes clear that the Commonwealth's unfair dismissal provisions are not being extended to these newly referred police matters. Instead, the bill extends the Commonwealth's general protections regime to those matters. That distinction is important and should not be overlooked.

However, while there are legitimate reasons for the reforms contained in this bill, there are also significant issues that this Parliament needs to consider. The first is jurisdictional complexity. We are effectively creating an interaction between the Commonwealth Fair Work Act 2009, the Victoria Police Act 2013, future enterprise agreements and workplace determinations and the Fair Work Commission and the Police Registration and Services Board. The bill contains provisions intended to establish how these different frameworks will operate alongside each other, but legislation that creates multiple overlapping jurisdictions inevitably creates the possibility of disputes about which frameworks apply, which body has jurisdiction and how competing provisions should be interpreted. That is not merely a technical legal issue; it has the potential to create uncertainty for employees, managers and agencies.

The second concern relates to general protections claims. Once promotion, transfer, fitness, discipline and termination decisions fall within the Commonwealth general protections framework, managers and decision-makers will need to exercise considerable care. Their decisions will need to be properly documented, and the reasons for those decisions will potentially receive much greater scrutiny. For organisations such as Victoria Police, where decisions can involve operational requirements, discipline, integrity and public safety, that is a significant consideration.

The third issue is the financial and administrative impact. We do identify that the material before us does not qualify the likely number of additional Fair Work Commission proceedings, the associated legal costs, the additional administrative burden, training requirements or the potential impact on the Police Registration and Services Board. These are reasonable questions. Whenever Parliament changes the industrial relations framework, there will be costs associated with implementation, there will be new obligations, there will be training requirements, there may be additional legal proceedings and there may be pressure placed on existing dispute resolution bodies. Yet we do not have sufficient qualified information about those impacts.

I also note the consultation undertaken in relation to this legislation. While consultation occurred across sectors, very limited feedback was received beyond support from the Police Association Victoria for provisions affecting its members. For legislation of this significance, particularly legislation involving the intersection of Commonwealth workplace law and Victoria's policing framework, meaningful consultation is essential. The government needs to ensure that those responsible for implementing these reforms understand precisely how they will operate in practice.

I acknowledge that the bill contains some transitional and savings provisions. In particular the existing Victoria Police enterprise agreement 2025 is preserved, meaning the broader referral will primarily affect future bargaining and future workplace determinations rather than reopening the current agreement. This is a sensible and important safeguard. That position recognises the legitimate policing objectives of the bill. There is merit in seeking greater consistency in workplace protections for Victorian public sector and local government employees. There is no doubt about that. There is also merit in providing law enforcement officers with a fairer bargaining framework and access to appropriate workplace protections. We must remain vigilant about the practical consequences, we must ensure that workplace rights do not inadvertently compromise operational effectiveness, we must ensure that managers and agencies are properly equipped to operate within the framework and we must ensure that jurisdictional uncertainty does not result in unnecessary disputes, costs or delays.

Most importantly, Victoria needs a workplace relations system that provides fairness to employees while also allowing public services and emergency agencies to do their jobs effectively. The challenge with this bill therefore is getting that balance right.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (17:29): I rise to speak in support of the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026. Just quickly, Acting Speaker, I do not know if you were in the chamber at the time, but the member for Essendon gave us an incredible synopsis on the evolution of modern policing, starting back with the Peelers and bringing us through to our time here in Australia. There were some objections from those opposite at the time, which was a little bit disappointing, given it was a great run-down on the history of policing. I actually learned quite a lot, and anyone else who was listening in would have learned quite a bit. I just want to commend the member for Essendon, because every time he stands up here, I do feel like my knowledge of history expands just that little bit further. It was actually quite interesting, and he ran through the referral of our industrial relations powers under former Premier Kennett in 1996, when he referred most of our industrial relations powers to the Howard government. Some aspects did not get referred at the time and, as the member for Essendon has explained, that was because there was a belief that some of those matters pertaining to Victoria Police should remain with the state, and there was probably a good reason for that as well. But over time there have been disadvantages to Victoria Police, and this bill seeks to address them.

I was looking through the history and recoiled at the fact that more powers were handed over to the Commonwealth at the commencement of the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Act 2009 on 1 July 2009. That was just before I entered the fray of industrial relations and had to deal with the joy of award modernisation, which still leaves some of us who went through it a bit traumatised, because it was a very long, very complex process. But it was worthy nonetheless; it actually was quite groundbreaking in what it did. It brought multiple awards together, distilled them down and simplified a system that was incredibly complex around the nation. The current system, the Fair Work system, I actually think works very well, and to refer some of these matters to the Fair Work system is completely appropriate because it is an important bill which is going to deliver practical improvements to the working lives of thousands of Victorian workers. We cannot do enough when it comes to supporting our Victorian workers, especially our very hardworking public servants, and very much so Victoria Police.

In speaking about Victoria Police, I will stray from the content of the bill for a moment because I just want to take the opportunity to note that tomorrow marks the one-year anniversary of the murder of both Neal Thompson and Vadim de Waart-Hottart, and I know that still has a profound effect on the Victoria Police family. They are a family. The wonderful Victoria Police who work across Monbulk, who I have a very good relationship with, are fabulous members of our community, and I know that the effect of this has been deeply felt by many. So I just wanted to take a moment to acknowledge that, and I know we will be doing that in the chamber tomorrow as well with a minute's silence.

But back to this bill. It is about ensuring public sector employees, local government workers and Victoria's law enforcement officers have access to the same rights and protections that many other Australian workers already enjoy. It recognises a really simple principle that a worker's access to fair conditions and workplace protections should not depend on whether or not they work in the private or the public sector. We have got a long history in this state – Acting Speaker, I am sure you are familiar with it – of standing up for working people. We know strong workplace rights are not accidents of history. They are won through collective effort and they are maintained through governments that are prepared to stand with workers, and this bill continues that tradition, I am proud to say. Many Victorian workers will benefit from important reforms made at the Commonwealth level.

The bill ensures that recent reforms introduced through the Commonwealth Fair Work framework apply to Victorian public sector and local government employees where those reforms do not currently operate, and it expands the range of matters relating to law enforcement officers that can be subject to enterprise bargaining and workplace determinations. They are really sensible reforms, and they are

reforms that have been strongly advocated for by employee representatives, including the Community and Public Sector Union and the Police Association Victoria. Many, many members have been commenting on the work that both have done in representing their members so well.

I would like to talk first on the impact of the bill on public sector workers. Public servants deliver essential services every day for Victorians. They support our schools, our hospitals, our courts, our child protection systems, emergency services and community programs, and local government workers keep our communities functioning. They maintain vital infrastructure. They deliver services and support residents in every corner of our state. They deserve workplace protections that reflect modern expectations and modern workplaces, and one of the most significant reforms extended through this bill relates to flexible working arrangements. We all know that flexibility matters. It matters to parents balancing family and work commitments; it matters to carers supporting loved ones or people living with disability; and it matters to older workers who may seek to remain active participants in the workforce. The ability to request flexible working arrangements can make the difference between someone remaining in employment or feeling that they can no longer remain and ostensibly feeling that they are forced out of employment. By extending these provisions to Victorian public sector and local government workers, we are helping create workplaces that are more inclusive, more supportive and more responsive to the realities of modern life, and we are supporting greater workforce participation. We are helping retain valuable skills and knowledge and experience across the public sector.

This bill also extends provisions regarding pay secrecy. Pay secrecy clauses have long contributed to inequity in workplaces because they prevent workers from openly discussing their remuneration. If we want to be really fair, we need transparency. It is such an important tool for that, and workers should have the right to discuss their pay without fear of breaching contractual obligations. Removing those restrictions on pay discussions helps expose unfair disparities and supports progress towards greater equity and accountability in workplaces, and that is something to be championed. It is particularly important in the ongoing effort to close gender pay gaps and address other forms of workplace disadvantage. It is a real concern and issue that in 2026 there is still a very distinct gender pay gap, and that is problematic. Hiding people's wages, not allowing people to discuss what salaries they have, compounds that further. Shine a light in the corners of the darkness and you may actually find that good things come.

Another key reform in this bill relates to casual and fixed-term employment, and secure work really does matter. We know that. On this side of the chamber we know how important secure work is. Victorians want the opportunity to plan their futures with confidence, and they are entitled to that. They want to know they can pay the mortgage, support their families and build a career without constantly worrying about the end of a temporary contract. This bill extends limitations on casual and fixed-term employment to non-executive public sector and local government employees. In many respects this reform embeds practices that are already occurring across the Victorian public sector. Where a job is genuinely ongoing, workers should not be trapped in an endless cycle of insecure contracts.

I know when I first started teaching, and this is many years ago – far too many for me to say out loud – there were only contracts on offer in the public schools. I really wanted to teach in a public school, but I also needed secure employment, so I ended up taking a permanent position in a non-government school because that was on offer. But there was no way I could get that in a public school back then, and I know it affected the decision I made. Unfortunately, at that time I left public school teaching. I did go back to it later, but it was one of the reasons I could not stay on. We were looking to buy a house, and I needed secure employment so the bank would actually lend to us. These changes we are putting in reinforce our government's commitment to secure employment and recognise the benefits that ongoing employment delivers not only for workers but also for organisations through improved retention capability and workforce stability.

Coming back to Victoria Police – with only a minute on the clock, I am afraid – the bill delivers important reforms for them. They perform really difficult and often dangerous work in service of our Victorian community. I said in my speech a year ago, in acknowledging the two police officers who were killed, that when they don their uniforms, they take a risk every time. They know that they are walking towards danger when the rest of us are doing our best to avoid it. They actually step into it, and they do it to protect us. We owe them a debt of gratitude that none of us really can ever repay. I will finish where I began in acknowledging those two fine police officers much loved by their friends, by their family and by their fellow blue police officer family. I acknowledge that tomorrow will be a very difficult day for many of the police in my community, and I send my thoughts and best wishes to all of them. I commend this bill to the house.

