Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Wednesday 1 April 2026

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

Members of the Legislative Council

60th Parliament

President

Shaun Leane

Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Bev McArthur (from 18 November 2025)
David Davis (from 27 December 2024)
Georgie Crozier (to 27 December 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)
Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Bach, Matthew[1]	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Luu, Trung	Western Metropolitan	Lib
Batchelor, Ryan	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Mansfield, Sarah	Western Victoria	Greens
Bath, Melina	Eastern Victoria	Nat	McArthur, Bev	Western Victoria	Lib
Berger, John	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	McCracken, Joe	Western Victoria	Lib
Blandthorn, Lizzie	Western Metropolitan	ALP	McGowan, Nick	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib
Bourman, Jeff	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	McIntosh, Tom	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Broad, Gaelle	Northern Victoria	Nat	Mulholland, Evan	Northern Metropolitan	Lib
Copsey, Katherine	Southern Metropolitan	Greens	Payne, Rachel	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LCV
Crozier, Georgie	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Puglielli, Aiv	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, David	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Purcell, Georgie	Northern Victoria	AJP
Deeming, Moira[2]	Western Metropolitan	FFV	Ratnam, Samantha[5]	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Enver	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Shing, Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Ermacora, Jacinta	Western Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Adem[6]	Northern Metropolitan	Ind
Ettershank, David	Western Metropolitan	LCV	Stitt, Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Galea, Michael	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Symes, Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Gray-Barberio, Anasina[3]	Northern Metropolitan	Greens	Tarlamis, Lee	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Heath, Renee	Eastern Victoria	Lib	Terpstra, Sonja	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hermans, Ann-Marie	South-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Tierney, Gayle	Western Victoria	ALP
Leane, Shaun	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee[8]	Northern Victoria	ON
Limbrick, David[4]	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Welch, Richard[7]	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib

[1] Resigned 7 Dec 2023
[2] Lib from 26 Nov 2022 until 28 Mar 2023;
IndLib from 28 Mar 2023 until 27 Dec 2024;
Lib from 27 Dec 2024 until 28 Jul 2026;
Ind from 28 Jul 2026 until 6 Sep 2026
[3] Appointed 14 Nov 2024
[4] LDP until 26 Jul 2023
[5] Resigned 8 Nov 2024
[6] DLP until 25 Mar 2024
[7] Appointed 7 Feb 2024
[8] PHON until 3 Aug 2026

Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;
FFV – Family First Victoria; Greens – Australian Greens; Ind – independent; IndLib – Independent Liberal;
LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria; LDP – Liberal Democratic Party; Lib – Liberal Party of Australia;
LP – Libertarian Party; Nat – National Party of Australia; ON – One Nation Victoria;
PHON – Pauline Hanson's One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party

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Wednesday 1 April 2026

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:31 am, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General – Supporting the Transition from Native Timber Harvesting, April 2026 *(Ordered to be published)*.

Municipal Association of Victoria – Report, 2024–25.

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Notice of approval of the Banyule, Bayside, Boroondara, Darebin, Glen Eira, Maribyrnong, Merri-bek, Monash and Stonnington Planning Schemes – Amendment GC270.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule No. 17.

Petitions

Responses

The Clerk: I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: Attorney-General's response to petition titled 'Stop further changes to gun laws'.

Production of documents

Syrian repatriations

Data centres

The Clerk: I table two letters from the Attorney-General, both dated 27 March 2026, in response to resolutions of the Council on 4 March 2026 relating to ISIS brides, on the motion of Mr Mulholland, and the review of water use policies for large industrial users, on the motion of Mr Ettershank. The letters state that the date for production does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

Harriet Shing having given notice:

David Davis: You are a goose.

The PRESIDENT: Mr Davis, I am going to berate you. We both were here when calling someone that sort of feathered variety of bird was ruled unparliamentary. I would advise you not to continue to interject like that.

Members interjecting.

Harriet Shing: Can I just get a withdrawal?

David Davis: I withdraw.

Further notices given.

Members statements

Junior pay rates

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:47): I rise this morning to celebrate the decision of the Fair Work Commission yesterday in its landmark junior pay rates case, the case that was launched by my old union the SDA on behalf of 18-, 19- and some 20-year-old workers who quite unfairly for generations have received less pay for doing the exact same work as their older peers. If you are 18 or 19 years old – across Australia – currently, you can drive, you can vote, you can drink and you can even go to war for our country. But under the award set by the Fair Work Commission previously, you could not be paid the same as someone 21 years old or older. This has been a campaign for many years now. In fact it was a campaign when I first joined the SDA union as an organiser back around 15 years ago. I was privileged to take part in this campaign for 100 per cent pay at 18 and saw firsthand the impact that it had. I saw, for example, the impact it had on a bright young 18-year-old who was a beauty counter manager in a department store, who was being paid less than the part-time older staff that she was managing. We have seen it more recently too with a supermarket worker by the name of Baylin in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, who struggled to pay rent on lower rates of pay. This is a significant win, and I congratulate the union, Michael Donovan, Dean D'Angelo and all the officials and especially all the union members who have fought so hard to make this happen.

Melbourne Asian food and culture festival

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:49): On the weekend I had the pleasure of attending the Melbourne Asian food and culture festival in Box Hill. It is essentially a food festival as much as anything, and it brings together many cultures, sharing their food, which of course is a really great way to break down barriers. It is an entry way to modern multiculturalism engagement. It was a fantastic event. I want to particularly congratulate the Victoria Shandong Fellowship Association and its president, Jordan Chen, who was instrumental in getting this event off the ground. I think it is going to be a massive event in years to come. It was well attended and had many, many stalls. As an inaugural event it was extraordinarily well done, and I enjoyed it immensely.

Blackburn activity centre

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:49): I also was out in Blackburn on the weekend with the excellent Liberal candidate for Box Hill, Sally Houguet. We doorknocked the length of Laburnum Street, which is one of the areas within the Blackburn activity centre that is feeling particularly aggrieved at the plans to put six- to eight-storey minimum apartments the length of that street. That is a traditional tree-lined street. The consultation has been inadequate at best – perhaps worse than that. What we have found is the community is deeply upset, deeply agitated and deeply anxious about the future quality of life in their area because of this activity centre. The consultation period has closed, but we await anxiously the feedback on whether any of their points will be acknowledged.

Edgy Veg Awards

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (09:50): Zucchini waffles and mushroom ragu from the Albion Hotel, pumpkin and plant-based ricotta ravioli from Shedshaker Brewing and Middle Eastern tofu fritters from Paysanne Cafe – these are just some of the dishes entered in this year's annual Edgy Veg Awards. Across the entire month of April cafes, pubs and restaurants across the Macedon Ranges and Mount Alexander shire will feature plant-based meals, with one of them crowned the winner. These yearly awards across my community not only champion seasonal produce and support local venues at a time that they need it the most but also promote the benefits of eating more plants for animal welfare, for the environment and of course for our own health. The concept is simple: diners try the dishes, score their favourites and help to crown the winner. Anyone who would like to take part can find a list of participating venues at edgyvegawards.com.au. A big thankyou to Veg Action and

the Macedon Ranges Sustainability Group for putting the awards on, once again, this year, helping to showcase our beautiful part of the world and promote plant-based eating at the same time.

Anti-vilification legislation

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (09:51): A year ago this week the Parliament took a decisive stand against hate in Victoria and passed Labor's anti-vilification law to protect those at risk of hate and bigotry. It was an exceptionally important piece of legislation, a landmark piece of legislation, that criminalised hate speech and that took stronger action against vilification, and it was one that many in our community here in Victoria – many faith groups, many religious groups, many multicultural groups – came together on and urged us as a Parliament to pass, including many from the Jewish community in the Southern Metropolitan Region. I was pretty proud to be part of the Parliament that day that passed those laws – laws the Liberal Party voted against. The Liberal Party voted against the anti-hate laws a year ago. Their hollow words of support for religious groups in our community, for multifaith groups in our community, evaporated as they stayed idle in their seats when presented with the opportunity to stand up and enact real protections. They are yet to explain why. We keep asking why the Liberal Party voted against Labor's anti-hate speech laws, and they continue to stay silent. But Labor will not stay silent in continuing our advocacy for a Victoria free from hatred, a Victoria free from bigotry and a Victoria where everyone is cherished and celebrated.

Victoria Police

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (09:53): Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson – shot and killed in the line of duty while executing a warrant. Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart – killed in the line of duty while executing a warrant. Senior Constable Bria Joyce – killed while undertaking regular duties. Leading Senior Constable Lynette Taylor – killed in the line of duty while helping the community. Constable Glen Humphris – killed in the line of duty while helping the community. And the list goes on. So it was very disappointing and appalling when we had the person in the highest office in the state call out and belittle a former police officer for his limited time in the service. May I remind the Premier Jacinta Allan that no matter how many days they serve – one day or 35 days – all police officers take the same oath, do the same duties, work the same shifts and may bear the same consequences as those on the list I have read out. What was more disturbing was the Minister for Police, sitting behind her, smirking and making his comment. May I remind the Minister for Police Anthony Carbines that he holds the office in which he is supposed to be supporting police officers when given the opportunity to do so. I remind both the minister and the Premier that all police officers deserve their due respect.

Government performance

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (09:55): Just when we thought Premier Jacinta Allan could not be further from everyday Victorians, she is seen in the company of billionaires like Anthony Pratt. While people are cutting back just to pay their bills and individuals and families are counting every dollar for fuel, food and basic care, the Premier is raising a glass with people who never have to make these choices. It is not just tone-deaf; it shows she does not care. In the same week, teachers and support staff went on strike, being the lowest paid in the country, dealing with heavy workloads and broken promises and being exhausted and underpaid. At the same time communities in Kilmore – the Muslim community – are dealing with fear and division due to racist-driven violence. This Labor government claims to understand the struggles of the very people who put them in power, who are now feeling ignored and left behind. This is the problem: a government closer to wealth than to its people. While access goes to those with money, everyday struggles are pushed aside. Victoria deserves more than this betrayal. It deserves leadership that walks beside its people, not above them.

Willum Warrain

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (09:56): I had the distinct pleasure on the weekend of sharing in the immense cultural pride that comes with joining the community at Willum Warrain

Aboriginal gathering place in Hastings to celebrate their 12th anniversary. It was a pleasure to attend this milestone along with my colleague the member for Hastings and to see firsthand the incredible impact this gathering place has on local community. Willum Warrain is a living, breathing example of self-determination in action, caring for country and leaving a beautiful space for reconciliation on the peninsula. Willum Warrain began as a dream for a dedicated gathering place, a vision for the local community to create a destination for reconciliation where everyone could come together. It was a privilege to stand alongside CEO Uncle Peter Aldenhoven and the Mornington Peninsula Human Rights Group to celebrate 12 years of caring for mob and country and reflect on the enormity and importance of our state's treaty. Our government is proud to support places like Willum Warrain, which stands as a pillar of cultural strength. Happy 12th birthday. Here's to many more years of leadership, connection and culture.

Western suburbs public transport

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (09:57): No doubt many Victorians are delighted that the government is making public transport free for a month. For many, a weekly Myki typically costs between $45 and $60 a week. However, for hundreds of thousands in the west, it is of little use. They cannot access public transport, can access it but cannot get on it or cannot be sure that it will even turn up, let alone be on time. Residents of our most multicultural suburb, Point Cook, can spend an hour in gridlock just to get onto the highway, even longer on the bus, and then they have to get to a station or a bus interchange. It is Point Cook, however, so at least you can hear the abysmal public transport being cursed in more than a hundred languages. If you are on the Melton line, you can squeeze yourself onto an overcrowded V/Line train. Some lucky commuters get to stand in the toilet cubicles, such is the congestion. If you live in or near Mount Atkinson, it is a perilous half-hour walk to the nearest bus stop. The route 140 bus, promised a year ago, like so many of the ghost buses in the west, is yet to arrive. Sunbury residents are left scratching their heads, wondering why half the trains on their line only make it to Watergardens. And if you are looking for a park at a train station, forget it. Tens of thousands of westies are forced to drive on the choking, often substandard, roads because public transport is not fit for purpose. We hope the government's new solutions can fix these old problems – (*Time expired*)

Vimy Ridge Day

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (09:59): I had the privilege of representing the Minister for Veterans at the Shrine of Remembrance at the ceremony which was held commemorating Vimy Day. Perhaps most Australians are not familiar with what happened at Vimy Ridge and why it was a significant moment in the First World War, but for our friends in Canada it is often held up as one of the moments when Canada matured and came to see itself as an independent nation rather than a British outpost. In this way Nick Rideout, the chair of the international committee for the Vimy Foundation, compared it to Australia's experience at Gallipoli. Also in attendance was Dr Julie Sunday, Canada's High Commissioner to Australia, as well as consular officials from a number of NATO countries, including the UK, the United States, France and many others.

Production of documents

Bushfire preparedness

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (10:00): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

(a) the Allan Labor government has refused to release Victoria's full bushfire risk management report, 2024–25;

(b) localised fuel-driven bushfire risk information for the 2025–26 season has been withheld;

(c) these actions raise significant concerns regarding the government's transparency and Victoria's bushfire preparedness;

(d) Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic) withdrew up to 290 G-Wagons and 59 Unimogs prior to the 2025–26 bushfire season, reducing rapid-response capacity;

(2) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within 10 weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, all documents held by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), FFMVic or the responsible ministers relating to Victoria's bushfire management, including but not limited to:

(a) Victoria's complete bushfire risk management report, 2024–25;

(b) all summer bushfire outlook reports prepared by FFMVic, DEECA or ministerial offices for the current 2025–26 bushfire season;

(c) correspondence and briefings between DEECA, FFMVic and relevant ministers and their offices relating to the 2025–26 bushfire season, including fuel-driven bushfire risks at the state, regional and district levels; and

(d) documents and briefings between DEECA, FFMVic and relevant ministers and their offices relating to the withdrawal of the G-Wagon and Unimog vehicles due to structural and safety defects, including repair timelines and operational impacts.

This is a short-form documents motion, and it relates to Victoria's full bushfire risk management report for 2024–25, localised fuel-driven bushfire risk information for the 2025–26 season and information about the government's Forest Fire Management Victoria fleet that was grounded at the end of last year – 290 G-Wagons and 59 Unimogs. This year we have seen a most significant bushfire once again. We have seen 1590 buildings, dwellings, outbuildings, sheds – included in that are 340 homes where people lived and loved their families – gone in these bushfires. We have seen 23,000 stock killed, incinerated in the bushfires, and we have seen almost half a million hectares of land burnt. What we have not seen from this government – and this is not asking for anything unusual whatsoever – is the Allan government releasing its full bushfire risk management report for 2024–25.

This document sets out Victoria's bushfire risk profile, and it is fundamental to understanding how the state is prepared. Instead the government has just provided a snapshot, and a snapshot is not good enough. If this government has nothing to hide, then the normal procedure should have been followed. The snapshot relies heavily on aggregated statewide figures, not the local on-the-ground data and detail that communities need. Communities like Natimuk, Harcourt, Longwood – I could go on – Yarck, Alexandra and Walwa up into the north-east could have benefited from this information. When we see this information, then we can have an understanding. Without it experts cannot properly scrutinise the data, communities cannot understand their true level of risk and Parliament cannot hold this government to account.

Normally the report is released at the beginning of the fire season. That is all. It is a procedure, and it was not done. Delaying is withholding information, and that is completely unacceptable. The fuel-driven risk information has been withheld. This is a really important one for those who very much need to understand this. The government has released information at a regional level, so it puts it out for a blanket region but it does not drill down into the district level. The government has got their Safer Together policy – 70 per cent residual risk. I could go on for hours, but I do not have that time. They have given it at a blanket regional level. People want to understand it for their locations, their districts. The government has not produced that as yet for the fire season, and it is just absolutely, completely unacceptable.

Let me give you an example. The Gippsland region is vast and diverse, as we know. It encompasses coastal and agricultural areas, forests and major industrial hubs. For the average regional area there appears to be a moderate bushfire risk per the government's status at the moment. In the past we have seen that the Latrobe Valley has had a particularly high residual bushfire risk, but that is not clear for this year. The government is not being transparent about this. We have got the Thomson Dam, which provides 50 per cent of Melbourne's water, while Moondarra supports the Latrobe Valley and surrounding industry and is a major part of the food processing operations, and we have seen a lot of industry there. People cannot see what their residual risk is. Does it matter? Not to some, but to others it is incredibly important to understand where districts sit and what those risks are. This government

needs to produce what it should normally produce. I had the opportunity of meeting Minister Dimopoulos the other day. I had a list and said to him, 'These things should just be normal procedure, which the government is not addressing.' Not only has he heard from me; he is hearing from this Parliament in a normal documents motion that that should be put out into the community.

Then we have the Unimogs and the information around the Unimogs and G-Wagons. These are front fire line vehicles. Again, the whole response about purchasing them back in 2017–18, their inclusion, their loading up of extra requirements and the cracking of the chassis – when did the government know about this? How did the government know about this? It took them offline and begged South Australia for other vehicles at the start of the fire season to come through. This house, my communities and our regional communities deserve to know what their status is. It actually got to the point where 300 vehicles were moved out of service. We deserve to see these things. Community deserves to see these things. As a normal practice, I ask this house to support the documents motion.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (10:06): Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this short-form documents motion before us. It is true that bushfire seasons are getting longer and they are getting more dangerous – it is a fact. Also amongst those facts is an increased danger in the length of these seasons as a direct result of climate change. Victoria is ready not just for fires but in the lead-up to more volatile bushfire seasons. The 2024–25 bushfire risk management report proves just this. As per convention, the government will not oppose this documents motion before us. One of the main aspects of the report is how it emphasises that governments and communities are working together to be safer from bushfires. Collaboration across communities is what these communities need, certainly not misinformation and politicking.

I have been very fortunate over the last few months now to witness the work that incredibly valuable community organisations have done in these parts – organisations like ARC Justice, who operate community legal centres across bushfire-affected areas in central and northern Victoria. The breadth and the scope of their work have been truly remarkable. They help people who have lost their homes into housing. They have helped folks with insurance claims. They work with community groups that know firsthand the underlying damage that bushfires can do to communities. Earlier this week I launched the Campaspe climate partnership collaborative action plan, funded by the Albanese Labor government, ARC Justice, along with the Jesuit Social Services Centre for Just Places, the Eastern Community Legal Centre and the Federation of Community Legal Centres. They have worked together with local communities to make sure that the Campaspe region is more climate ready and more ready for devastating natural disasters that are a direct result of climate change. It is really heartening to affirm that these critical organisations right there in place, in regional Victoria, have a partner in the state government when it comes to climate action, resilience and readiness, and they have a partner when it comes to bushfire risk management, as last year's report proves. After all, climate preparedness is bushfire preparedness. This government is committed to bushfire risk management at every step that there is risk. We want to prevent these fires in the first place by enclosing our forests and parks with compliance controls to prevent arson and out-of-control bushfires. We want to prepare for when a bushfire is inevitable by making sure there are established water sources available for the helicopters – a big thanks to the operators of them.

Finally, we need to be able to respond during these volatile bushfires with significant resources for both the air response and ground response. These strategies outlined in the report do prove that at every stage in our process the government is committed to preventing, preparing for and responding to bushfires across our state like the ones we saw over the summer. It was truly sobering, there is no doubt about it, to see the impacts of this summer's bushfires firsthand. We have heard many speakers from right across this chamber talk about what they have seen and heard, and some have been particularly personally affected. I want to let them know that our thoughts are still with them and we are still committed to working with them.

I remember driving up to Seymour, and I saw the blackened landscape. I saw the recovery centre filled with those that had lost their homes. But there was still an overpowering sense of hope and a slew of

community organisations there doing the right thing – organisations like ARC Justice but also those doing really immediate impact work, like Sikh community volunteers who served hundreds of hot meals across bushfire-affected areas. In visiting these communities you can see that Victoria takes steps to prepare for and respond to bushfires, to save the homes, save the businesses and save lives, ultimately. Communities like these need the best resourcing, data-driven bushfire response and on-the-ground support as they are rebuilding and really do not need pointscoring in Parliament, infighting, denial and delay. You cannot take bushfire readiness seriously without taking climate change seriously. Despite misinformation that I saw over the season, which was really damaging, really hurtful, the 2024–25 bushfire risk management report shows that our government is doing just that: we are taking it seriously. We are working at every stage of the process to prevent and respond to bushfires. We work in collaboration and consultatively with communities on the ground, with those community groups that I have spoken about and so, so many others. To those affected by bushfire this summer or ever: our government will always support you and your communities when responding to disasters. I reaffirm that we will not oppose this motion.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (10:11): I thank Ms Bath for her motion. The refusal to release the bushfire risk management report and the withdrawal of 290 G-Wagons before the fire season tells you absolutely everything about this government's priorities. I strongly support this documents motion, and I want to reiterate that this government's total preoccupation with running a secret society in this state is like the politburo. You hide behind climate change now as a reason not to provide documents. You have got to provide the information that is available to you to the public. What is there to hide? I have raised fire management repeatedly in this Parliament. Victoria's fire management is not working. The government abandoned the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission targets – targets written in the ashes of 173 lives. Farmers across my electorate tell me the government is the worst neighbour in the state. Crown land is overrun with weeds and excessive fuel loads, with no track maintenance, and when the state is the largest landholder in Victoria, that neglect is a public safety issue.

There is a dangerous idea in the department that locking up land equals environmental protection. It does not. Good land management requires people, not locking it up. Volunteers, forestry workers and bushwalkers are the bush's watchful guardians. Remove them and you get unmonitored forests and mounting fuel loads. The cultural burn story says it all. When I raised Indigenous burning practices, the department told me use of traditional techniques would constitute cultural appropriation. We should be prioritising planned burns, not hiding behind indefensible IP arguments. Ending native timber harvesting eliminated a skilled workforce that was always ready and the first to respond to fire. Now the activists have turned on planned burns, with ANU academics producing research claiming prescribed burning worsens bushfires. Activist groups are fundraising for legal challenges. The pattern that destroyed VicForests is being repeated. I was very pleased the Council on 4 February agreed to an inquiry into the 2026 summer fires, with crossbench support – thank you. Over 500 structures were destroyed and 400,000 hectares burnt. Submissions, I tell everybody, are open until 19 April. Get your submission in. I encourage every affected community to have their say. Speak up loudly. Hold this government to account.

I absolutely commend Ms Bath's motion and thank her for bringing it forward. It is about transparency and preparedness. If the government is confident in its bushfire planning, it should release the documents. Why wouldn't you? Withholding the full bushfire risk management report and local fuel risk information only raises more concern. The reported withdrawal of the G-Wagons and Unimogs before the fire season adds to that concern. But this issue goes beyond one motion and one fire season. It points to a broader failure in Victoria's bushfire policy. The government has moved away from active land management and from serious use of planned burning. After the 2009 royal commission Victoria should have learned that fuel loads matter. Planned burning is not the only answer, but it is one of the essential tools of reducing risk. Instead the government has retreated from that practical approach and weakened accountability. I have said that farmers tell us that the government is the worst neighbour. They know that unmanaged land does not become safer just because the government calls

it conservation. There is an ideological problem here. Too many in the bureaucracy and activist movement treat human intervention as a bad thing. It is not. Good land management requires active stewardship, reducing fuel, maintaining access and keeping skilled people involved. I absolutely commend this documents motion to the chamber, and of course everybody is supporting it.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (10:16): Mrs McArthur is barely two or three days past her preselection, and her full ideological attacks are on display. Let us be very, very clear: what we are discussing here is about keeping communities safe. And Mrs McArthur, some of the language you are using is disrespecting the incredible work that people are doing within Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV) and across the CFA to ensure that communities are safe. We have got the Greens on one side saying you cannot roll over a log and disrupt a few bugs, and then you have got the Liberals and the Nationals trying to breed culture wars into this, when what we are trying to ensure –

Melina Bath: On a point of order, President, this is a narrow documents motion. This is not an opportunity to attack the other bench.

The PRESIDENT: Members are entitled to respond to a contribution from a previous speaker.

Tom McINTOSH: I note that Mrs McArthur was straying very far from the motion. I am responding to Mrs McArthur. Our FFMV teams do incredible, incredible work. During the summer I was out at Nowa Nowa as their dozens of new recruits came onto the team there, talking to members who have been working lifelong in those teams, looking at the machinery that they are delivering over the summer. When we had the fires in Dargo out east, I was fortunate to be out with FFMV teams and all the coordinated teams in the incident control centres at both Heyfield and Orbost. The work those teams are doing to prepare for bushfire season, the work they do in response and the hours they put in when fires are occurring are incredible, and they deserve all our respect. Things like the rappel chopper teams that are out jumping on fires immediately, the work they are doing through the middle of the year to make sure we are prepped and the challenges they face in getting the right conditions to be able to do the work to protect communities, Mrs McArthur – that is what this is all about.

That coordination of information between our agencies, CFA and FFMV, is why the government is giving a snapshot before the season and reporting on the work that is occurring, so that whether it is agencies, whether it is members of Parliament briefings that they can receive or whether it is our communities, everyone is really clear and our local governments are able to understand what is happening. They do incredible work responding when incidents occur. They are clear, and they and various agencies can meet with community and talk through work that has been done and risks that present themselves. And then of course there is the work that all of us have in communicating weather conditions as they occur throughout various parts of the season so we can respond appropriately to keep our public bush safe and to keep our private lands, our farms, our communities, our towns, our livestock and our people safe and ensure that lives are not lost.

Motion agreed to.

Housing

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:21): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes:

(a) that according to the Homes Victoria *Rental Report: September Quarter 2025*, average annual median rents for a one-bedroom flat have risen 17.5 per cent in Flemington–Kensington, 21.6 per cent in Burwood–Ashburton, 23.6 per cent in Brighton, 14.6 per cent in Yarraville–Seddon, 17.6 per cent in Sebastopol–Delacombe, 29.6 per cent in North Bendigo, 32.6 per cent in Benalla and 32.7 per cent in Portland;

(b) the report also indicates that only 9.7 per cent of rental dwellings in metropolitan Melbourne are classified as 'affordable', including 1.1 per cent of rental dwellings in Melbourne, 0.9 per cent rental dwellings in Boroondara and 0.0 per cent of rental dwellings in Bayside;

(c) that research from Cotality, using ABS data, found that rents in Victoria have increased at almost double the rate of wages in over the five years to September 2025;

(d) that in comparison, Cotality's research shows the ACT was the only Australian jurisdiction where wage growth kept up with rents over the five years to September 2025;

(e) that the ACT is the only Australian jurisdiction that caps rent increases; and

(2) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, all briefings and correspondence provided to the Minister for Consumer Affairs regarding policy options to impose rental controls to cap rent increases.

Every day in this state, tens of thousands of people – an increasing number – are forced into impossible choices between paying rent, buying food or facing homelessness. Shamefully, Victoria's proportion of public and social housing is just 3 per cent. It is the lowest in the country, meaning more than 66,000 households are now on the social housing waitlist, up 7.4 per cent in just a year. It is not just the thousands of Victorians who cannot get into public and social housing that are forced to rely on the private rental market – and this is because successive Labor and Liberal governments built a housing system designed to maximise investor profits and keep pushing up house prices – but even Victorians on above-average incomes are now being locked out of home ownership and are renting over the long term. If you listen to the growing number of renters, they will tell you that they are essentially powerless against profit-seeking landlords who can raise rents by an unlimited amount every year, regardless of a renter's income or their ability to pay.

Each generation in this state consecutively have found themselves increasingly shut out of the dream of owning their own home. More and more young Victorians today are finding that they are also unable to afford the rental market. Research from Cotality using ABS data found that rents in Victoria have increased at almost double the rate of wages over the five years to September 2025, with rental growth increasing 33.6 per cent compared to wages growth of 16.9 per cent. In real terms this means a person earning the median wage living in a median-priced rental property in Victoria today is around $133 worse off a month than what they were just five years ago. Whereas they were paying around 39 per cent of their after-tax income on rent, they are now paying around 50 per cent, and these are just the luckiest Victorians who are earning the median wage. According to Anglicare's *Rental Affordability Snapshot* report, in 2025 there were no properties that met the affordability criteria for singles on JobSeeker and there was just one property in total in the entire state of Victoria – with a population of over 7 million people – which was affordable for a single parent on Centrelink with a child over 14. I repeat: there are no affordable rental properties in Victoria for a single person on JobSeeker and there is just one property in the state classified as affordable for a single parent on Centrelink. I say shame.