John LISTER (Werribee) (17:39): It is my honour to speak on this legislation extending some of the protections under the Fair Work Act 2009 to more employees here in Victoria. I always have an appreciation, when it comes to this legislation, seeing that interaction between our different levels of government, between the Commonwealth and state. It is that legal studies teacher brain in me that gets a little bit excited seeing sections 51 and 107 of the constitution start to play out as we really work through how we ensure that protections for workers across Australia extend to employees in our state system. In particular I would like to recognise the leadership of the federal Labor government in improving workers rights, particularly in this last term. Things like extending paid parental leave; multi-employer bargaining, as some of my colleagues have also referred to; ending pay secrecy and the 'same job, same pay' principle being enshrined in legislation; and secure work for casuals are all things that have come into being and that we are also looking at making sure our legislation reflects here in Victoria.

This bill makes important changes to working conditions and entitlements, particularly for Victoria public service staff and Victoria Police. Industrial relations when it comes to Victoria Police has been quite an interesting subject over the years. I recognise the work of the Police Association Victoria (TPAV), with over 100 years representing workers. Police, despite the fact that they have got a badge and a gun, are workers and go to work every day wanting to have good conditions. Despite the fact that the conditions are often very dynamic, they should be able to expect that their days start and end safely. The police association have always been champions of this, ever since they were first established back in 1917. Through some tumultuous times during the 1930s, with the industrial action that happened back then, we have come to this understanding of wanting to make sure that we respect workers rights, particularly for police officers, while also recognising police officers' very important role as officers of the law.

We are very much, on this side, champions of the operational independence enshrined under section 10 of the Victoria Police Act 2013. At the time when we were referring industrial powers to the Commonwealth, there was good reason for making sure that this operational independence was still maintained, particularly around some of the things that this bill carves out following negotiations between Victoria Police, TPAV and government. But we need to make sure that as many workers as possible are protected by these Commonwealth powers. The carve-outs and the arrangements in this legislation are particularly important for ensuring that.

There are a lot of different matters that are protected under Commonwealth law that have not necessarily been able to be protected under the agreements made between the police association and their members, Victoria Police and ultimately the government. Things around their deployment, probation, promotion and transfer are all very important things across Victoria Police. One of the important roles that the Chief Commissioner of Police has and delegates to commanders, inspectors and people managers at a local level is being able to make sure that their people are in the right place at the right time to meet different crime concerns in the community. But we also want to make sure that there are some guardrails in place. Over time there have been negotiations in enterprise agreements around this, but it has always been something where we need to make sure we have good protections in legislation and the ability between Victoria Police, the association and organisations like the PRSB,

the Police Registration and Services Board, to be able to make sure that people have a fair process if they disagree with some of those decisions made around those areas.

The things that we have ensured in this legislation are still subject to the normal arrangements through the Victoria Police Act. They are things like the number of employees, their identity, what classifications they have, how many are in those classifications and the process of appointing police officers. These are not things that can be referred to the Fair Work Commission. These are things where the operational independence of the chief commissioner is still maintained, which is particularly important, because unlike other public servants where those sorts of things are put into agreements through Fair Work, this is something that very much goes to operational necessity for police. How many there are, where they are and who they are are things that should really only be determined by the chief commissioner as that expert law officer responding to community concerns.

I have spoken a little bit about the police association, but this also goes to other workers and making sure that some of those initiatives by federal Labor over the years are protected for those workers as well. I note that the previous speaker – also one of our little bit of a band of former teachers on this side – referred to the experience in public schools of contracts. It was very much a regular thing, especially when you started your career, that you would be on a contract for many years and it would be rolled over year to year. You were not quite sure if you would get that coveted permanent position. Over the last 10 or so years this government has made a conscious effort to make sure that more people are getting permanent positions at our schools, something that we worked through not only industrially with the union but also through funding opportunities. The provisions in Fair Work around casualisation are something that this bill goes to, and we make sure that for those different protections, all those loopholes are closed.

Some of the other changes that federal Labor has introduced in these different pieces of closing-loopholes legislation are around requesting flexible work arrangements, meaning that workers can amend their work arrangements to support their needs as a parent, a carer, a person with a disability or an older person. This is really important not only to ensure a diversity of workforce in terms of gender and the different family roles that are required but also to make sure that people can work for longer. There is a bit of a topic at the moment around superannuation and retirement. I think one of the realities we are facing industrially across Australia at the moment is that people do want to work for longer. However, we need to make sure that their work arrangements are done in such a way that we can help them to work for longer.

It is interesting. Back in the day when I first started casual work, you got a bit of a conversation from the boss that said you were not allowed to talk about your pay with other workers. It was a really weird, taboo thing that was set up in some of my first retail jobs, and I often thought it was a little bit weird. We obviously spoke about it anyway. We were not necessarily bound by some of those contract provisions that people have had in the past. We just gossiped about our pay anyway and came to a pretty quick conclusion that a lot of us were getting paid vastly different sums, not necessarily because of the type of job we did but because of the arrangements we had come to as we onboarded or as we changed to different roles within the organisation. But you ended up doing very similar work. Making sure that we have that ban on pay secrecy and making sure that that applies to all Victorian government workers through the carve-out in this legislation is really important to make sure that that principle, which is now an Australian principle, is very much a Victorian principle as well.

We want to make sure that many Victorians have secure employment. That is why these sorts of provisions and making sure that we have this work done between the Commonwealth and the state when it comes to industrial relations is really important. I think we have spoken about it a few times, but I really, really want to emphasise it. Earlier today I spoke about our local officers in Werribee and the hard work that they do. I really do want to emphasise that our police officers are workers and they deserve the protections that every other worker has out there. Having the extraordinary powers that they have does not preclude them from those protections. I would like to thank the police association, especially in the years that I engaged with them in a previous life, for the work that they do every day

to look after their workers and make sure people come home safe. I would like to commend them for that work. I would also like to commend those other public sector unions that have engaged with us to make sure that this legislation goes a fair way to reflecting those Australian values.

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (17:49): I rise to support the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026. At its core this legislation recognises that workplaces continue to change and workplace protections need to keep pace with those changes. For many Victorians the way we work today looks very different from what it did a decade ago, and the balance between work, family responsibilities and caring commitments has shifted. Expectations around transparency and workplace culture have evolved. There is a growing understanding of the importance of job security and the role it plays not only in supporting workers but in strengthening families and communities. This bill responds to those changing expectations by ensuring Victorian public sector and local government employees can access protections that many other workers already enjoy, while also addressing longstanding inconsistencies affecting law enforcement officers.

This bill builds on Victoria's longstanding referral of workplace relations powers to the Commonwealth, ensuring public sector employees continue to benefit from a modern and consistent workplace relations framework as federal workplace laws evolve. At the centre of these reforms are people: the people who teach our children, care for patients, respond in emergencies, support vulnerable Victorians, maintain local infrastructure, keep communities safe and deliver the services that so many rely upon every day. Across the public sector and local government there are thousands of workers whose contributions often go unseen, yet their work is fundamental to the strength, wellbeing and resilience of our communities. Whether they are in a classroom, a hospital, a council depot, a government office or a community organisation or on the front line of emergency response, they each play a role in helping our communities thrive.

This bill is ultimately about ensuring those workers have access to workplace protections that are consistent and reflective of modern working life. These are conversations that I hear regularly across the electorate. Whether I am speaking with a teacher, a healthcare worker, a council employee, a community organisation, a police officer or someone working within the public service, there is a common desire for workplaces that are supportive, respectful and responsive to the realities of modern life. People want to know that their contribution is valued, they want confidence that workplace arrangements will support them through different stages of life and they want to know, if protections exist for some workers, is there good reason why those same protections should not also be available to others performing important public service roles? That is why consistency is important. Workers should not find themselves excluded from contemporary workplace protections simply because of the type of public sector organisation they happen to work for.

Across Bass, from Pearcedale through our coastal villages across to Clyde, up to Koo Wee Rup, Lang Lang and surrounding communities, over to San Remo and down to Inverloch, we know the importance of strong public services and the people who deliver them. We see it in our schools and our health services, our council, our emergency services and our community organisations. These are the workers who keep our communities functioning every day, often without fanfare and often under considerable pressure. Whether it is a nurse caring for patients at Bayside Health's Koo Wee Rup health service; a teacher supporting students at Kongwak Primary School; a police officer serving the community on Phillip Island; a Casey, Cardinia or Bass Coast council worker maintaining local infrastructure; a public servant helping families access services across the rapidly growing communities of Cranbourne South, Devon Meadows, Tooradin and Clyde; or a community sector worker supporting vulnerable residents anywhere across the Bass electorate, these workers are fundamental to the strength of our communities. The reforms before us recognise the contribution they make and seek to ensure workplace arrangements remain contemporary, consistent and relevant to modern working life. What all of these roles have in common is a commitment to service. These workers are there for our communities during the routine moments of everyday life and during some of the most challenging moments as well. They help families navigate difficult circumstances, support

young people to reach their potential, care for those who are unwell and provide assistance when communities face emergencies.