The housing crisis is of course a national problem, but there is one jurisdiction that has bucked the trend: the ACT, where the Greens in shared government introduced rent controls. It is the one and only state or territory in Australia where rents have stayed in closer correlation with wage increases in the last five years. Everywhere else renters are falling further and further behind. Yet we continually hear a different story from property industry lobbyists that this should not be the case. They have repeatedly lobbied the government, opposing rent controls and saying they will dry up housing supply and therefore rentals. But the reality is that the ACT with its rent controls is not only leading the nation on rents but also leading the nation in new builds and in housing supply, having delivered 92 per cent of its target under the National Housing Accord. So maybe, just maybe, it might be that the for-profit property industry and real estate agents working off commissions are actually opposing rent controls because the policy will lower rents, as it has in the ACT, and it will therefore also lower their own incomes and profits. That is just a guess. But what this documents motion here today from the Greens is about is seeing whether or not the state government is actually taking advice about rent control policies like those that have been employed in the only jurisdiction in the country where rents have kept in line with wage growth. Of course there are others out there, like property developers and agents, who measure success in the property market in terms of higher profits and commissions, but I truly

hope that our state government is listening to those actually making rents more affordable rather than those seeking to make them more expensive. I commend the motion to the house.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:25): I rise to speak to motion 1378 today, which has been brought in by Mr Puglielli. There is one point on which I do fundamentally agree with Mr Puglielli, and that is that the housing system is not working for younger people. It is not working for too many Victorians. I do certainly agree with him there. I would then point to the fact that that is exactly why this Labor government has enacted so many changes. It is why, for example, we have brought in the strongest protections for renters in the country, on a number of occasions, strengthening those rental protections for Victorians. We have also built more homes and are building more homes than anywhere else in the nation. This is where I think it gets to the real point of it. We are genuinely at risk now of a generational crisis, where a whole generation or multiple generations of Victorians are at risk of being locked out of, as Mr Puglielli said, the chance to buy a new home – or any home for that matter – or the chance to rent and be independent. Indeed, though it is not strictly related, I did make similar remarks in my contribution this morning when I was talking about Baylin, a young retail worker who was 18, living and renting and unable to pay rent because he was being unfairly held back by the wage system. That has now been changed, which is a very good thing.

But I would draw the house's attention to the fact of the actions that this government are taking. There is much, much more work to do, and I am the first to say it. We have constant arguments with the other far corner of the chamber over there, who bring in motion after motion and petition after petition to block new housing – including in fact in particular in Brighton, which is one of the suburbs mentioned in Mr Puglielli's motion. We know the Liberal Party's view on this and what they would seek to do: wind back these reforms that are building these new houses. What we do see is that the reforms that we have put in place are starting to work. For example, we know that the recent Cotality data shows that rents in Melbourne in 2025 rose by 2.5 per cent, which is around half of the national average of 5.1 per cent; indeed in some cases, such as Darwin, it was as high as 7.6 per cent. This was below inflation and the wage price index increase of 3.4 per cent that we saw to the December quarter of last year. We know that whilst nationally rental affordability has deteriorated, Victoria has maintained stable rental affordability levels consistent with those levels of a decade ago. We also know that there is more work to be done, and that includes providing the supply of new houses, such as what we have already demonstrated: in the past year to September 2025 building 10,000 more homes than New South Wales and 20,000 more homes than Queensland. In the state of Victoria in that year more than 54,000 homes were built, despite the continued strain on the nationwide housing construction sector.

We know that the time to save for a first home buyer to get to a 20 per cent deposit in Victoria is five years and three months for an average entry-level house. This compares to seven years and seven months in Sydney, six years and three months in Brisbane and indeed five years and seven months even in Adelaide. We are also leading the nation with build to rent. We have the largest share of first home buyers in Victoria; 22 per cent of home purchases nationwide are by first home buyers, but in Victoria that figure is 27 per cent. There is a lot that we have done and there is a lot more that we will do, but to say that Victoria is uniquely bad in this situation is quite simply not accurate. There is a powerhouse of work that has been done to change our planning laws and to provide those housing opportunities for young Victorians, whether they want to live in great electorates like mine on the outer fringes of Melbourne, whether they want to live in regional Victoria or whether they even want to live, yes, in the inner or middle suburbs.

Even when Mr Davis and his friends in the Liberal Party hold up their placards and say, 'Not in my backyard,' this is a government that recognises that we cannot just let the status quo continue. We cannot let that continue, and that is why we are standing up for renters and protecting their rights in their agreements. We saw just this week reforms to the way in which they do rental applications, to make processes easier. It is also why we are saying we will support density in a sensible fashion and development in council areas like Boroondara, where we are seeing public school enrolments dropping

due to a population decline. That is exactly where we need to be investing in housing for Victorians, exactly in the places mentioned in the motion, and this Labor government is continuing to do that job.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:30): I am pleased to rise and support the motion moved by Mr Puglielli today, motion 1378. This notes the Homes Victoria rental report for the September quarter 2025 and lists a series of annual median rent rises for one-bedroom flats. The report also indicates only 9.7 per cent of rental dwellings in metropolitan Melbourne are classed as 'affordable' on those definitions.

The motion notes the research of Cotality, using ABS data, that found rents in Victoria have increased at almost double the rate of wages over the past five years. It notes that in comparison Cotality's research shows the ACT was the only jurisdiction where wage growth kept up with rents. I am going to make one point here, Mr Puglielli: this is the public service town in Canberra. We are all paying for them. That is why their payments have gone up much more than elsewhere. I also make the point that one of the reasons that wages have not kept up with rents is because in Victoria wages have not been growing properly. In fact effective household income has been falling in Victoria – income per head in Victoria over recent years has been falling.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David DAVIS: I can. It has not done very well over the last few years, I can tell you, in Victoria.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David DAVIS: No, I have not actually read all of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report tabled yesterday, that is true. I naturally went to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action section straight off. I have read most of that, but I will get through the report in due course. What I will say is that income per head over recent years, in aggregate, has not done well in Victoria at all. That is one of the reasons that Victorians are struggling. Income per household has not done well in Victoria over recent years. Victorians have not kept pace. In fact one of the reasons that we are facing challenges with rental properties is because the state government has jacked up taxes on rental properties and all properties that are individual-owned homes that are rented and industrial properties have been clobbered by the state government with its raft of new taxes, new charges and the fees that are jacked up, which people are feeling very directly. My point to Mr Puglielli is I do not think the ACT is a great jurisdiction to quote because it is an unusual jurisdiction. It is a jurisdiction where we are being taxed to smithereens to pay for public servants in Canberra. It is an unusual town, and I want to just put that on the record.

In terms of the documents order under standing order 10.01, we will support that – all the briefings and correspondence provided to the Minister for Consumer Affairs regarding policy options to impose rental controls to cap rent increases. I do want to put on record that we are very aware of the economic literature that does not support rent caps, that does not support rent controls of various types. There is a long history of economic literature that shows it is counterproductive. What you tend to see is that the maintenance of those buildings deteriorates, the quality of the buildings deteriorates, and a whole range of other unintended effects do occur. The economic literature is very clear that rent controls are not the way to deal with it.

Notwithstanding that, I think Mr Puglielli has got every right to ask for this information. The government has either considered it or it has not. If it has considered it, well, let us see it. Let us see what they had in their consideration of this matter. If they have not considered it, I suspect that is an answer Mr Puglielli will also want to understand. So they are both fair outcomes from my perspective and from the Liberals and Nationals' perspective. But in terms of some of the points made over there by Mr Galea, and I am picking up directly from his contribution, I am very aware of the process that the government has underway now to designate high-rise, high-density zones. They are not activity centres. They are high-rise, high-density zones, and they are going to cause enormous trouble in our municipalities.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:36): The Libertarians will also be supporting this motion. I am very interested to see this advice, although I doubt we will get it. We will get another letter saying it is taking too long, but if there was going to be advice, I imagine it would say something along the lines of 'Why don't you go and read a book on economics?', because everyone knows the iron law of price caps equals shortages. We must judge policies by their consequences, not by their intention. And whilst the Greens try and tell us that price caps do not equal shortages, they might try and tell us that the laws of gravity do not exist either.

Back in the real world, people have tried rent controls and they are a disaster. You can point to Spain; it is a great example of what happened with rent controls. In Barcelona the rental supply has collapsed by 43 per cent since 2021. In Navarre, in their rental regulation zones, they have halved in two quarters combined. In A Coruña they lost 51 per cent of their rental agreements within five months of imposing price caps, a total disaster. In Barcelona in 2024 their rental contracts were down 14.9 per cent from the previous year, and Navarre saw contracts drop in all its regulated municipalities. Also, the prices of unregulated contracts went up in those areas. In San Francisco, another area, expanded rent controls cut supply by 15 per cent and pushed unregulated rents up by 7 per cent. In Berlin, their rent controls, which were later struck down as unconstitutional, saw regulated listings fall 52 per cent.

There is also a contrasting situation. Argentina also had rent controls with similarly disastrous outcomes. President Milei recently removed all their rent controls, in December 2023. What happened to rents? Supply jumped by 212 per cent within six months, and there was a 26.6 per cent fall in rents in inflation-adjusted terms. So he took a chainsaw to the rent controls, and what happened? Prices dropped and availability increased. It shows that the laws of economics are like the laws of gravity. For a party that lectures us so much about science and this sort of thing, when they believe in this superstition about rent controls, you must discount everything that they have to say about everything else, because clearly the policy that they are pushing for will cause homelessness and cause rents to become unavailable. It is an irresponsible policy. I commend the government for resisting this, and I note that the Treasurer and others in the Labor Party have actually come out and said that rent controls are a bad idea. I also commend the opposition for opposing rent controls. These are a terrible idea. Victoria must never do it. It will end in disaster. In fact what we must be doing is deregulating our rental sector, and we only need to look at what happened in Argentina to see the benefits that could be caused by that.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:39): I do not have much time, because of the construction of the sessional orders that was agreed to to limit debate on short-form documents motions, but there are simple points I think we need to make in this debate. The data shows that Melbourne has some of the lowest growth in rent prices in the country, and that is undoubtedly due to the efforts to increase the supply of properties available to rent. We are leading the nation in approving homes for construction, in commencing homes for construction and in completing the construction of new homes. That is what this Labor government is doing – bringing more homes into the housing market so that more people can buy them or rent them. The second thing that we have done in this state to improve the rental situation is we have had a raft of rental reforms, and I do not have time to go through them all. We have increased minimum standards. We have limited rent increases to once per year, and new laws that came into effect yesterday give the director of Consumer Affairs Victoria and Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria more powers with respect to excessive rent increases. This Labor government is standing up for renters and delivering.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Crime

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (10:41): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes that according to current crime statistics, crime in Victoria is at an all-time high, in just two years, December 2023 to December 2025, with:

(a) all incidents up 23 per cent;

(b) total aggravated burglaries up 24 per cent;

(c) motor vehicle theft up 56 per cent;

(d) family violence serious assaults up 47 per cent;

(e) youth incidents up 13 per cent;

(f) unsolved crimes up 47 per cent;

(2) further notes that Labor's newfound tough-on-crime positioning is just a sham and its:

(a) machete laws are not getting knives off streets;

(b) bail laws are not keeping criminals behind bars;

(c) protest laws are not keeping violent or intimidatory demonstrations under control;

(d) so-called youth justice reforms are a pale imitation of other jurisdictions;

(e) criminal association and industrial relations laws are enabling corruption and costing taxpayers $15 billion;

(f) funding cuts mean more unfilled police shifts and more closed or reduced hours at police stations;

(3) calls on the government to immediately:

(a) restore move-on laws and introduce a protest registration system;

(b) give police the necessary powers to protect Victorians, including introducing Jack's law and implementing a 'break bail, face jail' policy;

(c) better protect women by implementing a 'right to ask, right to know' scheme and criminalising coercive control;

(d) invest in early intervention initiatives to divert at-risk youths from a life of crime; and

(e) properly fund Victoria Police and keep police stations open.

I rise today to speak about a motion that is something that is extremely important, and that is crime in Victoria. The first job of any government is to keep its citizens safe. I know that it is something that everybody in here takes very seriously, but we also have to acknowledge that something is not working. The latest crime statistics in Victoria show that crime is at an all-time high. In just two years, from December 2023 to December 2025, all incidents went up 23 per cent. Total aggravated burglaries went up 24 per cent, common motor vehicle theft was up 56 per cent, family violence serious assaults were up 47 per cent, youth incidents were up 13 per cent and unsolved crimes were up 47 per cent. Behind every one of these statistics are victims and people who are caught in a life of crime, and that is an absolute tragedy. Every one of those situations has potentially altered a Victorian's life in a way that the outcomes are much worse.

The second part of this motion is that Labor's tough-on-crime positioning is just a sham, because the reality is that machete laws are not getting knives off the streets, bail laws are not keeping criminals behind bars, protest laws are not keeping violent and intimidating demonstrations under control and so-called youth justice reforms, which the government said – and I am going to talk a lot about this – were based on those of Queensland, are just not – they are a pale imitation. When you drill down into the specifics, they are just not. Criminal association and industrial relations laws have enabled corruption, costing the taxpayer at least $15 billion. $15 billion could pay to put the 2000 police officers that we are short of in this state back on the street. It could open the more than 50 police stations that have either closed their doors or increased their hours. We will not talk about the hospitals

that are needed for people that are victims of crime and just hospitals in general. $15 billion – what it could have done for homelessness. But it is the laws that have enabled that. And funding cuts to police mean that there are more unfilled shifts and more reduced hours in police stations.

The third part of this motion calls on the government to immediately restore move-on laws, something that we have been speaking about for a very long time. We need these move-on laws. The police are up against it, number one, because they are 2000 staff members short. Whenever we have these huge protests in the city, they absorb so many resources, with police officers having to be taken from other areas. We need these move-on laws restored immediately, because police need to actually have the ability to prevent a crisis before it happens.