A key objective of the bill is extending important Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Act 2009 provisions to public sector and local government employees. Importantly, these reforms extend not only to the Victorian public sector but also to local government employees, helping ensure greater consistency across councils and public sector workplaces alike. Specifically, these reforms extend provisions relating to flexible working arrangements, pay secrecy protections and limitations on inappropriate use of fixed-term and casual employment. While those matters may appear technical, they have practical consequences for people's everyday lives. Flexible work arrangements can make an enormous difference to parents balancing work and family responsibilities; carers supporting ageing relatives; and workers managing illness, disability or changing personal circumstances. The way people participate in the workforce continues to evolve, and these provisions recognise that flexibility, when implemented effectively, benefits workers, employers and the wider community. Flexible working arrangements are often described in policy terms, but their impact is intensely personal.

The bill also extends pay secrecy protections. Transparency helps build trust within workplaces. It supports accountability and contributes to more equitable outcomes for employees. These are expectations that many workers now reasonably hold, and they are important elements of a modern workplace system.

Another important aspect of the bill is its application to fixed-term and casual employment arrangements. Secure employment matters. It matters because it provides people with confidence about their future. It helps families plan, supports participation in local economies and allows communities to grow and prosper. This is particularly relevant in fast-growing areas such as Clyde and Cranbourne, as well as in regional communities across Bass, where people are putting down roots, building careers and raising families. Importantly, the bill does not remove the legitimate use of fixed-term or casual employment. There will always be circumstances where those arrangements are appropriate. What it seeks to do is ensure that ongoing work is supported by ongoing employment wherever practical, particularly for non-executive public sector and local government employees. For teachers, education support staff and many other frontline workers, that principle of greater job security has the potential to provide stronger workforce stability and greater certainty.

Job security also plays an important role in workforce attraction and retention. Across regional Victoria employers compete for skilled and experienced workers. Public sector agencies, schools, health services and councils all benefit when employees are able to see a future in the work they do. Retaining experienced workers means retaining knowledge, skills and relationships within organisations. It supports continuity of service delivery and strengthens the capacity of organisations to respond to the needs of their communities. Ultimately, secure employment is not simply beneficial for employees; it is beneficial for the communities those employees serve.

I also acknowledge the role played by unions, employee organisations and professional associations in advocating for many of these issues over time. Questions relating to workplace flexibility, secure employment, pay equity and workplace protections have been the subject of significant discussion across a range of sectors for many years. While views will not always align on every aspect of reform, those conversations have helped shape broader discussions about what modern workplace protections should look like.

The bill also addresses a longstanding issue affecting law enforcement officers. One of the strengths of this bill is that it seeks to address disparities that have developed over time. Workplace relations frameworks evolve, new protections are introduced and community expectations change, and from time to time there is a need to review existing arrangements to ensure they remain fit for purpose. This legislation reflects that process. It recognises that some groups of workers have not always had access

to the same workplace protections or bargaining arrangements as others, and it seeks to bring about greater consistency across the public sector.

The role performed by police officers and other law enforcement personnel is unique. They are called upon during emergencies, major incidents and some of the most difficult moments in people's lives. Their work requires professionalism, resilience, sound judgement and a deep commitment to public service. This bill seeks to address that disparity by allowing bargaining and agreement-making in relation to matters such as probation, promotion, transfer, physical and mental fitness, discipline and termination of employment. In the very short few seconds that I have left, I commend the bill to the house.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (17:59): I take pleasure in rising today to speak in strong support of the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026. This legislation is about uniformity, but it is also about fairness, equality and dignity at work. It ensures that workers across Victoria, whether they are delivering frontline public services, supporting our schools or keeping our communities safe, are afforded modern, robust workplace protections.

I represent a community built on hard work, diversity and strong local connection. In Mulgrave our families know that when you go to work you deserve fair conditions, job security and the knowledge that if you face hardship your rights will be protected under law. I have seen firsthand the vital link between workplace security, mental wellbeing and family stability. When workers lack certainty or face systemic barriers to flexibility, the impact ripples through homes and communities. That is why this bill is so important. It delivers on our government's commitment to modernising Victoria's workplace relations referral framework, ensuring our public sector workers and our dedicated law enforcement officers enjoy protections that reflect contemporary community expectations.

One of the central pillars of this bill is ensuring that key protections recently introduced into the Commonwealth Fair Work Act 2009 are fully extended across the Victorian public sector. While national system employees have benefited from crucial reforms under the national workplace relations system, legal nuances in our referral framework meant that certain public sector employees did not automatically access these same statutory entitlements. This bill directly addresses those gaps. Specifically, the bill clarifies and expands references under the referral act to ensure public sector employees benefit from flexible working arrangements, which will give employees genuine statutory avenues to request flexibility to balance family caregiving and health needs. They also benefit from pay secrecy protections, which will ban restrictive pay secrecy clauses so that workers can discuss their remuneration openly, a crucial step in closing the gender pay gap and ensuring wage fairness. It also results in secure employment limits by placing clear restrictions on the misuse of successive fixed-term contracts and setting pathways for casual conversion, aligning with this government's core priority to deliver secure jobs for Victorians. Whether someone works in an administrative role, education or government services, secure employment and fair conditions must be guaranteed, and this bill brings uniformity federally and across the states.

I would like to turn now to how this bill impacts our law enforcement personnel – that is, our police officers, protective services officers, police recruits and reservists. Historically, under the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Act 2009 a significant range of workplace matters relating to law enforcement officers was excluded from enterprise bargaining and the national system. This created an unfair disparity between police personnel and other public sector workers. This bill expands the scope of matters that can be validly included in enterprise agreements and workplace determinations for law enforcement officers. Crucially, the bill allows enterprise bargaining and dispute resolution through the Fair Work Commission across vital employment matters, including probationary periods and promotion arrangements, transfers from place to place or position to position, physical and mental fitness standards, discipline processes and termination of employment. This bill ensures that law enforcement officers have full access to the general protections regime under part 3-1 of the Fair Work Act. This means that if a police officer or PSO experiences adverse action based on a protected attribute, they can now access independent recourse through the national industrial tribunal. Our police

officers and PSOs put their safety on the line for us. They deserve a fair, transparent workplace where their rights are protected by an independent umpire, and we are delivering that.

We must also recognise the direct link between fair workplace conditions and worker retention, particularly across our public institutions and emergency services. When workers feel supported, when they know that career progression, transfer arrangements and workplace adjustments are managed transparently and fairly, it fosters a healthier, more resilient workplace. Burnout and occupational stress often stem not just from the demands of the job itself but from structural frustration when employees feel unheard or lack agency in their working lives. By providing clear statutory rights around flexible work, independent dispute resolution and protection against discrimination, this bill helps create supportive working environments. It signals to our dedicated public servants and emergency service workers that their contribution is valued, helping us retain skilled, experienced personnel who serve Victoria every single day.

While this bill delivers expanded industrial rights, it does so with careful precision and balance. It respects the operational realities of frontline policing while maintaining clear boundaries between workplace bargaining and essential command duties. The bill preserves the Chief Commissioner of Police's capacity to respond immediately to community emergencies and major incidents. Under the refined provisions, tasking decisions are explicitly retained as essential operational powers. This creates a fair, sensible balance protecting officers' industrial rights during standard career progression and transfers while ensuring Victoria Police can mobilise rapidly when an emergency threatens public safety.

When we evaluate legislation like this, it is impossible to ignore the stark contrast between those on this side of the chamber and the history of those opposite when it comes to industrial relations. Historically in Victoria the coalition's approach to workplace relations has been defined by deregulation, stripping back employee entitlements and curbing collective bargaining. We remember the Kennett coalition government, when Victorians saw the abolishment of state awards, the dismantling of conciliation systems and the forced referral of industrial powers to the Commonwealth without safeguarding basic workers rights. Even nationally their ideological approach culminated in the WorkChoices framework, a regime designed to undermine penalty rates, weaken job security and dismantle the independent umpire. More recently, federal coalition members voted against the Fair Work legislation amendment, which tells us the philosophy of those opposite when it comes to workplace protections. Labor's history stands in complete opposition to that record. On this side we believe that economic prosperity and fair working conditions go hand in hand, while the coalition views workplace protections as a burden to be cut. This bill continues Labor's legacy of restoring fairness, guaranteeing dignity and ensuring every Victorian worker returns home safely with fair pay for a fair day's work.

Good legislation is built through open, constructive dialogue, and this bill is the product of extensive consultation across key agencies and employee representatives, including the Department of Justice and Community Safety, Victoria Police, the Police Association Victoria, the Department of Education and local government representatives. Stakeholders have broadly supported these amendments because they deliver on written commitments made by the government. They provide clarity, certainty and fairness for frontline personnel and public sector workers alike. The Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026 reinforces the fundamental principles that underwrite our industrial relations framework: fairness, choice, secure employment and independent dispute resolution. It ensures that Victorian public sector employees receive modern national standards around flexible work, pay transparency and secure job pathways. Equal to this, it grants our hardworking law enforcement officers the enterprise bargaining rights and general protections they have long deserved. Ultimately, when we treat our workforce with fairness, dignity and respect, we build stronger services and a safer, more equitable Victoria for everyone. I commend the Minister for Industrial Relations and the Attorney-General for bringing this crucial legislation before the house. I am proud to stand here in

support of this bill, which upholds fairness and respect for our workplace, and I commend the bill to the house.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (18:08): I rise to support the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026. I do so proudly because this bill sits within a much bigger Australian story, and it is a story that goes to the very reason the labour movement exists. It is a story about the simple but powerful proposition that working people deserve a fair day's pay for a fair day's work; that they deserve dignity, security and respect at work; and that the prosperity of our nation should be shared by the people whose labour helps create it.

Long before any of us sat in this Parliament working people had to fight for rights and conditions that today we take too easily for granted. Here in Melbourne of course, in 1856, stonemasons famously downed their tools and marched from the University of Melbourne building site to demand the 8-hour working day. Their demand was revolutionary for its time: 8 hours labour, 8 hours recreation, 8 hours rest. They were not asking for privilege, they were asking for balance. They were saying that a worker was not simply an input into an economy but a human being – a parent, a husband, a wife, a member of the community, entitled to a life beyond work – and they won. That achievement made Melbourne and Victoria pioneers of the international 8-hour day movement. Then in the great industrial struggles of the 1890s, including the maritime strike and the Queensland shearers strike of 1891, working people confronted wage cuts, insecure employment and attempts to undermine organised labour.

Those disputes were bitter; many workers lost. But from those defeats came the extraordinary realisation that working people needed not only industrial representation but political representation. They needed a voice in Parliament. They needed representatives who would make laws for working people rather than simply leaving working people subject to the laws made by others. Around the shearers camps of western Queensland, immortalised through the Tree of Knowledge in Barcaldine, that political labour movement gathered strength, and out of those struggles emerged the Labor political movement that we know today. That is why the history of Labor and the history of workplace rights in Australia are inseparable.

From the workshop, the quarry, the shearing shed, the factory floor and the picket line, working people brought their cause into Parliament, and once they did Australia changed. Here in Victoria the Factories and Shops Act 1896 established wages boards, which set Australia's first statutory minimum rates. Then came the landmark Harvester judgement of 1907, delivered right here in Melbourne at the Sunshine Harvester works, in Brimbank today. Justice Higgins famously approached the fair wage according to the needs of an employee as a human being in a civilised community. That decision became the foundation of Australia's national minimum wage system. What a profoundly Australian idea that became – that wages should not simply be determined by how little an employer could get away with paying but by what was fair and reasonable for a human being to live with dignity.

Over the generations that followed, organised labour, working people and Labor governments continued that work: the 8-hour day, the 40-hour working week, penalty rates, overtime, annual leave, sick leave, long service leave, equal pay, occupational health and safety protections, superannuation, maternity and parental leave, protections against unfair dismissal, minimum employment standards and the right to collectively bargain. Beyond the workplace, Labor's belief in dignity and security helped build the great institutions of Australia's social compact: Medicare, the pharmaceutical benefits scheme and, recently, the national disability insurance scheme. They are different reforms, different generations, different circumstances, with one common principle: everyone has the right to aspire to secure and safe work and to not be left behind. None of those achievements simply fell out of the sky: they were fought for, they were organised for, they were legislated for by Labor governments and the labour movement, and they must continue to be protected and built upon by Labor governments and the labour movement. That is the tradition which this bill actually stands on.

In 2009 Victoria referred significant workplace relations powers to the Commonwealth so Victorian workers could benefit from the protections of the national Fair Work Act 2009. But our workplace

relations system does not stand still. Work changes, the economy changes, Commonwealth legislation also changes, and when the Commonwealth strengthens the Fair Work Act there can be circumstances where those reforms do not automatically flow through to sections of Victoria's public sector workforce, because of the constitutional arrangements underpinning our national workplace relations system, and that is what this bill addresses. At its heart, this legislation is about fairness, consistency and parity in Victoria and across the country, and it asks a very straightforward question: why should a Victorian public sector worker be denied an important workplace protection simply because of the constitutional character of their employer? Why should someone working for the Victorian public sector or local government have lesser statutory protection in areas such as flexible work, pay secrecy or insecure employment than a Victorian performing comparable work elsewhere? Our answer is simple: they should not, and this bill fixes that disparity.

Firstly, the bill extends important recent reforms to the Commonwealth Fair Work Act to Victorian public sector and local council employees, where those reforms do not currently apply to them as a matter of law. That includes important protections relating to flexible working arrangements, and that matters enormously in the modern workplace. It matters to the parents trying to balance work and raising a family. It matters to the carer looking after a loved one. It matters to an older worker and those workers with disability. Flexible work is not about workers doing less, it is about enabling more people to participate in the workforce and remain in the workforce while meeting the realities of their lives.

Secondly, the bill extends protections relating to pay secrecy. For too long secrecy around wages could operate to the disadvantage of workers. Employees should not be contractually silenced from discussing their remuneration. Transparency can empower workers to identify unjustified pay disparities and to have informed conversations about their worth.

Thirdly, the bill extends Commonwealth limitations on the inappropriate use of fixed-term and casual employment to non-executive public sector and local government employees. That is entirely consistent with this Labor government's secure employment agenda, because there is an enormous difference between having a job and having job security. If somebody is performing work that is genuinely ongoing in nature, governments and employers should not use rolling temporary arrangements simply to deny that worker certainty. This bill will continue to permit legitimate use of casual and fixed-term employment – it does not abolish those types of employment – but what it will do is ensure that the same contemporary Fair Work protections apply more consistently also to Victorian workers.

The second major reform in this bill concerns Victoria's law enforcement officers, our police, who do extraordinary work. I just want to acknowledge that on 14 May I was really delighted to help and thank our local Victoria Police members by attending the Pascoe Vale Rotary's Ivor 'Monty' Montgomery Memorial Community Police Awards at the Northern Golf Club. The nominees and recipients for this year included Detective Senior Constable Jack Talmage, recognised for initiating Operation Laverna in 2025 which targeted recidivist shop stealing; Sergeant Geoffrey Kwist for his efforts in managing the liquor licensing portfolio and representing the LGBTQIA+ community across Merri-bek; Acting Sergeant Christian Fenyk for his work as the disability liaison officer for Merri-bek; and Leading Senior Constable Andrea Barnden, who commenced with Victoria Police in 1989, for performing a wide range of duties including the Merri-bek crime scene office from 2012 and mentoring many junior members to this day. The overall winner was Georgia Barnes, who is a Victoria Police Service level 3 public service officer, who received the overall award for her efforts as the new and emerging communities liaison officer, doing particularly important work across all of Merri-bek with our sporting clubs, particularly our football clubs, and particularly up in Fawkner in the member for Broadmeadows's area, where she is doing fantastic work with the Fawkner Soccer Club – Fawkner Azzuri – and the Blues up there with the local member, who does magnificent work in the seat of Broadmeadows.

But this bill is also about supporting our Victoria Police members. Every day they walk into situations most Victorians would instinctively walk away from. They respond to family violence, road trauma, serious crime, mental health incidents, emergencies, public disorder and some of the most confronting circumstances imaginable. They deserve our gratitude, but gratitude must also be reflected in fair industrial settings. Under the existing arrangements, law enforcement officers cannot validly bargain over certain employment matters in the same way as other public sector workers, and this bill changes that. It expands the matters which can be the subjects of collective bargaining, and validly, including enterprise agreements or workplace determinations for law enforcement officers. Those matters include probation, promotion, transfer from one place or position to another, physical and mental fitness, discipline and termination of employment. This is significant because collective bargaining only works properly when workers and their representatives can actually negotiate the matters that meaningfully affect their working lives and, importantly, where agreed provisions covering these matters are included in a future enterprise agreement or workplace determination. Disputes about those provisions will be capable of being dealt with through the appropriate industrial framework, including the Fair Work Commission.

The reforms also extend the general protection regime of the Fair Work Act more broadly to law enforcement officers in relation to all of these matters. That means greater access to protections against adverse action taken for prohibited reasons. Again, the principle is straightforward. Our police officers should broadly enjoy the same fundamental workplace protections available to all other Victorian public sector workers. This bill also carefully gets that balance right as well, through a number of other provisions. But in essence, these laws are building on that ongoing work that we have been doing as a Labor government and as a labour movement over many years. The tools might change, the workplaces might change and the economy might change, but the principle endures: dignity in work, fairness in pay, security in employment and a genuine voice for working people. It was worth fighting for in 1856. It was worth fighting for in 1891, 1896 and 1907, and it is worth fighting for still in 2026 here in Victoria.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (18:18): What a great contribution from the member for Pascoe Vale. Thank you for that history lesson. It was fantastic. I rise to speak in support of the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026, a bill that is about fairness, consistency and respect for the people who serve our state. Victorian public sector employees and local council workers should benefit from important workplace protections already available to many private sector employees. Of course, this bill does that, and it gives Victoria's police and other law enforcement officers greater capacity to bargain collectively over matters affecting their employment and to enforce agreed conditions through the appropriate industrial processes, primarily being the Fair Work Commission. These are sensible reforms, and they address disparities in our workplace relations frameworks. They reinforce a simple Labor principle: that people doing important work deserve secure employment, fair conditions and of course an effective voice in their workplace. We know that our law enforcement officers are represented fantastically by the Police Association Victoria.

Victoria referred significant industrial relations powers to the Commonwealth in 2009 so that Victorian employees could have broader access to the protections of the federal Fair Work Act 2009. That referral remains important because the Commonwealth's constitutional powers do not automatically capture every Victorian workplace. While the federal Corporations Act 2001 applies to constitutional corporations and their employees, it does not necessarily cover the core Victorian public service of every public sector and local government employer. We see a number of local government employees at the moment trying to do collective bargaining, and they are obviously in dispute with a number of councils around the state of Victoria, in particular in my electorate over in Melton. They are trying to force a single agreement onto the employees and, I would almost say, intimidate them into agreeing to a single agreement outside of the collective arrangement with the other nine councils, is my understanding. There are quite interesting developments going on out at Melton.

I will come to another issue very shortly about in-home aged care support. They are getting out of it in July of next year and are going to outsource it. They will blame the Commonwealth, but it will be 80 jobs that will go missing from the Melton City Council by outsourcing these services. People are in need of those services. I think that is very unfair. I would like to see the council rethink their position on that. I know the ASU is representing their members and taking that battle up to the council. I know that there will be a dispute in the Fair Work Commission. There are people out there in the Melton community that rely on those people from the Melton council serving them and helping them within their homes.