We also ask that a protest registration system is introduced, like in many other states. We want to see police given the powers they need to protect Victorians, including Jack's law, which I will speak about shortly, and also the implementation of a 'break bail, face jail' policy. We need better protection for women in this state. We are asking that the government implement a right-to-ask and right-to-know scheme, and we ask that they criminalise coercive control. There needs to be more money invested, not less, into early intervention and initiatives that divert young people from a life of crime. The thing that upsets me most when I hear about these horrific stories is the victims and the way that the lives of innocent people are just disrupted. Something else that also deeply distresses me is the fact that young people are getting involved in lives of crime more and more. The other thing we are asking is for police to be properly funded so we can keep police stations open.

Like I said, the first responsibility of any government is to keep its citizens safe. However, in this state every 50 seconds a crime is committed. Every single day there are another 750 victims of crime in this state. With home invasions, statistics show that it is the same 1000 children that are committing four out of five home invasions – kids that are out on bail. Every 16 minutes a car is stolen in this state. Retail crime is on the rise. Despite the fact that PSOs have been taken from train stations and redeployed to shopping centres, retail crime is still on the rise. There have been some absolutely horrific crimes committed at train stations, and I am going to bring up some of those. Crimes committed with banned weapons, such as machetes, are up 10 per cent, despite the machete bins. There is more than one reason why we need to get this under control.

There are a few things I am going to speak about, but first I want to read some stories that have been emailed to my office. I have contacted these victims of crime and asked them if I can share these stories. I want to share a few emails that have been sent to me, because this is exactly why we need to get control of the crime in this state. This is a young girl from Pakenham. She says:

> I'm writing because, honestly, I no longer feel safe in the community where we chose to start our family.
>
> …
>
> My partner and I have tried to take every precaution we can. We've spent money we don't really have installing cameras all around our rental property. Unfortunately, they feel almost pointless when it seems like cameras no longer deter people from attempting break ins or causing damage. We've even had conversations about rearranging our bedrooms to think about the safest place to hide if a home invasion happened.
>
> That is not how young families should have to live … and it's not the Pakenham I thought we were moving to when we decided to build our life here in 2023.
>
> …
>
> We've had our car egged. Our home has been egged. These might sound like small things compared to other incidents, but they add up and contribute to the feeling that things are becoming less safe.

I found that amazing – I think it is well articulated – but I am going to read more from her email:

> I'm writing to ask what is being done to address the growing concerns around safety in Pakenham and how residents like myself can be involved in solutions. Whether that means stronger community programs, better prevention strategies, more visible policing, or forums where residents can discuss these issues and work together, I would welcome the opportunity to be part of that conversation.
>
> …

> I want my son to grow up in a community where families feel safe in their homes, where people feel comfortable walking their streets, and where the kindness that used to define our local community is stronger than the fear many of us are beginning to feel.

That is an incredible email from a young girl that really articulates why we need to do these things. Here is another one that I received from another victim of crime. This one took place in a train station, and that is why I raise the point that, regardless of the fact that a lot of these PSOs have been redeployed from train stations –

Michael Galea interjected.

Renee HEATH: No, they have been redeployed – taken from train stations.

Michael Galea interjected.

Renee HEATH: I want to bring up Aidan Becker soon. I do not want this to be politicised, if that is okay.

The statistics show that people were taken off train stations and put into shopping centres, and retail theft is still up. This is a man that has raised an issue where he was brutally attacked at a train station where there were no PSOs. I normally love engaging in a bit of cross-chamber debate and banter, but I am not going to here. I am going to read his email. He is a veteran, professional engineer and academic. The email states:

> I would like to share with you a story that relates to your shadow ministries as it exemplifies the Labor government's negligence in dealing with crime in general and safety on public transport.
>
> On Tuesday afternoon, I was assaulted at the Highett station by a man who obviously was strung out on drugs (bystanders agreed … He took offence at his dog barking at me so he rushed me and repeatedly punched me in the head with full force, ripping my shirt down the middle as I tried to get out of his grip. I could not run due to a recent surgery, so I was trapped …
>
> I was terrified he was going to kill me, and I have no doubt that I am alive only because three brave bystanders stepped in to save me …
>
> After 40 minutes, I gave up waiting for the promised police to arrive. A couple of PSOs finally came in on a train and chatted but took no details from me and went on their way. Hyperventilating and afraid I might faint, I called my wife to drive me to Chelsea Police Station. By the next morning, the police had identified the assailant from a bystander's photos. He will likely be arrested next week. The investigating police officer, who has been wonderfully helpful, could not enlist the help of detectives responsible for the train network … as they said it did not meet their 'threshold'.
>
> That a man could be so brazenly strung out in public on drugs shows how normalised such misbehaviour has become under Labor's soft-on-drugs attitude.

I want to remind you this was not written by me. This was written by somebody who reached out to me.

> That he could feel so entitled to punch me in broad daylight in front of witnesses and cameras suggests he knew he would get away with it, or suffer little consequence, given the government's indifference to crime. That the police didn't rush to the station suggests they are under-resourced. This government has … failed to maintain community safety.
>
> The government has re-tasked PSOs to privately-owned shopping centres and has proposed pulling them off some stations. They just don't get it.

The email went on to say 'This is not the Melbourne we started out in; it is crime ridden. Why would we spend billions of dollars on a new train line if it is unsafe for people like me to use it anymore?' Another person with a similar story emailed me and then sent me a follow-up email stating 'I've got some new information. Police told me that the attacker will be charged when witnesses' statements are signed. I am wondering why this person felt so free to be out on drugs and whack somebody. Labor has made public intoxication legal. Violent behaviour then shouldn't be unexpected.' Those are not my words but the words of people who have reached out to me.

There are a couple of things I want to talk about. The first one is that I was, sadly, at Aidan Becker's memorial after he was murdered. There is no way we can gloss over this. He was violently murdered by somebody he did not know, stabbed to death at the Mernda train station. His family's lives and his community's lives have been ripped apart. When I was there I stayed after that memorial – it was one of those days I will never forget – and started talking to a lot of people there that were visibly upset. You could see that they were heartbroken. I went up to one group of young kids and said, 'Did you know Aidan?' They said, 'No. We knew of him,' like many people there did. We began to talk about it. They were beautiful young boys. One of them grabbed out his phone and showed me a video of himself being chased by somebody with a machete at exactly the same spot as where Aidan had been murdered, and it was two years ago. I said, 'Hang on, what happened about this? Did you go to the police?' and he said he did. I am not saying this is right or wrong; this is his perception. I said, 'Well, what did they do?' and he said, 'I felt that because of the way I looked they judged me and thought it would have been my fault.' I am not saying that is right or wrong, but that is how the victim of this crime felt. I asked him to send me the footage, and he said, 'I would love to talk to you about it at a later date; at this stage I don't want to make this about me,' because we were there grieving the death of beautiful Aidan. The fact that that happened there two years ago and was reported to the police is just unbelievable to me. We need to do something about this. We need to have police that are resourced. We need to have laws that protect people.

I am not going to have time to talk about all of them, but I want to raise the fact that recently adult time for violent crime came into effect in the state of Victoria. The government said that this was based on what has worked in Queensland. However, what has made it work in Queensland is the fact that every off-ramp has been given to children because it has invested $100 million into prevention programs. We have not done this here. The Labor government have taken the slogan and made a law around that but have totally missed out the fact that they have not invested the $100 million to give off-ramps to kids. Not only that, the budget papers show us that $20 million has been cut from crime prevention in the state of Victoria. To me cutting the prevention programs and not investing into what it is that kids need to not get involved in a life of crime, while simultaneously raising the bar for young kids, is immoral.

I do not want to see prisons filled with kids. That to me is a tragedy. These are kids. Imagine your niece or your nephew or your son or your daughter or whoever is connected to you being locked up for a lifetime. Something does need to happen in this state, and there do need to be consequences, but there have to be consequences run in parallel with prevention. We have to be smart on prevention and tough on crime – and that is what we will do. We are going to invest $100 million into prevention programs for kids. We are going to have – the first of its kind in Victoria – a residential program that takes repeat offenders between the ages of 12 and 17. I have nephews that age. If they commit a crime, yes, they absolutely must be responsible, but for kids like them we need to provide a way for them to turn their lives around.

In here I spoke yesterday about the biggest indicator of whether or not a child will become involved in crime being whether or not they can read and write. One of the things we will do is have – the first of its kind – a residential, live-in program that has four pillars. The first one is discipline, so these kids know that they are above what they feel. They might feel like they are hopeless, they might feel like they want to carry out a crime, but we are going to provide them with the discipline to show them they can live above their feelings. The second part is education. I do not have the time, because I have got 2 minutes on the clock, to talk about that, but that one is quite obvious. We want to upskill them so they actually have an opportunity to get away from that life of crime. The third thing is life skills. We want these kids to be able to break the cycle of whatever it is that has got them here in the first place. And the fourth part is therapy, helping them overcome whatever barrier it is that got them there in the first place.

The second thing that we are going to invest in is a youth start program, which is essentially another four pillars. This is for kids that are at risk, kids that are going down a certain path. This will establish

regional youth justice hubs that have day programs and cognitive behavioural therapy and reach out to the community. Second, we are going to have targeted mentoring programs for kids that are going down a bad path to help them believe in themselves. The third one is early intervention pathways so these kids can have off-ramps before they get to these issues. And the fourth one is family-based therapy, so we can help these people tackle whatever it is at home to help deal with these issues. We will bring in Jack's law, which is going to be preventative and will allow PSOs to essentially take a wand to find out if there are weapons. We are going to go further than in Queensland, where there have to be certain areas that allow this: we are going to allow it everywhere. I have not got time to talk about 'break bail, face jail' and the other things in here, but I really hope that you know we are coming in good faith. I commend this motion to the house.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:01): I would like to speak a bit about this motion about crime. I think we can all agree that crime is a big problem in Victoria. What we are really talking about is not whether crime exists or not, because it certainly does exist, or whether people feel scared at the moment or not, because they certainly do feel scared. I know in the south-east I have spoken to many people who were victims of home invasions, assaults, robberies and all sorts of things, and it is pretty bad out there at the moment. People are worried, people are scared, and rightly so, when crime is out of control like this. Certainly I have spoken many, many times about organised crime as well and the failure of the government and actually the opposition to acknowledge and attack the root causes of this type of crime.

I find it interesting, though, that one of the failures pointed out here is around the machete ban. Now, the opposition is pointing out that this is a failed policy. To remind everyone, this policy was not originally a government policy. They were goaded into it for years by the opposition, and the government foolishly caved in and agreed to do this machete ban. Of course it has turned out to be totally ineffective. In fact it was ridiculed by everyone; it was ridiculed by the opposition themselves when the machete bins came out. I do not know what the opposition thought was going to happen when these machetes were banned, how they were going to be collected. Maybe they thought that police time would be better served by collecting these machetes rather than putting them in bins out the front of the stations. But nevertheless, it was a stupid policy ridiculed by all, even the Liberal Party, even though it was their own policy.

So you would think that there would be some humility before proposing other solutions, such as some of the solutions proposed here. One of these solutions, which I take great issue with, is this idea of a protest registration system. Now, I do not know what sort of Australia the opposition want to live in, but the type of Australia that I envision is one of a free country, a free Western democracy. In free countries, we should not have to go to the police and fill in a form and ask them for permission to protest. That is not how a free country works. The opposition seem to think that if they give the police the power to decide whether or not people are allowed to protest, sacrificing liberty will somehow get them safety, and of course we know it will get them neither. It will get Victorians neither.

This is the other proposal: Jack's law. For those that are not familiar with this, it is like the opposition went to the airport, saw all the scanners and people being scanned and thought, 'Well, that's wonderful, let's make the whole state like that' – because that is exactly what they are proposing, to allow police to electronically search anyone at will. They have done this in Queensland, and if the opposition had looked at some of the studies on this – Griffith University came out with some research on the implementation of this – it has had no effect on knife crime whatsoever. Despite them discovering knives, it has had no effect on knife crime whatsoever. Again we have sacrificed liberty for safety and gotten neither. These are proposals that are not evidence based. They do not achieve their stated goal, like the machete ban, which was another failure. In fact I would have a lot of respect for the government if they got up – maybe Mr Galea is going to do it – and said, 'We made a mistake with the machete ban. It hasn't actually been effective.' He probably will not do that. But it would be nice for the government, for once, to say, 'We tried something and it didn't work, so we're going to try something else. We've learned from this mistake, that it didn't work.' It would be nice, and I think

Victorians would have a lot more respect for the government if they said occasionally, 'We made a mistake.' I never hear the government say that really, but it was a mistake.

What are some things that could be done to fight crime? We all know, with organised crime – I have spoken many times about it, and I do not blame the state government so much for this but the federal government – we have seen what has happened because of the tobacco excise tax. It has caused an explosion in organised crime. We were getting firebombings of tobacconists, but now we are getting them at ice-cream shops and all sorts of other shops. Make of that what you will. But the firebombings have not ceased. Ironically, the firebombings are more expensive now due to petrol prices. I do not know whether that will have any effect on it. But there are other things that we can do. I have spoken about it many times. If people feel unsafe, you know what, a lot of people in Victoria would feel safer if they had pepper spray. It is actually ridiculous that we force people to be totally unarmed and unable to defend themselves. I have spoken about it many times. There was a case recently where two women were attacked at a place of business by a violent offender. One of them happened to have pepper spray. She used it. It was caught on video. You can see it on my social media. It was published in the newspapers and on television. She used the pepper spray. It was highly effective. This violent man was attacking two women and succeeded in hurting one of them quite seriously, is my understanding. They used pepper spray. He retreated immediately and went down the street. He was yelling and screaming on the street because his eyes were burning, and he started taking off his clothes because they were covered in pepper spray. It made it very easy for the police to catch him, and he was arrested and charged.

Michael Galea interjected.

David LIMBRICK: He could have had pepper spray, and I am glad Mr Galea has brought that up. He was wondering, 'What if this offender had pepper spray?' In fact the Northern Territory had that same concern, when they went through their trial recently, about pepper spray. Their number one concern was the number one concern brought up in this place about pepper spray: what happens if offenders use it? It seems that everyone that brings this up has not actually looked at jurisdictions that have legalised pepper spray, because this rarely happens. In fact after the Northern Territory's trial they concluded that this concern was totally unfounded, and they went ahead with permanent legalisation of pepper spray in the Northern Territory. That is not a good concern, not a valid concern.