The referral act therefore helps provide a consistent workplace relations system across Victoria. However, when the original referral was made, several matters relating to public sector employment were excluded. Some exclusions reflected constitutional considerations arising from the High Court's decision in the *Re Australian Education Union; Ex parte Victoria*. Others sought to preserve the operational independence of the state, particularly in relation to Victoria Police, who in my opinion are the finest police force in the country, and of course they are the largest police force in the country. I would like to commend the remarks by my friend the member for Monbulk concerning the one-year anniversary tomorrow of the murders of Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim De Waart-Hottart. I share those sentiments and extend my condolences to their families and of course their friends and colleagues.

The workplace relations system has continued to evolve since then. The Commonwealth has amended the Fair Work Act, working practices have changed and some of the original exclusions now produce disparities that were neither intended nor justified. The Victorian Parliament must therefore update the referral act so that Victorian workers can take advantage of important national reforms. On public sector and local council employees, of which there are so many living and working in Melton, I would particularly like to mention the Melton City Council, who I have had the incredible privilege of working with for the last eight years. I have had a pretty good working relationship with them. We do not always agree on things, but we have had a pretty good working relationship. As I referred to earlier, they have made some interesting decisions of late in regard to outsourcing the in-home aged care services, and as I said, it will cost 80 jobs from the Melton City Council. We are hoping that they will rethink their position on that.

This bill extends the application of recent federal provisions to those important workers concerning flexible working arrangements, pay secrecy and the use of fixed-term and casual employment. I have been a strong advocate as an ex-union secretary in regard to the concerns around fixed-term employment and how that is an avenue for employers to keep wages and conditions down, to keep a lid on them. It is a way that some employers, in regard to the insecurity when someone is on fixed-term contracts and casual employment, make those unfortunate individuals too scared to speak up. They are too scared to seek a wage increase. They are too scared to improve conditions. They go to the boss and ask for a wage increase and the boss tells them to eff off. What can you do? What actions can an individual take? That is the importance of being in a union and being collective.

Those people cannot change anything unless they have a sympathetic boss that is prepared to pay them more money and improve their conditions. They keep extending these fixed-term contracts, just keep these employees dangling at the same wage rates and with the same conditions for many, many years when they probably should be permanently employed or ongoingly employed and have some level of security. We have seen that many, many times. I saw that in my days as a union secretary when I worked for the ambulance union for 23 years. That is why we say these are practical protections that can make an enormous difference in people's lives.

The right to request flexible work arrangements is particularly important for parents, carers, older workers and people with disabilities. Flexible work is not just merely about convenience. I would like to challenge that concept that gets thrown around, that it is about convenience. No, it is not. For many people it determines whether they can remain in the workplace at all and whether they can balance family life with working life and bringing in an income and putting food on the table.

I noticed in the media yesterday that it was reported that Melton Secondary College are trialling teachers working from home one day per fortnight, which I think is a fantastic way to manage teachers' time in regard to being able to do the non-student day things, whether they have to do reports and all that sort of stuff. I am pleased, and I commend Kathryn Sobey, the principal at Melton Secondary College, for trialling this. I notice it captured a lot of attention in the media yesterday, and good on her for allowing her teachers to trial that concept of one day per fortnight working from home. I noticed some people that rang up the radio station yesterday, the ABC, saying that they did not think it was a good thing and people are just getting lazy. It is not that they are having a day off. They are actually working from home in a more constructive way, and it is a better way of utilising their time. I think it is a great model and I am sure other schools will take it on. As I say, Kathryn Sobey, the principal, should be applauded for that.

In our growing community in Melton, many residents balance work with raising their children and caring for relatives, managing disability or health needs and travelling significant distances to their workplace. Seventy-three per cent of people travel outside of Melton to go to work. It takes an hour and a half to get to the city from Melton, and that is on a good day when you have not got someone running up the backside of someone on the Western Freeway. It is a minimum of an hour and a half by car, let alone by train when the trains are running, so it is important to have flexible work arrangements. The degree of flexibility can help a parent manage school and childcare responsibilities. It helps a carer support a loved one, and it also helps an experienced employee remain in a job and like their job and not have the burden of the trudge of long distances of travel but having that flexible arrangement of balancing it with their family.

I know I have only got a short time left. I do want to commend again our police officers. This bill allows our police officers to be treated like all other workers that are covered by enterprise agreements and covered by the Fair Work Act. It means that some of the provisions that previously could not be included in their agreements or could not be negotiated can be now and can be included in an agreement. It does not take the power away from the Chief Commissioner of Police to negotiate with VicPol officers and the police association in regard to what can be included in an agreement. Again, it is about an agreement, it is about working conditions, it is about fairness, it is about security. I am pleased, and again I commend the police association for the great representation of their colleagues. This is an important bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (18:29): I rise to speak in support of the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026. When looking at this, at first glance I suppose it looks fairly technical in terms of a piece of legislation. It does deal with industrial relations powers between the Victorian and Commonwealth governments, and we do that regularly here in this place to align our legislation. But it is amending the principal act which was established back in 2009, and it is making sure that changes that were made to the Commonwealth workplace laws can now flow through to Victorian workers who would otherwise miss out.

Behind all that technical language and behind the act and the amendments are people. They are workers. They are people who get up every morning, they go to work, they provide for their families, they care for others, they serve our communities and they contribute to our economy and the society that we all share together. I think it is really important that we talk about workplace relations in this place and remember that there are people behind this legislation. Ultimately, it is making sure through this bill that workers have fair and modern workplace rights, and it is making sure that people have a fair go at work. It is something I am really proud to say, being part of this government: we have always believed that workers should have the dignity of work. But it is more than just a pay packet. It provides security, it provides for families and it allows people to support themselves. People and workers should have a reasonable say in the conditions under which they work, and that is the principle that sits behind this bill.

The Victorian government first referred aspects of its industrial relations powers, as I said, in 2009 to the Commonwealth, and the reason for doing that was pretty simple at the time. Without that referral,

many Commonwealth workplace laws would only apply automatically to employers who were constitutional corporations. That means that there could be circumstances where a reform may happen at the Commonwealth level and apply to private sector workers but not automatically apply to someone doing very similar work, maybe in Victoria, particularly in the public sector or local government. Obviously, we do not want that, so from time to time we have had to update this referral act to make sure that changes in the Commonwealth workplace laws do flow on to Victorian workers where appropriate. This is another step that we are taking in that process today, and these changes matter. It matters to workers who need flexibility, it matters to workers who want transparency about their pay and it matters to workers who certainly need that security and knowledge that their work and their job is going to be genuinely ongoing.

I just want to start with that flexible work, and I heard the member for Melton talk about this as well. For many people the idea of flexibility sounds like a small thing, but when you are juggling a whole lot of things in your life – parents may be juggling kids – it can make a difference to have a bit of flexibility to being able to stay in that workforce. Maybe it is about working from home; it might be about reducing hours. But having that flexibility can absolutely support a worker. You may be, as I think they call them, the sandwich generation or age, where you might be dealing with or supporting young children or children at home but also ageing parents, and that flexibility might mean that you need to take your parents to an appointment or give care. For someone living with a disability, having flexible working arrangements absolutely makes sense and makes employment more accessible. These are really important issues that we need to reform, and we need to think about what our work participation will look like going into the future. The Commonwealth reforms have strengthened the rights around that request for flexible work arrangements, and this bill ensures that those protections can apply to the Victorian public sector and local government employers as well. Ultimately, it is about fairness.

This bill also addresses pay secrecy. I think this is a pretty straightforward principle, that people should be able to talk about their pay if they choose to; there should not be a contractual prevention, I suppose, from discussing their pay. The Commonwealth reforms give employers the right to share or not to share information about their pay and conditions. Again, this is making sure that the Victorian public sector and local government workers are not left behind and that pay transparency matters. I suppose it goes to fairness, whether a worker is being fairly remunerated, and it can help identify any differences in the workplace and with making decisions about their future.

The third area I want to touch on in this bill is about secure employment. This is pretty important to me because I think there is a fundamental difference between having a job and having security in a job. If someone is doing work that is genuinely ongoing, then they should be kept ongoing. They should not be kept in that cycle of temporary uncertainty or insecure employment simply because it is convenient for the employer to keep them like that.

The Commonwealth reforms have strengthened the rules around casual employment, introducing new limitations around fixed-term contracts. They also provide a pathway for eligible casual employees to move to permanent employment circumstances where there are requirements and the employers can do that. It does, I suppose, align directly with our government's policy and our government's broader commitment to secure employment as well. We want workers to have certainty about their future and certainty about their employment, because ultimately, at the end of the day, you need to be able to plan for your future. It might be that you need to plan for a mortgage. It might be that you are wanting to raise a family. Having certainty about your job and your future absolutely gives you the confidence that you can move into the future knowing and planning, making long-term decisions for yourself and your family. That is why I really do welcome these changes as well.

The bill also makes some important changes for law enforcement officers, and I will just touch a little bit on that part of the bill regarding our law enforcement officers and police officers. It particularly goes to probation, promotions, transfers, physical and mental fitness, discipline and termination. Because of the existing exclusions in the referral act, these matters cannot be validated, bargained over

or included in enterprise agreements in the same way as for other public sector employees. There is a little bit of inconsistency there. The bill addresses that inconsistency, and it also will allow law enforcement officers to bargain over those matters broadly in the same way as other Victorian public sector employees.