The reason actually is very easy to understand. Criminals already can choose any weapon that they want. They could choose pepper spray if they wanted to. They do not choose pepper spray, because it is a very ineffective weapon for offensive crimes. If you want to rob someone, it is very difficult to rob them when they are covered with pepper spray. You cannot touch them. If you want to physically harm someone, it is very difficult to do it when they are covered with pepper spray. It is not very good for that. Criminals, as we know, prefer knives, machetes and guns. Those are what they choose. They have the entire selection of weapons to choose from, and they are what they choose because they are far more effective for committing offensive crimes. Pepper spray is rarely used in offensive crime, as has been borne out by the trial in the Northern Territory. They were concerned about that, and they concluded that it was a non-issue. They have gone ahead and made it permanent, and Victoria should follow suit. Maybe the government, if they are concerned about it being used in offensive crimes, should have a look at what the Northern Territory government has done. It is very effective, and I know that there are many women in Victoria especially who would love to possess pepper spray.

Back to this case where the woman used pepper spray – very effectively, I might add – many people, including me, were concerned that she was going to get charged with possession of pepper spray, because in Victoria it is a prohibited weapon. You can go to jail for up to two years, and even if you do not go to jail, you can have a criminal record. Keep in mind that the people that continue to support this prohibition on pepper spray believe that this woman, who defended herself from a violent criminal, should go to jail. She should be the one going to jail, because that is the reality of your policy position on this, right? The police disagreed with you. They said it was not in the public interest to press charges. They did not press charges. Even the police thought that there was nothing to be gained by

charging this woman with prohibited weapons offences. I commend the police on their good decision here. I would be interested if the government want to continue their prohibition on pepper spray. I would like to hear their justification for why that woman should go to jail, because I do not think she should. I do not think that any Victorian thinks she should. I think that all Victorians would side with her against this offender and not with the government, who wants to put her in jail, because that is the reality of the government's position.

I think that the government urgently needs to look at what Northern Territory are doing and what they have done very successfully, and we need to do it in Victoria as well. I think it would be a massively popular thing for them to do. It would not even be risky for them. I think that would be a very popular thing. It blows my mind why the opposition are not proposing it – I have no idea. I think it would be a hugely popular thing. But nevertheless I will not be supporting this motion, because I do not support restricting people's liberties for this vain hope that it will somehow curb crime, because it will not.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:11): I am pleased to rise to speak on the motion that has been brought forth today by Dr Heath. I always appreciate the contribution of Mr Limbrick too. It is good to be challenged from outside the box, and Mr Limbrick always does that. This is an important subject. Victorians have a right to feel safe in their homes, going out and about at the shops and in their workplaces. I do want to touch on quite a few things that have been gone into, but I want to, at the outset, acknowledge that this government recognised that more work was required and we are doing that work, and where we need to continue to reassess, look, listen, say what has worked and what has not and do more, we will do so. I am very pleased that we have seen reforms such as adult time for violent crime, County Court uplifts in certain violent crime cases for young offenders, extremely tough penalties for those adults who try to groom children and teenagers into criminal offending and all these many other measures, which I will go into, and indeed, touching on Dr Heath's comments, many early intervention measures too, because they are critically important.

This motion has come about in light of recent crime statistics, which do show that whilst crime levels are increasing, they are increasing at a slower level than they had been previously. We are starting to see a dent in those crime statistics as a result of these measures and in particular in relation to both the tougher sentences but also those bail reforms, which have progressively come in with the bulk of those reforms – the second tranche of those reforms coming in just in the last couple of months. I am very much looking forward to seeing the next lot of crime statistics once these reforms have been fully set in and to see the impact that they have.

Whilst I am and remain concerned about rising crime rates in my electorate, including in some areas such as Greater Dandenong, Casey and Cardinia, I do note, pleasingly, that in Knox and Kingston we have seen the effects already of those policies, with those crime rates coming down considerably in fact in the case of Knox and stabilising in both Frankston and Monash. There is considerable work that is being done, and I think it is worth commenting on some of it. We know that we need to resource our police to do their jobs as best they can. We are seeing some issues at the moment: despite the fact that we do have the largest standing police force in the country in Victoria Police, we are seeing quite a number of workforce shortages in the police force, in PSOs and in other various sectors as well. This is not for lack or want of trying. There are significant recruitment campaigns underway right now, and the resources and the capacity are there for these police vacancies. This government is committed to working with Victoria Police, with the Police Association Victoria and with others to ensure that we get police on the front lines, where they need to be. It is also not just about the raw numbers. Our role is to provide the investment into Victoria Police. It is not to dictate to them how to go about the operational work that they do. I do note that the Chief Commissioner of Police's new reforms seek to get police reservists – retired police officers – into police stations to do that sort of back office work as much as possible to free up policing resources for the frontline work, visible policing out in the community where it matters most. There are a number of things I would like to come to, particularly retail crime.

Another point of this motion, which Dr Heath has emphasised, is the role of early interventions. On this I do completely agree – early interventions are absolutely critical. We have brought in the toughest bail laws in the country and tougher sentences for repeat and violent offenders. These are all very important measures. But we cannot just have the consequence; we need to have, for want of a better word, the carrot. You want to have the early interventions in place to support these young people in particular to avoid that life of offending. We have seen the recent announcement of the rollout of early intervention officers in schools across Victoria, including a couple in my electorate, which I welcome as well – that direct feed-in. We have also seen the violence reduction unit, which is already up and running, targeting areas that are peaking, areas of concern that are coming up. I look forward to seeing the work that the VRU will be undertaking in the south-east as well, particularly those spots where we have seen those increases of crime relative to other parts of my electorate. This is all very important.

I take Dr Heath's remarks that she is coming in good faith at face value, and I am no doubt sure that she is. What I struggle with, though, is not so much her good faith but that of her colleagues. On the very day that the VRU was announced last year we had a member of this place who sits just three seats away from Dr Heath get up and do an adjournment to the Minister for Police. This is a direct quote:

> … I call on the government to scrap the costly violence reduction unit announced today by the government.

That is appalling. Mrs Hermans may not support the early intervention work that this government is doing, but I can only presume that she is speaking for the Liberal leadership. The Liberal leadership certainly supported her and endorsed her preselection, so I can only assume that when Mrs Hermans comes into this place and says that she wants early interventions such as the violence reduction unit scrapped, that is Liberal Party policy. I hope that from today Dr Heath's remarks might lead us down a different direction, but we just do not know. Whilst I take her remarks in good faith, I do not think we can take the Liberal Party's stance on this in good faith when you have members of the Liberal Party coming into this place and saying, 'Remove the early interventions.' That is frankly atrocious. It would only make the problem worse if we were to do that. I would appreciate some clarity from Dr Heath in her closing remarks – whether she does stand behind Mrs Hermans's outrageous statements and whether those statements of Mrs Hermans do reflect the position of the Liberal Party, or whether they are going to distance themselves from them, which they absolutely should. We should get an unequivocal message from the Leader of the Opposition. Does she stand by Mrs Hermans's comments, or does she support early interventions such as through the violence reduction unit? That is the very least that we can expect from any party that wants to pretend to Victorian voters that it is worthy of government.

I do have some remarks in terms of retail crime. I am anxious that the clock is now working against me, but I do want to turn to this very important topic. I will just talk through a few of the key things. Obviously the bail and sentencing reforms and the early interventions are all very critical to this space. We know there is a scale of offending. We saw just before Christmas last year several hundred young people run amok in a supermarket in my electorate. With the local member Tim Richardson, the member for Mordialloc, we really appreciated the chance to go and meet with the staff who were affected by it. One silver lining out of the visit was whilst we were there one of the parents dragged their daughter in to apologise to the staff, which was very appropriate and very nice to see. But there are continuing concerns around retail crime, and we legislated just last year tougher penalties for those who do seek to violently abuse or assault retail workers, as is appropriate that we did. We will very soon be bringing into the Parliament new laws for workplace protection orders, which will serve to keep retail and other essential service workers safe where there is a particularly violent and repeat offender who is likely to return to a store or other workplace. These will allow for court-enabled mechanisms to keep those people out of those workplaces and to keep workers safe. We have seen early indications from other jurisdictions around Australia of the success of similar initiatives.

We do also have Operation Pulse, which is seeing extra police resources and PSOs deployed to select shopping centres across Melbourne, initially as a summer trial, which has now been extended. I make the point that the PSO hours on Operation Pulse are extra hours as overtime and there are no shifts

being taken off railway stations to meet the shopping centre operation. We have already seen dramatically good results from that program, which has now been extended to the end of the year. I have certainly heard from workers in Fountain Gate in my area, and shoppers as well, of the difference that is making, and we have seen the huge stats coming out, which I do not have time to go through, but I will at another opportunity if I can.

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (11:21): I rise today to speak on this motion put forward by Dr Heath regarding the all-time high crime statistics in Victoria. This motion highlights just a fraction of the consequences of the crime crisis Victorians are facing. The latest figures from the Crime Statistics Agency tell the story that every Victorian already knows, has experienced and has endured under this Labor government. Victoria is in the grip of an unprecedented surge in crime, and it did not happen overnight. Time and time again I have raised questions and concerns over the past years about the rise in crime, the rise in youth offending, the increase in violent crime and how young offenders transition from minor offences to serious crime – from summary offences to indictable offences and then to serious indictable offences – with very little hesitation. This is the result of the Allan Labor government going soft on youth crime, watering down bail laws and weakening sentencing legislation, among many other progressive policies.

In this motion my colleague Dr Heath has outlined the consequences of inaction and the failures that come from poorly designed government policies such as the so-called machete bin initiative. I recall standing in this very place calling on the government to support the reclassification of the machete as a prohibited weapon. Those of us on this side recognised the alarming trend: its increasing misuse, its easy accessibility and its devastating potential. I made it quite clear at the time that regardless of what age the offender was, the person swinging a machete can split a skull open and sever a limb. Yet those opposite dismissed the warning and insisted it was just a knife and only a knife. We all know what followed: a sharp rise in machete-related attacks, an escalation in serious injuries and the weapon becoming a common choice among young offenders involved in aggravated burglaries, home invasions, carjackings – and it goes on. If we fail to act now, Victorians will once again bear the cost of inaction.

In my electorate in Melbourne's west, motor vehicle theft has become one of the fastest escalating threats to the community in Victoria. The problem is most visible in Wyndham, where over 1700 vehicles have been reported stolen. This places Wyndam amongst the highest risk areas in this state. Offenders are becoming more modernised and innovative in their efforts. In Tarneit and Truganina police have intercepted individuals misusing onboard diagnostic devices to bypass vehicle security systems and clone keys. Residents are increasingly finding their cars stolen overnight, even while the keys are still inside their homes. This demonstrates a shift from opportunistic theft to organised, targeted activities.

The Victorian government must ensure that police are properly resourced and equipped with the tools that they need to dismantle organised crime networks and protect our citizens. Aggravated burglaries have surged 45 per cent, and the impact on Victorians is profound. These home invasions are not merely property crimes, they are acts of terror committed in the very places where people should feel safest. It is no surprise that many Victorians no longer feel safe in their homes. Households have endured forced entries carried out by offenders armed with weapons, ransacking properties and violently confronting victims. Communities are left grappling with psychological trauma from repeated violent incursions, and the sense of safety that they once their homes has been taken and shaken.

Our dedicated men and women in blue have always performed strongly to protect Victorians from these incidents. I know because I worked among them for many years. However, they cannot continue this standard or even try to do better if the Allan Labor government deprives them of proper funding, proper resources and the manpower to look after the growing population.

Some have attempted to suggest that young offenders cannot distinguish between right and wrong. Certain voices in this chamber have promoted an ideology that 14-year-olds who damage properties, commit robberies and assault other people somehow lack understanding of their actions. This narrative does not help Victorians. It does not help the surge in crime. It makes it worse. Let me be clear: young people are not foolish. They are bright, capable and resourceful. Their backgrounds, whether they come from disadvantage, limited education or a challenging home, do not take away their ability to understand the consequences. If they have an obstacle in front of them, they will find a way around it. So when a 13- or 14-year-old youth with no physical or cognitive impairment strikes someone with a weapon in order to steal their belongings, they know exactly what they are doing. They know the force they use will hurt someone. They know it will cause pain. They know that the pain makes the victim submit so they can take away what they want. Young offenders who commit violent crimes are not acting in ignorance, they are making choices. Victorians deserve a justice system that acknowledges this reality and protects our community.

Too often, young offenders who are given opportunities through intervention programs and outreach initiatives abuse these opportunities. Many come to see these programs as little more than a get-out-of-jail card. And when young offenders fail to attend these sessions, what happens then? In most cases, they are simply given another chance, referred to another program, and the cycle continues right up until their next arrest. It becomes a revolving door, as most policemen would say, just like what we see in the bail system: bail, reoffend, arrest, rebail, offend, arrest and rebail again. This pattern sends entirely the wrong message. It tells young offenders consequences are minimal, that accountability is optional and that the system will always give them another chance, no matter how many victims they create. There must be clear consequences – real consequences. Without them, we are setting young people up to fail and leaving the community vulnerable to continued harm.

Police need more resources, as I mentioned, on the front line and staff resources to respond to incidents quickly and effectively. Anyone familiar with the system knows the extraordinary amount of paperwork, referrals, follow-up obligations and court involvement for even a single family violence incident. So when I say Victoria Police need better resources, more manpower, and less administrative burden, it is an understatement. To help police prevent family violence–related assault from occurring in the first place, Victoria needs stronger tools – proactive tools – to stop harm before it happens. This includes initiatives such as the 'right to ask, right to know' scheme, as is mentioned in this motion, which will allow people to request information about partners' violence history, and the criminalisation of coercive control. The government must act to protect victims before the harms occur, not only after. Our community deserve nothing less.