We are making these improvements, as I have said, because it is about working people. It is about working conditions and making sure people have a genuine voice in their employment conditions. It is not about handing over operational control. In terms of enterprise agreements, those are still going to be determined through bargaining, but it is about making sure that workers have a legitimate say in the employment conditions that affect them. It is also – just to touch on the bill – about access to protections in the same way as for other public sector employees. At the moment law enforcement officers face different arrangements when it comes to accessing federal general protections in relation to some of these matters. I want to acknowledge the advocacy of a couple of groups and acknowledge the work of the Police Association Victoria and also the Community and Public Sector Union, who have been advocating for these reforms for a long time. They represent workers who are going to be affected by this legislation. It is fantastic to have their advocacy as part of this and the consultation that the government has done with them. That is really important.

In closing, we could summarise this bill as making sure that workers have a voice. Unions should have a voice, employers should have a voice, and government is going to align a framework and create a fairer framework through which those parties can now negotiate. As I said at the start, this is about working people. This is about people that get up every day, serve our community, work hard in our community and contribute to our society. We want to thank them for that, and we want to give them the right conditions so they can continue to do that work and have protections from our government but also from the Commonwealth government and have those protections aligned. I commend the bill to the house.

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (18:38): I also rise to speak on the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026, and I think I am right in saying the opposition are not against this bill. I think I am right; I am getting a nod. That is good. I would be very surprised if anyone was. In some ways it seems a strange concept that we are in a position where we are making the same rights available to some of our law enforcement officers that everyone else has had in the public service, and I am obviously glad we are doing it. The key objective of this bill is to amend the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Act 2009, the referral act, to expand the category of matters that can be the subject of enterprise bargaining and validly included in enterprise agreements and workplace determinations as they relate to our law enforcement officers.

I should say at this point – like other members have, I am sure, on both sides – our sincere condolences on the tragedy 12 months ago tomorrow of the two officers who were slain in the actions of their daily work. I remember when we passed industrial manslaughter laws in this place, which I think we are all very proud of, because the idea that anyone would go to work and not come home is just abhorrent. Yet our police officers too many times – because one would be too many – take on that risk when they serve us day to day. We all grieve for the losses of those officers, none more so than obviously their family and their friends. As many have said, we send our condolences to them and the communities that they served.

I am just looking at the list, and others have mentioned that the bill amends the referral act to ensure the following matters are referred to the Commonwealth with respect to law enforcement officers: probation; promotion; transfer from place to place or position to position, subject to a deployment exemption; physical or mental fitness; discipline; and termination of employment. We had a period last year where EBAs were negotiated with our police. EBAs are like laws and sausages: you do not really want to see how they are made, you just hope to get a good result at the end. To my knowledge, our police are happy with the EBA that was negotiated, but obviously from the fact that we are here passing this bill today, the things that I just read out before could not be in the EBA that was passed.

Presumably that is something that they will argue for in the next EBA when that comes up. As I said, it surprised me that we had not completed that sort of equity, if you like.

The bill also goes to the security of work. Over the last number of years we are talking more and more in many ways that are not great about labour hire and about insecure work. It strikes me that a focus on the security of work for people – and the member for Melton said this quite eloquently – is always important to protect. I think over the last 40 years, and certainly in my working life, I have seen that degrade, year on year, slightly on slightly. This is not a whack at any side of politics. We have all got ourselves to this point, but I think we are ready as a society to start folding that back. I think the populace are ready to have a conversation about less insecure work and more people being directly employed, whether it be by private corporations or by public corporations. I see this not just here in Victoria when I am talking to people on the doors or in my community, I see it also around the country, but also around the world. If you look at what England are doing at the moment, they are having conversations in similar frames.

I remember – and I have probably said this in the house before, so forgive me for repeating myself – being a young worker at one of my first jobs at NEC in the 1990s. I remember turning up to work one morning and out of the 50 or 60 PABX technicians who were gainfully employed by the company at the time – and I am not having a go at NEC; great stuff – they were all told, 'You are now redundant. Thank you for your service. Here's your package'. There would have been a package, and it probably would have been quite generous back in 1991 as well, because the packages early in this outsourcing phase we went through as a world were relatively generous. The next day, to my knowledge, about a third of them or maybe a quarter of them got a phone call from the same person they used to work for, who said, 'G'day, mate. Hey, listen, we've got some work for ya. Can you go get yourself an ABN and a couple of your mates who you like, who you trust, one of the other guys, and do you mind starting up a company to do the same work you were doing last week, except we'll pay you as contractors, not employees.'

The accountants love this because it changes the way you look at the books. On the paper side of things it can make a company look more viable and more flexible, and these are all good things. At the time in the 1990s we were all sold, 'This is the way of the future. It's going to be great. We're going to have lower prices. We can talk about the SEC. We can talk about a whole heap of other things we've done.' I think the jury has been out since the early 1990s. It is not cheaper, to my mind, because we end up just paying the same people to do the same jobs, but we pay an extra 25 per cent return on investment over five years for the privilege. For private business it is fine – that is great; everyone should be entitled to make some money – but for public services one would hope we would never suggest that we outsource our police force. That would be, I think, anathema to all of us in this place. But we have done it to so many of our public sector workers who this bill affects as well. I just think we are ready to start bringing this back in. For crucial services that we always do, essential services, we should bring this back in.

There are two reasons. Firstly, I think it is cheaper. I had a parliamentary intern – Otto, who did a fantastic job – have a look at this about roadworks for me. There are examples overseas where it can be cheaper to outsource. Texas, for instance, was one he put in, but they have much more competition. In some markets – in our state, where we have less competition – it is not cheaper, because it ends up just basically finding a price amongst the small number of people who compete. The second reason why I think we are ready to bring some of this stuff back is accountability. Whether you are public service or whether you are private business – have a look at some of the big four and the trouble they are in with some of the accountability at the moment – if you outsource everything, you also, and this is one reason why the bean counters and the lawyers love it, outsource some of your responsibility. You can easily say, 'That contract that we held, they've done the wrong thing. That's all their fault. We won't use them anymore.' But the reality is you employed them to do the job. I would much rather back in our law enforcement officers and our public services – anyone who does essential work that the people of Victoria need done day in, day out, day in, day out by government. I would much rather

they were directly employed with all of the benefits of direct employment, including the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Act 2009 and including all the things that protect employees. I would much rather that because, again, I think it is cheaper but also it means that the people in charge are responsible to make sure things are done right. With that, I commend the bill to the house.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (18:48): I feel like I am probably, like everyone in this place, getting a little bit croaky at this time of day. The Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026 makes important changes to the working conditions and entitlements of several cohorts of Victorian workers, including Victorian public service staff and Victoria Police. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge that this is going to be a very difficult week for sworn and unsworn staff of Victoria Police. I remember being in this place on this day last year when we heard the reports of the terrible incident in Porepunkah, and my thoughts are with everyone at VicPol and their families and loved ones as well as the communities of Porepunkah and Bright, who are still grappling with how such a terrible, terrible thing could happen. As someone who used to work for Victoria Police, I know how committed and passionate those employees are and that this will be a really challenging time for them.

At its heart, this bill is about bringing greater fairness and consistency to the workplace relations framework for Victorian public sector and local government employees. For many workers the Fair Work Act 2009 provides a familiar set of rights and protections, as it should. But because of the way Victoria's industrial relations powers have historically, sometimes rightly or wrongly, been referred to the Commonwealth, there are important areas where Victorian public sector employees have not had the benefit of the provisions that apply to other workers, and this bill is about addressing some of those gaps. It extends important Fair Work protections relating to flexible working arrangements, pay secrecy and casual and fixed-term employment. It also expands the matters over which Victoria Police officers can bargain collectively, something that we on this side of the chamber are proud advocates for. These are practical reforms that will make a real difference to workers.

Flexible work has become an important feature of modern employment. Workers have responsibilities outside the workplace: they might have kids or caring responsibilities, health or accessibility needs, or simply circumstances that make a degree of flexibility essential to maintaining their employment. And for an employer, flexible work can also be an important tool for attracting and retaining skilled and experienced employees. Therefore there is a strong case for ensuring our Victorian public sector employees have access to the same modern, flexible work protections available elsewhere in the Fair Work system. This bill also addresses pay secrecy. Workers should have the ability to discuss their remuneration and understand how their pay compares with the work being performed by others. One of the things I am really proud of as a Labor member of Parliament is our efforts, both at the state and federal level, to deal with the gender pay gap.

This bill also deals with casual and fixed-term employment. There are circumstances where these forms of employment are appropriate and necessary, but secure ongoing employment should be the norm, where the work itself is ongoing. As I mentioned at the outset, a really significant part of this bill is to support the employees of Victoria Police, and that is an especially important reform. We know that police officers undertake demanding work on behalf of our communities; they work in incredibly challenging environments, they make difficult decisions and carry significant responsibilities. Yet the industrial relations arrangements have restricted the matters over which they can bargain collectively. This bill changes that by enabling bargaining over matters including probation, promotion, transfers, physical and mental fitness, discipline and termination – significant aspects of an employee's working life.

I am mindful, with the time remaining this evening, that one of my other colleagues, the wonderful member for Wendouree, would also like to make a contribution. I will conclude by saying that unions are an essential part of a functioning industrial relations system.

Richard Riordan interjected.

Katie HALL: There is an old man shouting at a cloud over there. An individual worker may find it difficult to negotiate with a large employer over complex employment matters, and collective representation changes that balance. We know it, we believe in it and I commend the bill to the house.

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (18:54): I thank the member for Footscray for sharing her time with me tonight to talk on the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026. I stand today as a proud ASU member, a former AWU Port Kembla organiser and a former AMWU printing division national industrial officer. Fair work is so important, and I look around this chamber and look at the number of people who have done amazing work with unions over the years. I worked with the member for Thomastown at the AMWU. Obviously we have got the former head of the Victorian Ambulance Union with us. They are all amazing people, who have supported hardworking, decent Victorians all their lives as union officials and are now continuing to do so as local members representing their communities, and this is what this bill is about. It is about looking at industrial relations law, but at the heart of it are the people – the people who make up industrial relations. It is about a police officer finishing a night shift and wanting confidence that their workplace rights are protected. I too want to thank my local police in the Ballarat command and say that I am thinking of them and all of Victoria Police during this very, very sad time on the anniversary of the dreadful, tragic events that happened at Porepunkah.