I will keep it short; I am close to the last minute. Under this government, the number of criminal incidents in Victoria has risen to 29 per cent over the past two years. This is the highest number of events in two decades. The government has cut police resources, allowed police stations to close and failed to introduce laws that deter criminals from committing serious offences. Safety is not a privilege – it is a fundamental expectation of the community. Victorians have every right to feel safe in their homes, on the street and in their communities, and they deserve a system that delivers exactly that. In the last 30 seconds, this motion gives an overarching lesson in what happens when a government fails to acknowledge a crisis, act properly and have proper policies to attack and deter crime. I will leave it there.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (11:31): I stand to make a contribution in support of this motion. The facts are the facts – all incidents are up: aggravated burglaries, which are home invasions, up by 24 per cent; motor vehicle theft, up by 56 per cent. Given how hard it is to steal a car the old-fashioned way, by hot-wiring it and all that, that can only mean one of two things: either an aggravated burglary or a burglary. Someone has got to get the keys; it is just not that easy. There are other ways, I suppose. The one that really perturbs me is that family violence serious assaults are up. There is a lot of work that has gone into the family violence arena over the years I have been here, but it does not appear to be reaping results, and I wonder if it is time for a fundamental shift in the approach and how

it is going. Family violence is one of the things that really affected me whilst I was in the police force; when going to these situations, it became apparent then that it was not as easy as I had thought. And maybe the so-called fixes we have seen over the years are not as easy as they thought. But we cannot just rest on our laurels. As a society we need to do better.

But getting to the reasons why I feel that this is happening – why the data is going up – on police numbers for starters there are 1500 or so positions vacant every single day, plus around another thousand sick every single day. Now, being a police officer exposes you to trauma, both mental and physical, and also, as I found out the hard way, you get diseases from people, and it is no fun at all. So the number of people sick is something that probably cannot be dealt with as far as – you have got to look after those with mental health issues, but the trauma and the other stuff are medical issues. The support given to officers in mental distress is anecdotally not very good. Also, I have got to say, as coppers you are encouraged to suck it up somewhat and move on, and as everyone finds out, everyone's piece of string for dealing with those matters is different to the others.

But why would people not want to join the police force now? It was a big thing in my time there that people did want to. But we saw COVID, and I can assure you that no-one joined the police force and went through all the stuff you go through in the academy to kick kids off playground equipment. We saw people like the traffic management guy that was going lights and bells to an event, and he was charged by the department. It made it to the first hearing where basically the magistrate threw it out. Slightly off our beaten track, Zach Rolfe in the Northern Territory. The treatment of police by the government – and I am not pointing at this government – of their own people, is getting next level. I would not recommend it to anyone at the moment. Things go wrong. Police need to be held to account, absolutely, but it has to be reasonable. You are putting normal people in situations that the average person might go through once in their lifetime, but they are doing it two or three times a day, and sooner or later something is going to come up where people are forced to make a split-second decision, on which everyone has weeks to figure out what should have gone on and blah, blah, blah.

I feel a societal shift or even a governmental shift towards the protection of the officers on the beat. Doing things in good faith and within policy should never end up in a court – never, ever, ever. The machete laws – I heard Mr Limbrick go on about them. Basically, only law-abiding people obey laws. It apparently has not changed a thing. Ironically, I believe the massive number of machetes they got off the street were from the dealers, so none actually got off the street. One of the things I have had an issue with is the move-on laws. When it came out that we were going to have move-on laws there was a big furore about it, and a lot of it was to do with industrial relations problems. I figure that the police need a move-on law or power – call it what you will – but they need to work with the unions so that legitimate industrial action is not affected. I am sure, with the power of the government and all the resources it has, it could work out something.

I am going to move on – and it is only going to be a fairly short contribution – to investing in early intervention initiatives to divert at-risk youths from a life of crime. The other day we had Blue Light Victoria in here. Blue Light Victoria has over 50 years experience in delivering early intervention programs. I think most of us remember Blue Light discos, which I did not go to – discos are not my thing. It works with a lot of community organisations as well as emergency services, and particularly the police, to reduce youth offending but also normalise contact with police. A lot of people that go off the rails have only ever had a negative experience, and they see police as someone that comes and bustles them up, puts them in a van and goes off and deals with them; they do not realise that they can be helpful as well. It depends on your perspective, I guess. They do mentoring for at-risk young people. There are a lot of restorative justice practices, where you do not just lock them up and throw away the keys; there is time to work with kids, because when they are kids – they are at the beginning of their life; they are not towards the end of their life – there is still hope for them. They do school- and community-based intervention programs. They can also help with training and apprenticeship pathways. There are a whole lot of things they can help with, but they need help. The Blue Light disco program is always after funding. It should be something, I figure, that was funded in full by every

government. But moving on, it has been around since 2012. There is a lot of evidence that it does work. It is the only youth organisation embedded with the Australian Federal Police, Victoria Police and emergency services across all the programs.

Investment is essential for the purposes of taking the pressure off the other systems. I do not have forever, but I could go on about the justice system and all that. One way of reducing the pressure on the justice system is keeping the kids diverted from there. If they do something wrong, they get punished. But we as a society should be doing our best to try and keep them out of the system, and this is a way. It may not be the way; it will not work for everyone of course, but it will help. The current funding is set to cease this year, and our budget is coming up, so I would like to hope that the government has seen the light and will do this. It is established. It is already there. There is nothing to build; it has just to continue. But if government – federal and state governments – do not invest, then it stops, and what good it does do just evaporates. I feel that this is an opportunity for what is a fairly modest investment by a government that should not be passed by. It is something that has proven itself. It is something that will deliver results. For every kid it keeps out of the system or diverts away from the system, it is helping the bottom line. It is helping by the fact that the justice system does not have to deal with them and their families do not have to deal with them in a negative way. In the end, a problem avoided is far better than a problem dealt with. I will leave my contribution there.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (11:40): I am pleased to rise to speak on Dr Heath's motion about crime and police. It is a wideranging motion covering a range of issues. These are significant and serious issues and ones that we have obviously dealt with on a number of occasions over the last couple of years, responding to legitimate and real community concerns that have existed about the rise in criminal activity in the community and responding to the need and desire of all Victorians to feel safe, particularly in their own homes. Fundamentally every Victorian has a right to feel safe in their home and safe in the community where they live, work and play. This government have been listening to the community about what they want to see, and we have been acting to make sure that the laws are in place to deal with the changing nature of criminal offending, that the police have the resources and the powers that they need to effectively deal with crime and that the Parliament makes it clear to the courts what our expectations are with things like bail and sentencing matters. I think it has been very clear that the fundamental point that Victorians have a right to feel safe in their homes and in their communities is something that this Labor government absolutely believes in and absolutely supports, and we have been acting in a range of areas to make sure that the laws are in place that are needed and the resources are in place that are needed to deal with rates of criminal offending in our community.

We do know that there has been in recent years an increase in rates of violent youth offending across the community. You do not need to read statistics to understand that; you can go and talk to the community. I have certainly had many conversations with members of the community across the Southern Metropolitan Region about crime matters, and I have spoken with local police in various parts of Southern Metro, whether from the Boroondara area, whether from the Bayside area or whether from Moorabbin or Port Phillip. There has been a range of conversations that we have had over the last couple of years about the way that the police report to us, the different and changing nature of the crimes that they are facing and certainly the concerns that members of the community have about criminal activity and the impact it is having on their lives.

I have spent quite a lot of time in particular talking with the very good people at Neighbourhood Watch Bayside, who have done a really excellent job in engaging with their community about ways that every household can take steps to improve and increase their own safety. That has really been a community-led response to keep individuals and households safe. There are little things that we all can do to make ourselves safer in our homes and in our communities – locking cars and doors is just one example. Neighbourhood Watch Bayside in particular, who I have spent a lot of time talking with, have been really great at getting out and having those conversations with the community. They have also been forthright and forthcoming in talking with me as an elected member in the area about the sorts of

changes that they want to see made to the criminal law and to bail and sentencing provisions. As a representative of that community I have been bringing those concerns back to government, and government has been listening. You can see that through things like the suite of changes we have made – for example, the adult time for violent crime reforms, ensuring that young offenders who commit certain violent, serious crimes face serious consequences by the uplifting of more trials and sentencing from the Children's Court to the County Court; increasing the maximum penalty for recruiting a child to engage in violent offences to 15 years across the board; and introducing a new life sentence for youth gang recruiters who recruit children into serious and violent offending.

Importantly, the government has also backed the new Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police Mike Bush's reforms to get more police out from behind a desk and onto the streets, because fundamentally we know that the community feels safer and is safer when we have got more of our uniformed officers out on the streets either deterring or investigating crime, and the work that the chief commissioner is doing to try and get people out from behind the desk and onto the streets is something that has had significant support from the government.

The other thing that we have done, in addition to strengthening and toughening the consequences for those who commit crimes, is actually put work into trying to prevent some of that criminal behaviour from occurring in the first place. It has been really significant, I think, the work that the government has done to establish the new world-leading violence reduction unit in Victoria, which is seeking to reduce violent youth crime through early intervention, and to make sure that we are investing to prevent crimes from occurring before they do whilst strengthening the laws to provide real and necessary consequences for those who choose to break the law. We have also invested in and recently made further announcements about the location of early intervention officers in schools to intervene earlier in the lives of children who are starting to go down the wrong path. It is important to invest in prevention as well as tough consequences and more resources for police.

We know that not every member of the Liberal Party agrees with some of the measures we are taking to prevent crime. We know that there has been criticism from members of this chamber, members of the Liberal Party in this chamber, who have called for the violence reduction unit to be scrapped. I cannot fathom why any member of this place who is concerned about their community and concerned about community safety would get up and decide they want to scrap the violence reduction unit. It is a really important part of the suite of measures that we are taking as a government to deal with violent crime in our community, to deal with increased rates of youth offending. You need tough consequences, you need more resources in police, you need resources going into prevention and you need to be preventing that crime from starting. For Liberal Party members to get up and say they want to scrap the violence reduction unit is astounding and confounding, and I think it demonstrates just how out of touch they are with what is necessary to deal with youth offending in the community.

There have been obviously a range of laws and a range of actions that we have taken over the last couple of years to deal with increased rates of youth offending and to deal with increased rates of crime in the community. I think what we have seen is that there is progress being made on these issues. The latest sets of crime statistics do demonstrate that there are early signs of promising results from the suite of measures that I have talked about. Record refusals of bail and bail revocations are helping to keep high-harm young offenders off our streets. Victoria Police are holding more offenders to account, with more being remanded for serious offences like home invasion, aggravated burglary, assault and theft. Overall, crime rates do remain unacceptably high, but our measures are working.

I had a look just recently at some of the latest crime statistics, and I was talking with some members of Victoria Police who cover parts of the Southern Metro area. We are seeing some promising signs. In the Bayside area, the latest crime stats show a slight decrease in the offence rate and a slightly larger decrease in the offence rate in Glen Eira and in Kingston. Much of that is being driven by reductions in the number of burglaries and break and enters, which are down by 6.2 per cent in Bayside, around 13 per cent in Glen Eira and around 24 per cent in the City of Kingston. There is a lot more that needs to be done, and we need to remain absolutely vigilant to ensure that the laws we are changing are

having an effect, that the extra resources we are providing are going to police to get them out from behind the desk to the front line and that we are working to prevent crime before it occurs.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:50): I also rise to make a contribution on this motion in Dr Heath's name in regard to crime statistics. I just want to say at the outset that my thoughts are always with anybody who is a victim of crime. It is something that I know Mr Batchelor remarked on and other speakers have remarked on: every Victorian has the right to feel safe. Whether it be in their own home or whether they are walking on the street or shopping or in whatever setting they wish to participate in in life, everybody has the right to feel safe. Unfortunately we do see a lot of reporting on crime when it happens and on victims of crime. It is always an unnerving situation, whether you are seeing it on the news, whether you are hearing about it from friends or whether you have been personally affected. It is something that, again, is never a good thing. As I said, my thoughts and sympathies are always with people who have experienced crime and any trauma associated with being a victim of crime.

The statistics are one thing, but it is also important to focus on the stories about what is behind crime and also on the investment that our government is putting into addressing crime. It is sad that, unfortunately, there are many drivers of crime. We can talk about statistics, but the drivers of crime are known, and they often eventuate from things like family violence affecting young children in the home or from abuse or neglect – a whole range of things. That is something that is very difficult and challenging, but also something that our government understands only too well is that early intervention is a very key part of helping to not only drive down crime but stop it before it starts. What we know is that early intervention is far more effective as a tool or as a mechanism to address the reasons for crime.

Once somebody becomes incarcerated as a consequence of committing a crime, oftentimes that individual for the first time in their lives might be getting some kind of intervention that might actually assist them to turn their lives around. It is a sad factor that once somebody becomes incarcerated they may end up going through a revolving door of incarceration, whether it is in juvenile justice, for example, in the first instance or perhaps then as they become older and become an inmate in an adult prison setting. Those things are always regrettable because that person is still a person. Our job as government is to try and assist that person to rehabilitate so that they do not go on to commit more crime. It is always challenging. Some people, once they come into a custodial setting, will for the first time in their lives have access to medical treatment or psychological treatment. They may have an underlying disorder that has not been previously diagnosed, and that is a very sad fact. Sometimes these are things that can go into part of the reasons why people commit crime. But that is very cold comfort to anybody who has been the victim of a crime.

Before I do talk about the investment our government is making, I again want to thank Victoria Police and every police officer, whether they be on the beat or in a police station, for the very important work that they do. I know that police officers, whilst they are on the front line and attending to crimes and addressing these matters in the community, often make important linkages with communities as well. We know that community policing type of role is critically important so that young people from various groups or backgrounds can see police officers in their own community and understand the important work that they do. There is a vital role for our police officers, who obviously are at the end of trying to catch people who have committed violent crimes, and then we have those people that get put before the courts to receive sentencing. It is a very important role that the police do and a difficult and challenging role, so I thank them for all of that.

I am going to talk a little bit about statistics, but statistics do not tell the entire story. Contrary to what those opposite might be saying, our reforms are delivering results. We have had record bail refusals and revocations, which is keeping more offenders off our streets. If they are breaking their bail conditions, their bail is being revoked and they are being put back into custody. There are more people who are being remanded for serious offences like home invasion, aggravated burglary, assault and theft. Whilst the crime rate remains unacceptable, these results show that our approach is working. As

I said, we are backing Victoria Police with record investment and the Chief Commissioner of Police's plan to get more officers out from behind desks and onto the front line. We know that Victoria Police, for example, are making record numbers of arrests. They have arrested over 78,000 people in the last 12 months alone. Our hardworking and dedicated police officers are absolutely out there on the job doing very important work. As I said earlier, I thank them for that. It is a difficult job. You can see from the statistics that I have just highlighted that our hardworking police officers are working harder than ever and are achieving real results.