I would also like to say that this bill is about public servants caring for an aged parent and needing flexibility to balance their work and family responsibility. It is about a local government employee who wants the security of an ongoing job rather than rolling short-term contracts, and we know that impacts every aspect of their life, in trying to give their kids security at the same school, not having to rent, being able to get that mortgage and being able to lay down roots in a community and say, 'This is where our family is.' It is impossible to do that unless you have secure employment and you are not relying on short-term contracts. It is about ensuring that Victorian workers have access to fair protections, regardless of whether they work in the public sector or the private sector.

One of the things that I have learned throughout my time representing workers is that fairness is so important. Workers want to know that if they work hard, if they contribute to their workplace and if they serve their community, they will be treated with dignity and respect. That is what every worker in Victoria deserves. That expectation should not stop at the workplace door. It reflects a simple proposition: workers in Victoria's public sector and local government should be able to access many of the same workplace rights and protections that have been extended to other Australian workers through recent reforms to the Fair Work system. To the workers of the City of Ballarat, whether you are working in our libraries, in our maternal and child health, in our gardens or in our civic support teams – whatever you are doing at the City of Ballarat, which is one of the largest employers in my community – you are valued, you deserve to have dignity and you deserve to have fairness in the job.

That is also why this fairness is so important – pay secrecy. When Mike was working for an American company, there was all this secrecy. You could not tell anyone else what you were doing. As a fitter and turner, he did not know what the other fitters and turners working alongside him in the factory were earning. They were doing the same work of the same value, yet there was secrecy. Some people could have been on sweetheart deals; other people could have been getting underpaid. To be able to have pay transparency is the basis for a decent, transparent workplace. We know that it causes divisions when people do not think that there is fairness in the workplace. I have seen that firsthand. Mike, being a strong unionist all his life, as a delegate working for this company, said he felt grubby. He felt grubby when he was prevented from talking to people about his wages and conditions, and it was not right. Between you and me, he did not keep that secrecy, because he is not that kind of person, and if he thought that someone was getting underpaid he was the one who would speak up and do it. Employers think they can have this power over people. They think they can make people vulnerable in the workplace where they will not question it, they will not speak up, they will not stand up for themselves and they will not stand up for the collective. That is what pay secrecy is about. It is about

really striking at the heart of the collective of workers, and that is not okay, because they conceal inequality and make unfair treatment a part of the workplace culture.

We know that this is important. It is important for job security, for secure employment and for providing certainties for people with housing, education, child care and financial planning. Victorian workers deserve the best, and our Labor government is here to stand with them every day. That is what we do. I commend the bill to the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Warrnambool train services

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (19:00): (1789) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Public Transport, and the action I seek is for the minister to publicly release the V/Line plans for the extra services on the Warrnambool train line. We have had quite the storytelling episode from the minister now for quite some time. I and my colleague the member for South-West Coast have been lobbying for a long time to make sure that six V/Line carriages that arrive in Geelong continue on down to Warrnambool so that the people of western Victoria, the people in South-West Coast and the people in Polwarth can actually get a seat on a train when it comes through five times a day. The government have made much of the fact that they have increased services. Yes, they have increased services, but magically, increased services mean 10,000 less seats a week. Can you believe that? A government so incompetent that they have increased services but delivered 10,000 less seats. That means school groups cannot get on the train. That means people in wheelchairs and on disability and mobility scooters cannot fit on the train. It means people who want to come to the great bike-riding rail trails of Polwarth, on the Timboon rail trail and out to Forrest and up to Beech Forest, cannot bring their bikes on the train, because there is simply not enough room.

We have been lobbying hard, and the whole time the minister for transport and V/Line have been telling the people of Polwarth, 'No, you can't have your extra three carriages, because your platforms aren't long enough. It simply can't work. Unlike every other train line in the state, we can't lock the carriages to make sure people don't go off the end and fall off the platform, or we can't somehow manage the people on the train.' Suddenly, lo and behold, with an election looming the Labor Party have now said that magically sometime between now and the election they are going to find some extra carriages, but we do not know when they are going to find the carriages. We do not know for how long they are committing to the carriages. What we do know is that for over 12 months this government has sworn black and blue to the people of Polwarth, 'You can't have your train. You can't have your seats. You can't have the service that you have had for the last hundred years. We've taken that all off you, and we can't fix it.' Magically, under the pressure from me and under the pressure from South-West Coast, we have now got the government saying, 'We can provide the extra carriages.' Minister, if you are going to provide the extra carriages, if you have now made that commitment, if you have now thrown into the rubbish bin your excuses for the last 12 months that it simply cannot be done – we have said all along it can be done – when is it going to happen, how many extra carriages are we getting, what days of the week will they be and when can the people of Polwarth expect it?

Craigieburn Road East

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (19:03): (1790) My adjournment is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to come with me to inspect Craigieburn Road East at the BP service station and fast-food outlet hub. The housing estates north of Craigieburn Road East are among the newest estates within the Thomastown electorate. Although many homes

have been there for several years, not all the services residents require have yet been built. The state government has built schools and an early learning centre. Soon the community centre and library will be completed. We have upgraded Epping Road and Craigieburn Road East and have now announced the construction of the new police station. The Mernda Community Hospital has also opened and is operational.

However, communities also need local shops and food stores. A shopping centre has been earmarked for the area, but the council has repeatedly agreed to developer applications to delay the construction of the shopping precinct. This means the only available shops and food outlets are those on Craigieburn Road East at the BP service station. There is only one access point to the BP service station and fast-food outlets, and that is a left-hand turn when travelling east along Craigieburn Road East. There is no second access point for the estates and no legal right-hand turn for those travelling west. This means those travelling west must drive a further 2 kilometres or more to do a legal U-turn to then turn left into the BP. There have been many car accidents and near misses caused by illegal right-hand turns, and residents are becoming fearful of this section of the road. They are woken in the night to crashing noises, tyres screeching and horns tooting, and similarly while driving they can never be sure what will happen next as they travel along that section of the road. I ask the minister to please visit this site with me and see the problem firsthand.

Crime

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (19:05): (1791) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police, and I call on him to intervene urgently to curb Victoria's crime wave. My heart sank in my chest hearing about the 10-year-old boy and his mum attacked in the CBD in broad daylight by a man with a pair of scissors. The woman was walking through the city with her three children when out of nowhere a random man punched her 10-year-old son in the head. When the mother stepped in to intervene he turned on her, and she was then stabbed repeatedly in the neck and shoulders. The alleged offender was stopped when witnesses came to their rescue and performed a citizen's arrest.

This hits home because around the same time that day my mum was on her way back through the city after taking my 19-month-old baby to the zoo. I felt sick to my stomach thinking about my family being out and about in the city around that same time. I know I am thinking what so many other mums and parents are thinking: how did it get to this? When did it get to a place where you fear for your child's safety in broad daylight in our city? I speak to parents all the time who say to me that they will not let their kids go out on their own anymore, to women of all ages who say they will not take public transport at night anymore and to families of all varieties who say they do not even feel safe in their own homes anymore. Isn't it the fundamental job of the government to protect the very people they are elected to serve? How is it that it has come to this, where children and innocent people are no longer safe on our streets? I think of Van Viet Truong. We remember Aidan Becker. We remember Chol Achiek, Dau Akueng and Ash Gordon. Victorians are crying out for solutions and legislation that will fix the crime crisis and make them feel safe again.

This is our commitment to Victorians: we have a comprehensive plan led by a former policeman to keep Victorians safe. It is a plan for 3000 more police, a one-strike rule for bail, actual adult crime for adult time, 200 more PSOs to return to the 119 train stations Labor has taken them off of, a fit-for-purpose justice system with specialist judges appointed for criminal cases in our courts and more. It is abundantly clear to Victorians that there is a widespread culture of crime that has taken hold in our state – a culture of crime where youth offenders boast about getting out on bail by the time the police who arrested them have finished their paperwork and where organised crime gangs recruit children to do their dirty work because they exploit the fact they will not face consequences as youth offenders. This is why things need to urgently change. We have a plan to fix it and to keep Victorians safe.

Greater Geelong planning

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (19:08): (1792) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning, and I ask the minister to provide advice on how local residents can provide feedback to planning

proposals under planning provisions clause 53.19 in relation to planning permits for non-government schools. I have recently heard from many residents across the communities of Anakie and Staughton Vale, who have raised concerns about a proposal for 155 Staughton Vale Road, Anakie. This proposal is for a local private school, Bacchus Marsh Grammar, to expand their current agricultural campus and build a 450-student private primary school in Staughton Vale. In 2015 the school proposed a 15-year road map, which included a plan to grow to a 1500-student, $25 million campus. This was rejected by local government, following local opposition and a rigorous planning process. At VCAT level the plans were negotiated down from this massive student campus to a site that could accommodate a maximum of 150 students at any one time.

Local residents have concerns about the appropriateness of the current proposal, and these are not simply a case of 'not in my backyard'. Residents are particularly worried about several issues, including safety, with the site sitting within a bushfire overlay, raising significant fears about evacuation safety, especially since the only access road doubles as the town's main evacuation route; and also that the rural, farming-zoned location lacks basic infrastructure to support a large-scale development such as this and the increased infrastructure and amenities that will be required to sustain it. As such my local community want some advice around the process involved in this proposal and how they can ensure their voices are heard in this matter.