In terms of knife crime, we know that too many people have had access to knives, but we have made some initiatives on that. We had our machete bin program, but also we have introduced a range of laws to disrupt and prevent knife crime. We have expanded Victoria Police's stop-and-search powers and our machete bin program, as I touched on earlier. We are investing a million dollars in funding to procure over 840 additional handheld metal detectors, and that will support Victoria Police in conducting searches for dangerous edged weapons. Our machete bin program saw over 12,000 dangerous weapons handed in by members of the community over that amnesty period, and our expanded stop-and-search powers helped to seize another 17,400 dangerous knives, which were taken off our streets. Those things are a testament to the success of that program, and it is having results. I know those opposite might say that it is not enough, but there is tangible work and tangible results that are in fact being achieved.

This approach to trying to drive down crime is not a one-size-fits-all approach. We need to be responsive to the challenges that are being presented. I do remark on some of the remarks that our Premier made in regard to this when the police were talking about the types of crime that they were seeing, and some of these things were new and they had never seen them before. When we have new sorts of presentations of these things, obviously new responses are required. That is why we are working with Victoria Police and listening to them about the sorts of things that they need.

Just on the early intervention front, we have established our world-leading violence reduction unit in Victoria, which will reduce violent youth crime through early intervention. As I said earlier, that is critically important. It includes a $7.7 million investment for youth mentors to connect kids with reformed offenders, so people who have that lived experience can connect with offenders and talk to them about getting them back on the right path. There is a further $5.6 million for early intervention officers in our schools to intervene early in the lives of children who are heading down the wrong path. We know it is critically important. We know that early intervention works. We have backed that with real investment: as I said, $7.7 million for youth mentors to connect kids with reformed offenders but then a further $5.6 million for early intervention officers in our schools.

I have talked about this with a lot of my friends. It often takes a village to raise a child, and this is a village approach. We have so many people working from so many angles, coming together with a shared objective of driving down crime. As I said earlier, my thoughts are with victims of crime, but it is always a sad thing to see young people getting tangled up in lives of crime so young and so early, and that is why our early intervention approach is so critically important.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Business of the house

Budget 2026–27

The PRESIDENT (12:00): I have received a message from the Assembly:

> The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that under s 52 of the *Constitution Act 1975*, approval has been granted for Hon Jaclyn Symes MLC, Treasurer, to attend the Assembly on Tuesday 5 May 2026 to give a speech on the Annual Appropriation Bill.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Data centres

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:01): (1293) My question is for the Premier. The federal Department of Industry, Science and Resources has released *Expectations of Data Centres and AI Infrastructure Developers*. These guidelines include expectations that data centres will supply additional clean energy, limit demand on the grid, pay for network connection costs, adhere to water efficiency guidelines and contribute to skills development. These guidelines capture the concerns of many Victorians. They will need to be actioned through state regulation on a whole-of-government basis, and the Commonwealth has said it will prioritise proposals that meet them. With a live application to triple the size of the NEXTDC data centre in West Footscray, and the nearby Perri data centre already approved, will the government be applying the Commonwealth's expectations to these concerning proposals?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:01): I thank Mr Ettershank for his question for the Premier, and I am very happy to direct that to her for an answer within the standing orders.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:02): Thank you, Minister. Residents adjoining the completed first stage of the NEXTDC centre are subject to the incessant hum of air conditioning and intense light pollution. They describe it as nightmarish. The planning approval for the NEXTDC site in Port Melbourne was rushed through in just 75 days; however, its location means it does not impact on residential amenity. West Footscray residents believe the expansion of these data centres will be approved with no consideration of the impacts on their health and wellbeing or possible sanity. Pending a whole-of-government response to the development of data centres, can the Premier give an undertaking that the West Footscray application will not be similarly fast-tracked?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:02): I will pass the supplementary question on to the Premier for response.

Suburban Rail Loop

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:03): (1294) My question is to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Minister, in the context of rising oil prices, the Civil Contractors Federation chief executive Nicholas Proud said that about 7.75 per cent of any tender is the cost of diesel and that, applied to a billion-dollar project, that would add $46 million to the price tag. The government has previously stated that the SRL East is immune from the government's own calculation of 22 per cent construction cost increases since 2020. Does the government accept that these fuel spikes will impact the SRL East budget?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:03): Thanks, Mr Mulholland. I take issue with some of the wording of your preamble. The uplift in costs associated with delivering major projects is not something from which any major project is immune. Let us be really, really clear about that. Let us be clear, then, about the business and investment case which, totalling 1000 pages of detail, including technical assessments, Mr Mulholland, has found that the Suburban Rail Loop not only is necessary, not only is nation building and not only is going to equip Victoria with the means to accommodate growth and to enable people to live within walking distance of public transport, of their jobs, of Australia's largest universities and of health care but is also a project which under the terms of the funding and finance model is aligned with the way in which other major projects have been delivered, whether that is around value capture – the Elizabeth line, the Île-de-France – or the work that has happened, including with the city loop, on the way in which we have delivered this. Mr Mulholland, again, if you had bothered to read the business and investment case – your colleague Mr Welch I think got to page 361 before he threw in the towel – I know that you would actually appreciate that this work –

Evan Mulholland: On a point of order, President, on relevance. The question was: does the government accept that these fuel price spikes will impact the SRL East budget? The minister has not come near that question.

The PRESIDENT: I think the minister responded at the beginning of her answer.

Harriet SHING: So, Mr Mulholland, I was going into the detail of the way in which the budget for the Suburban Rail Loop has been developed. Again, if you are not going to read the business and investment case, that is a reflection on you and on the position to which you aspire, Mr Mulholland, and on your capacity or inability to deliver a major project, because your lot never, ever did. Now, the work on the business and investment case –

David Davis interjected.

Harriet SHING: Mr Davis has just fessed up to the fact that you know how to deliver a major project, which is even worse because it shows that you are wilfully blind to the need for this infrastructure. And again –

Renee Heath: On a point of order, President, question time is not an opportunity to attack the opposition. On a second point of order, Ms Shing has misled the house by saying we never have delivered a major project.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: I do not know how I will go rejecting a point of order when someone is holding a baby. Does that make me look mean if I do? I do uphold the point of order in that it is not an opportunity to attack the opposition, but I have to say interjections are unruly. It was very difficult to hear the minister over the interjections. If I can call the house to order, I will call the minister to the question.

Harriet SHING: The range as set out in the business and investment case of 2021 is $31 billion to $34.5 billion. The project is on time and on budget. It fits within that envelope. Again, we welcome the investment from the Albanese government of $2.2 billion to date for early works and land acquisition. Work continues. Major construction is underway across those sites, and we will continue the work to deliver the project. Even though you say 'Stop and pause and review', you mean 'Sack and scrap and stop' the delivery of tens of thousands of homes and jobs for thousands of workers as part of what then sits on top of $11.1 billion of cuts under a Liberal–One Nation coalition.

Evan Mulholland: On a point of order, President, on relevance, the minister has still not come near my question on whether the government accepts that fuel price spikes will impact the SRL East budget.

The PRESIDENT: I believe the minister has been relevant to the question. You have got 9 seconds if you like.

Harriet SHING: The range is set out in the business and investment case. The project is on time, and it is on budget.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:08): Minister, will the government now update the SRL East costings to inform Victorians of the true cost of the Cheltenham to Box Hill rail line?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:08): Mr Mulholland, again, there is a standing order that refers to tedious repetition, but I do not think there is anything tedious about identifying the fact that you still have not read the business and investment case, which refers to $31 billion to $34.5 billion in –

David Davis interjected.

Harriet SHING: You know it is wrong?

Renee Heath: On a point of order, President, the minister is using a prop, and that offends the standing orders.

The PRESIDENT: I actually did not see you holding that up, but I ask you not to hold it up. I do not think it is a prop, it is a business case, but it can be determined like that.

Harriet SHING: Dr Heath, if you think a business and investment case for Australia's largest infrastructure and housing project is a prop, that reflects on your inability to deliver on the work that is going to mean that future generations will be able to catch a train to Australia's largest universities. They will be able to buy a home within walking distance of a train line. They will not be forced to have a denial of housing options available to them. You are so fixated on denying people the opportunity for housing in the inner suburbs – housing which our parents had the benefit of an opportunity to acquire and which our kids deserve the same opportunity to avail themselves of. We will continue to deliver this project. Read the business and investment case – $31 billion to $34.5 billion. The project is on time and on budget. Get on board, stop flip-flopping and join us as we continue to build it.

Ministers statements: Victorian multicultural health survey

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (12:10): Yesterday Minister Thomas and I launched the Victorian multicultural health survey, an important initiative to make sure that the health system works for every Victorian. Victoria is proudly multicultural, but unfortunately we know that people from diverse backgrounds can still face barriers to health care. We know that language, culture and distance can all limit access and lead to poorer health outcomes, and that has got to change. This survey is about action. It places the voices of Victoria's multicultural communities at the heart of our health, mental health and alcohol and other drug services, ensuring they guide meaningful, lasting reform. At the launch Yue Hu, who is an executive lead of transcultural and language services at Northern Health, made it clear that quality care is not just about words, it is about creating culturally responsive systems that understand and reflect the communities they serve. Bringing a regional perspective, registered nurse Arun Thomas from Horsham shared how distance can deepen disadvantage but also how digital innovation can bridge gaps, giving a platform to voices that might otherwise go unheard. This work builds on the multicultural review led by George Lekakis AO and underpins our commitment to the whole-of-government multicultural strategy. We invite all Victorians from multicultural communities to take part. Your voice will shape what comes next. The survey is available on the Engage Victoria website, and it closes on 31 May. This is about real, practical change so that no matter what your language, culture or postcode, Victoria's health system works for you.

Animal care and protection legislation

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:11): (1295) My question is for the minister representing the Premier. Last week, on the very same day that a koala was tied to the back of a vehicle and dragged down a street, the Premier confirmed she will not be honouring her government's commitment, made 10 years ago, to fix our state's broken animal protection laws. The Animal Care and Protection Bill has been drafted since 2023, but the Premier says that a 'busy legislative agenda' is the reason for it being binned. I note that this week we have three bills in this place. In the lower house there are just two. The government has motions ready to go in case we need to fill time. Can the Premier explain the real reason why she is breaking her promise, which is leaving countless animals to suffer while authorities have no power to act or intervene?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:12): I thank Ms Purcell for her question, which she has directed to the Premier. Obviously a lot of the animal welfare initiatives and funding measures would be a matter for

the Minister for Agriculture, who would be well placed to answer some of those. But given that the member has requested an answer from the Premier, let us send it to her in the first instance in accordance with the standing orders.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:13): I thank the Treasurer for referring that on. The government took their promised Animal Care and Protection Bill to multiple elections. They promoted the so-called 'positive animal welfare' agenda in materials and plastered it on corflutes. They took stakeholders, many of whom were volunteers, through multiple gruelling rounds of consultation over many, many years. Five different agriculture ministers have worked on this legislation since it was committed to before it was binned. Now the Premier is apparently too busy to keep her word, but I am willing to offer a solution by introducing her bill and using my own general business time to ensure its passage. All the government needs to do is hand it to me to introduce in my name. So my question is: will the Premier take up my offer to help her keep her decade-old commitment to Victorians?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:14): I will add Ms Purcell's supplementary question to the substantive.

Fuel supply and prices

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:14): (1296) My question is for the Treasurer. Treasurer, I note yesterday's implacable opposition by the Allan Labor government to any change on the GST collected –

A member interjected.

David DAVIS: Well, you were not going to do it yesterday.

A member interjected.

David DAVIS: The comments were not there. You were actually offside with New South Wales. New South Wales were going one way, you were going the other.

The PRESIDENT: Mr Davis, you are running out of time to ask your question.

David DAVIS: The obvious decision that people had made across the country was that the money should be returned to motorists. I therefore ask whether the backflip that has occurred to the New South Wales position is the result of calls from New South Wales officials or the federal government and whether you will be able to get an Olympic award for an unusual – *(Time expired)*

The PRESIDENT: There were a number of questions there. The minister can answer one as she sees fit.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:15): Mr Davis, you are so off track in relation to the way you have tried to frame this question. At least you have acknowledged that you are aware of the Allan Labor government's willingness –

Nick McGowan: You answered the question yesterday.

Jaclyn SYMES: I got asked yesterday about whether we would consider forgoing the windfall of GST, which we had already been on the public record saying that we were doing. Mr Davis, yes, of course first ministers met yesterday following a meeting of national cabinet in relation to GST.

David Davis interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: I take issue with your interjections, Mr Davis. You are creating a narrative that has just not got any substance behind it. But rather than bickering with Mr Davis, I can make it very clear to the house, as I did yesterday, that the Allan Labor government is doing everything it can to ensure that pressures are taken off those that are experiencing higher prices as a result of the fuel

increases. That is why we have announced free public transport. It is being taken up, and it is resulting in mode shift, which means that we are having less demand at the pump.

In relation to supporting the federal government's halving of the fuel excise, which will result in a reduction of around 26 cents per litre at the pump, as a result of productive conversations about what further measures we can take to reduce pressure on fuel prices, the state government has had those conversations with all of the first ministers and can confirm that we have agreed to forgo the windfall of GST, and that will be applied again at the bowser by a further reduction in excise, resulting in a further 6 cents.