Lowan electorate police resources

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (19:10): (1793) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police, and the action I seek is for the minister to immediately restore the operating hours of police stations across my electorate of Lowan. Last week I attended the Horsham police station just after 10 am. I did not realise it at the time, but we have got reduced operating hours at Horsham police station, and there were any number of people waiting to be served in the front counter area of Horsham police station. The police at Horsham are doing an absolutely outstanding job. They do an incredible amount of work in the community. They are the front-facing service for so many aspects of our community and deal with some of the more difficult aspects within our community. I certainly thank Horsham police for their recent support following an incident that I was the victim of. We also know that at Horsham the police are working in even harder conditions, because while it is a two-storey building, the upper floor is currently closed due to black mould. This is very, very difficult, because in the upstairs area there are critical officers, including the sexual offences and child abuse investigation team. They have got reduced capacity at the moment. So we have not just got a floor of Horsham police station closed, we have got reduced hours, which is putting enormous pressure on our police officers to be able to serve the community.

We have seen this rollback of operating hours of police stations across the entire electorate. Stawell police station also has heavily reduced hours. What this means for our community is that it sends a message that our police are not available, and when people need to go in to make a statement, it is at very, very limited times of the day and everybody wants to make a statement at exactly the same time. I ran into Paul Christopher, who is a fabulous local person involved in the local livestock exchange at Horsham, who was making a statement and retrieving some items that had been stolen from the livestock exchange. These are the interactions that are dealt with through the work of police.

It is so important for our community to be able to engage with local police. It does not matter whether it is break-ins, car theft, farm crime, violent offending, antisocial behaviour, domestic violence or any other matter in our community, we need to send a clear signal to our community and to criminals in the local area that our police will be there when they are needed. I urge the Minister for Police to immediately ensure there are an appropriate number of police officers in communities right across Victoria but particularly in the outer reaches of our state. We do matter in regional Victoria and in rural Victoria, and I urge the Minister for Police to ensure our stations are appropriately staffed to support other police officers and our community.

Wyndham Vale train services

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (19:12): (1794) My adjournment is for the Minister for Public Transport, and the action I seek is that the minister update me on the rollout of our nine-car carriage V/Line trains on the Wyndham Vale line, as funded in the budget this year. If you are someone who lives in Truganina or Tarneit and you catch the train to work in the city, there is some really good news coming your way: your trains are about to get 50 per cent bigger, because all peak-hour services will be nine-car carriages – not just a few of them, all of them. It means it will be easier for you to get on the train, and it will be easier for you to get a seat. Only Labor has delivered and will deliver the rail improvements that we westies need.

Sadly, we know that these services are at risk this coming November. If Victoria elects a Liberal–One Nation government of cuts and chaos, they will cut these services from the Melton and Wyndham Vale lines. The Liberals want to take our trains off us. They want to leave the line thin, as the member for Bulleen said, and give those trains to Warrnambool or to Gippsland. And despite the member for Bulleen trying to walk back his comments and suggest that that is just a lie, his interview on ABC radio speaks for itself. 'Excess services' is what he called them, and he admitted that it would leave the lines thin but is certainly available. Well, I say to the member for Bulleen: anyone who catches the train in this part of Melbourne's west will tell you that these trains are not excess, they are absolutely critical. We need more of these high-capacity trains, not less.

While we get on with delivering on major rail projects in the west – projects like airport rail, Sunshine superhub and paving the way for electrification – our plan is to ensure that we run as many high-capacity trains as possible. Whilst we are on track to deliver these projects, the only thing the Liberals are on track for is more cuts. Let us not forget it was the Liberals who tried to cut $2 billion from our Sunshine station superhub. Now they want to cut our trains too – because from Kew and Bulleen they will never, ever have to catch these kinds of trains in the morning. They do not care about the Melton and Wyndham Vale lines, and they will not deliver the services and the rail upgrades that we need. Only Labor delivers for the west.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind the member for Laverton that the l-word is unparliamentary in regard to members. Please refrain.

Youth mental health

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (19:15): (1795) I rise this evening with an action for the Minister for Mental Health. The action I seek is that the minister convene an urgent meeting of schools, health services and youth mental health providers across Melbourne's eastern suburbs in response, sadly, to recent youth suicides. Yesterday an article in the *Age* reported that 10 young people have died across two suspected suicide clusters in Melbourne's east. The youngest was just 13. Thirteen. These are 10 young lives lost and 10 families dealing with unimaginable grief. The impact reaches much further, to friends, classmates, teammates, teachers and other young people who may already be struggling.

The fact that these deaths appear to have occurred in clusters is particularly concerning. Young people do not live their lives within the boundaries of a single school or suburb. Their friendships and connections extend across schools and communities and sporting clubs. Schools and mental health services are responding, but something of this scale cannot be looked at just school by school or service by service. There needs to be a clear understanding of what is happening right across the region, where the pressure points are and whether young people are falling through the gaps between services. These deaths require a coordinated response. Schools, mental health services and government need to share information, understand where young people may be at risk and ensure that appropriate support is available. I urge the minister to take seriously this request to make sure that we do everything we can in response to this crisis.

Camelot Rise Primary School

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (19:17): (1796) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit Camelot Rise Primary School in my district of Glen Waverley. I know how much local families value education, because when we invest in better schools we invest in better futures for our children. Every student deserves a safe, modern and inspiring place to learn, grow and reach their full potential. For 50 years Camelot Rise Primary School has served our community with pride. Generations of local families have sent their children there, and it remains a much-loved part of our community. But its ageing facilities can no longer keep pace with the needs of the students and staff. While we have secured funding for important improvements over the years, it is now time to consider a longer term solution.

Over recent weeks I have been running a petition calling for an upgrade to Camelot Rise Primary School. I am proud that more than 700 people have added their names to this important community campaign. I want to thank principal Matthew Coney and assistant principal Ben Heys for their leadership and tireless advocacy. I also acknowledge the school council, school teachers, support staff, parents and the entire Camelot Rise community for standing together and making their voices heard. They want their children to learn in modern, fit-for-purpose facilities and they want a clear plan for the school's long-term future. What they need now is for our Labor government to work alongside them to turn that vision into reality. That is why I invite the Minister for Education to visit Camelot Rise Primary School with me to see the facilities firsthand, hear directly from the school community and explore how our government can support this fantastic Glen Waverley school for generations to come.

Shepparton electorate roads

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (19:18): (1797) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to address the appalling standard of road repairs that we are seeing done on many damaged roads and potholes in my electorate. My office has been working hard with our community to report the dangerous potholes and dangerous damaged stretches of roads, but it is constant and impossible to keep up. One of these areas is the busy Tatura-Murchison Road, which is one of the worst damaged stretches of road I have seen. After months of waiting and constant reporting, when the works were finally addressed they only did half of the area, with a patched-up, appalling temporary job. This is something we are constantly seeing, and the community are astounded and angry. They expect their taxes to go towards fixing our roads and proper repairs when works are done. The minister has a responsibility to ensure that our roads are safe, that works are done to an acceptable standard and that roads are not falling apart again just days or weeks after repairs. The roads are in the worst condition that I have ever seen, and like many, I am astounded at the high level of potholes and crumbling, unsafe roads we are experiencing due to the lack of investment and maintenance by this government.

Data centres

Katie HALL (Footscray) (19:20): (1798) The Premier will be representing Victoria tomorrow at national cabinet, where data centres will be on the agenda. The action I seek is for the Premier to use his seat at the table to advocate for strong and consistent guardrails that put community and the environment first. From the outset, I thank the Premier for listening to me. He understands community concerns in West Footscray and Yarraville. We know that data centres support much of the economic activity in our state. We all have a cloud at home, and I am particularly excited about the opportunities for medical research with AI. I have my own concerns about AI being worker-centred. As Parliamentary Secretary for Creative Industries, I have concern about the theft of work. We should have sovereign capacity in AI so all of the advantages, such as life-saving medical research, can be harnessed by Australians. I commend the ACTU and the ALP national conference for their work on this area of policy.

Social licence is needed and I believe data centres too should have appropriate guardrails. These could include such things as a requirement to use recycled non-potable water; strict requirements on usage of diesel generators, including emissions offsets or using biodiesel; and developers bringing their own renewable generation and firming and paying for all of the costs of the electricity network augmentations required to enable their connection to the grid. There are alternatives to lithium batteries, and there should be buffers between the industrial land that is used and the residences.

Locally, I do not support the expansion of data centres. I want the real concerns of community addressed. Internationally, jurisdictions and communities are grappling with these challenges and if we cannot form a strong and consistent position nationally, I would like Victoria to take the lead. I know my colleague the member for Williamstown shares my views. I thank the Premier for taking the views of my community with him to national cabinet.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before I call the minister, member for Footscray, there is a ruling from the Chair that asking for advocacy is not a matter for the adjournment debate. Are you able to reword your action?

Katie HALL: I ask the Premier to take on the issues I have raised with him, and the action I am seeking is for him to speak to those at national cabinet.

Responses

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit – Minister for Youth, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (19:23): I note the member for Polwarth raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport. The member for Thomastown raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The member for Warrandyte raised a matter for the Minister for Police. The member for Lara raised a matter for the Minister for Planning. The member for Lowan raised a matter for the Minister for Police. The member for Laverton raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport. The member for Glen Waverley raised a matter for the Minister for Education. The member for Ringwood raised a matter for the Minister for Mental Health. The member for Footscray raised a matter for the Premier, and the member for Shepparton raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The matters raised this evening will be referred to the relevant ministers for consideration and response.

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

House adjourned 7:24 pm.