Nick McGowan interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: As I said yesterday, Mr McGowan, we have always been willing to acknowledge that a windfall from increased petrol prices should always be reinvested back into supporting motorists. That is exactly what we are doing, and I have just confirmed it. It has been a matter of 48 hours of ensuring how you could deliver that project. We in the Allan Labor government are very proud of the initiatives that we are taking to ensure that we can take pressure off hardworking Victorians, and we will continue to consider other initiatives going forward.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:18): My supplementary question to the Treasurer is: will the Treasurer tell the chamber how much GST windfall the Victorian government has already had collected on its behalf to date and whether that will be returned to Victorian motorists as well?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:18): Mr Davis, as I have confirmed in relation to conversations with the federal government and other states and territories, the GST windfall will be applied for further reductions – cents per litre – at the bowser. We have already ensured that we are spending money where it matters most. That is what we are spending. We are spending more than $70 million on free transport. An announcement of –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! It is problematic that a member of the coalition asked the Treasurer a question and then the coalition benches just about shouted her down to the point where I could not hear her. Spare me any points of order about relevance or anything like that, because I just cannot hear her. It is very problematic, and it is adversely affecting my quality of life, so I ask you to spare me and we can move on. I think the clock ran out while I was –

A member interjected.

The PRESIDENT: The minister has completed her answer.

Ministers statements: early parenting centres

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:20): I rise to update the house on one of the ways in which the state Labor government is supporting Victorian families: by delivering the Whittlesea early parenting centre. Last week it was a pleasure to visit the team at the Whittlesea early parenting centre to hear about the ways we are supporting families and their little ones in the northern suburbs and beyond. The services delivered at the centre aim to enhance the parent–child relationship and assist carers to achieve their parenting goals in areas such as sleep and settling, child behaviour, parent and child health and wellbeing and parent–child attachment. This beautiful centre delivers supports to families with babies aged zero to four years. Families can be referred to the service by their GP or maternal and child health nurse, but they can also self-refer to the centre. The centre features 10 overnight family units and four day-stay places, giving families the option of visits for daytime supports as well as weeklong programs that improve the health and wellbeing and developmental outcomes of their children.

The Whittlesea early parenting centre is operated by Mercy Health, who also operate the longstanding Canterbury early parenting centre, which has been operating for more than 75 years. In fact I recall first visiting that centre, then known as the Grey Sisters, as a child with my own family. I remember that they had the most amazing doll's house. Until not long ago the Canterbury EPC, known as the O'Connell Family Centre, was one of only three early parenting centres operating across the state, but since 2019–20 the Victorian government has refurbished two EPCs and built seven more, with another three centres planned for completion this year and next, bringing the total number of Victorian EPCs to 13.

We now have EPCs operating in Whittlesea, Canterbury, Footscray, Noble Park, Bendigo, Ballarat, Geelong, Wyndham and Casey and a First Nations-led EPC in Frankston, with centres to open in Hastings, Shepparton and Northcote. With close to $200 million invested in Victoria's EPC network, the state government is now delivering services to families right across the state. By delivering these amazing services free of charge we are easing the cost of living for Victorian families and helping their families grow. I am very proud to speak to this wonderful nation-leading initiative in the house today, because it is only our government that will support Victorian families from those very early days of parenthood right through the early years to give our children the very best start in life.

Water policy

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:23): (1297) My question today is for the Minister for Water. Regional Victorian irrigation communities are concerned. For almost two years now the federal government have been conducting buybacks of water from farmers. While at the moment these buybacks are voluntary, it is only a matter of time before they realise that the uptake is not enough to fulfil their aim of 450 gigalitres. The loss of water comes at the detriment of our regional communities. Without water, food production is severely impacted. Without water, farmers will walk off the land. Minister, what is the government doing to protect our irrigation communities from the impacts of the federal government's disastrous water buyback scheme?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:23): I thank the member for her question on what is a significant issue in this state, particularly in terms of the communities which she represents in Northern Victoria. Our government has been in lockstep with all of the key stakeholders in its opposition to the federal government's buybacks, and I think I have taken that issue to this chamber several times. I have also taken it to the ministerial council meetings that have occurred, and of course I have put it in correspondence to the federal minister of the day. We oppose it for all of the reasons that I have raised before and that you would be well acquainted with. I think too that it is important that we keep up the engagement. I had a recent meeting with the Victorian Farmers Federation in my ministerial office where we went through the issue of buybacks, but we also had a conversation about the Murray–Darling Basin plan discussion paper and the missing chapter that you would know is being talked about in your communities. Of course we also talked about the sustainable communities fund.

Before I go on any further, though, given that there was a VFF media release today, can I thank Brett Hosking for his stewardship of the VFF. I think that we can only work better. I have enjoyed a very good working relationship with him and others at the VFF over a long period of time. Can I also congratulate Mr Milgate and Mr Young on being the new president and vice-president of the VFF. I look forward to a very productive relationship with them. Of course Natalie is always in my thoughts in terms of being a very good advocate when it comes to water and opposition to buybacks and, importantly, what we need to do in terms of ensuring that communities in northern Victoria are absolutely at the forefront of government decisions. That is why I have been asking all stakeholders, all communities and individual community members to put submissions in to the review that is currently underway. As I said, there is a missing chapter. We need to make sure that the voices of northern Victoria are heard. We do need to recognise and appreciate that our northern Victorian communities and economies survive, and not only survive but thrive. I thank you for your continued

advocacy in this area. We will stand up to the Commonwealth on this issue. Nothing is going to change in respect to that. We are always going to put Victoria first.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:26): I might give the minister the opportunity to finish that with my supplementary question. Water is one of the few policies on which the majority of members in this place agree. We know of the devastating impact on regional farming communities of the federal government's nonsensical taking of the very water that grows our food in Australia's food bowl. Will the minister commit to continuing to work with all members in this place to attempt to stop federal Labor's disastrous water policies?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:27): You are quite right, Ms Tyrrell – this is one issue that we can have bipartisan, and tripartisan, views on, and we are more than happy to continue to put that position to the Commonwealth. We will continue to do that, and of course we will ensure that the voices of Victoria are heard and in particular those in northern Victoria who are directly impacted as a result of the ill-founded policies of buybacks.

Budget 2026–27

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:28): (1298) My question is again to the Treasurer. Treasurer, last week you expressed confidence that Victoria would deliver a budget surplus despite the impact of the Middle East fuel crisis. But an operating surplus is not the same as a healthy budget bottom line. Treasurer, will you confirm that when the budget is delivered in May, Victoria's state debt will be higher than at the end of 2024–25?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:28): Whilst I appreciate Mr Davis's interest in these important matters, I am not going to use the opportunity to preadvance the budget. You would appreciate, as I confirmed yesterday, we are in the final stages of pulling that together. We have a focus on the priorities of Victorians, and we know that it is really tough for many families right now, particularly with interest rate increases and the fuel increases, so these are features that will be reflected in the upcoming budget. You will have to wait to see all of those figures in about a month's time, Mr Davis.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:29): My supplementary to the Treasurer is: last year's budget promised that state debt in this financial year would reach 25.1 per cent of GSP. Will you confirm that this figure is now erroneous and that the debt as a share of GSP will in fact be greater at the end of the financial year?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:29): Mr Davis, I released the budget update on 5 December, which had the figures at that point in time. I do not release the aggregates on a weekly basis. I release them at the appropriate time, and they will be in the budget in May.

Ministers statements: Suburban Rail Loop

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:30): The Suburban Rail Loop is a city-shaping project that will change the way we live, work and move around the state as it grows. With rising fuel costs, Victorians know that we must support households, families and workers by delivering faster and more affordable connections now and better opportunities and livability for future generations. The current fuel supply issues we are experiencing have made it abundantly clear that Victorians need and want to spend less on petrol or diesel and less time in traffic. Labor has in that regard made public transport free until 30 April this year. That is on top of our existing public transport cost-of-living relief support, including free transport to under-18s and to seniors, carers and disability support pensioners on weekends and capping the V/Line network travel at metro prices. Responsible government also demands long-term action to address the causes of cost-of-living pressures like filling a tank or spending hours in congestion. With the Suburban Rail Loop, Labor is making the savings

that come with accessible and reliable public transport available to even more Victorians, all while helping to take growth pressures off our outer suburbs by delivering more homes within walking distance of existing jobs, schools, health care and Australia's largest universities. No matter where they live, the Suburban Rail Loop will bust congestion and get Victorians home to their families quicker and safer. But all of this is at stake under a Liberal–One Nation partnership. Let us be clear: when those opposite talk about pausing and reviewing, they are really saying they will sack over 3000 workers, they will slash 70,000 homes – on top of the 300,000 they are blocking across Melbourne as part of their 'anywhere but Brighton' and 'keep out of Kew' housing policy – and they will force more Victorians to spend more time in the car and more money at the petrol station, denying families the housing choices they deserve. While those opposite spend their time ripping each other apart, we are laser focused on saving Victorians time and money. We have only ever had one position on the SRL, and that is that we are building it.

Public transport

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:32): (1299) My question is to the minister representing the Minister for Public and Active Transport in the other place. With petrol prices spiking, many people, particularly in outer suburbs and regional centres, are even more frustrated than usual that their local public transport is either non-existent or simply does not meet their needs. Some areas have slow, infrequent buses, routes stopping by 8 pm or no buses at all, as well as busy roads with no safe cycling infrastructure. Minister, what new actions is the government taking to help these people shift from dependence on expensive petrol cars right now?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:32): Thank you, Ms Copsey, for that question to Minister Williams in the other place. I will refer that to her in accordance with the standing orders, noting of course the additional services that we are providing as part of connecting Sunbury right out through to Pakenham with the Metro Tunnel; the work that we are doing to create better access to public transport, including free public transport for the month of April; new and additional bus services that are servicing some of those outer areas; the work on Melton electrification; the removal of level crossings; and ongoing intermodal connectivity, including as that relates to active transport.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:33): I just emphasise, although the minister will see it, that I asked for new actions that will benefit people right now.

V/Line's regional trains are also reliant on diesel, which is more expensive than electricity at the best of times and leaves them exposed to price spikes like this latest price spike. Electric trains, though, could be faster in top speed and acceleration, they could be cheaper to run and maintain and they could run with zero emissions. Is the government investigating electrification of V/Line services?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:34): Thank you again. I will refer that to the Minister for Public and Active Transport for an answer in accordance with the standing orders, noting that Melton electrification is indeed part of the longer term work. The Sunshine superhub and the work on major connectivity and the growth areas, including as they relate to connections with regional Victoria as part of Melbourne Airport rail and additional services, will go on.

Illicit tobacco

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:34): (1300) My question is to the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. Minister, last sitting week you excitedly announced to the house that the seizure of 3 million illicit cigarettes in the first month of your tobacco licensing scheme was 'fantastic'. Industry estimates show organised criminals sell more illicit cigarettes than your 3 million

in one single day in Victoria. Minister, is seizing one day's supply in an entire month a success or a complete and utter failure?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:35): I thank Mrs McArthur for that question and her interest in our new tobacco licensing scheme, the first of its kind in this state's history and a $46 million investment by our government in the last budget. We have already said that we will do more if needed, and that is why I was proud to announce new closure powers that will be rolled out in the second half of this year. But enforcement has begun. I think it is a successful start – and it is a start, understanding we have not had such a scheme before in this state's history. I do want to re-emphasise that we know that illegal tobacco is not a victimless crime, and it is important to note that it fuels organised crime networks, undermines legitimate businesses and puts communities at risk. That is why we have prioritised this work. It had a strong start in the first year. Over 3 million cigarettes were taken off our streets in the first month alone, and they are obviously escalating that work as we continue. There will be new powers to hold landlords to account, and we will continue that work. We have always said that this is a national problem that requires a national approach, but in Victoria we are doing our bit.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:36): Thank you, Minister. Minister, 3 million cigarettes is just a drop in the ocean. This is not just lost revenue for your cash-strapped government, it is allowing organised crime, firebombings and violent robberies to flourish on Victorian streets. New South Wales has 78 tobacco enforcement officers, and Queensland has hired an extra 43. Why does your government think 14 inspectors, some of them recently locked in a cupboard, is a serious response to a criminal trade that is terrorising communities across Victoria? You had to call the police to get them out of the locked cupboard.

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:36): I thank Mrs McArthur for that supplementary question, although I do not necessarily agree that the whole preamble there was factually accurate. But I will not let that get in the way of a good answer to a bad question. Tobacco Licensing Victoria does have a dedicated enforcement team, and the number of inspectors alone does not paint the picture. I have always said it is about a risk-based approach and being intelligence led, and they have been quite successful. I can say that in almost 40 per cent of the inspections they have conducted they have found breaches, because they work closely with Victoria Police and they work closely with law enforcement across the nation. But this is only the beginning. We said if we need to do more, we will, and that is why I announced new closure powers. I want to thank the team for the work they are doing. They will continue to work closely with Victoria Police and other agencies to tackle the illicit trade.

Ministers statements: Tongala Nutrition

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:37): I would like to rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is supporting regional businesses to create more jobs. Last week I was delighted to be at Tongala Nutrition to announce support for the company's expansion through the regional stream of the $150 million Victorian Investment Fund. Tongala Nutrition have been producing nutrition and UHT liquid products since 2023, after acquiring the former Nestlé factory. With the government's support, they will upgrade their technology and infrastructure and create 40 brand new jobs. It was great to meet CEO Sidd Jani and Tongala local Shannon Tucker to hear about how they have brought the site back to life, employing locals and really immersing themselves in the community.

Established last year, the Victorian Investment Fund is fast-tracking strategic investments right across Victoria. Five priority sectors have been identified for investment: advanced manufacturing and defence, health technologies and medical and research, the circular economy, digital technologies and agribusiness. It is another success story for the small Victorian town of Tongala, where the government

has also recently supported the expansion of Greenham Australia's Tongala abattoir, which has seen them almost double their production and create 270 jobs. This latest investment in agricultural businesses reinforces Victoria's position as a global leader in food production, creating jobs, driving economic growth and supporting regional communities, and that means jobs in country Victoria. This support is maintaining our low regional unemployment rate at 3.9 per cent, amongst the lowest in the states, and the Labor government is providing, of course, new solutions to make life easier by supporting regional businesses to thrive and creating jobs close to home.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:39): Minister Symes will get, in line with the standing orders, responses from the Premier for questions from Mr Ettershank and Ms Purcell, and it is very important that Ms Copsey hears that Minister Shing will get answers, in line with the standing orders, from the Minister for Public and Active Transport.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, I sought the GST windfall amount to date. It is a figure that I am seeking here, and the minister did not provide that figure. I ask that she do provide that figure.

The PRESIDENT: There are a few things in that. Level of detail is one of them, which is a precedent set by many presiding officers. Also, I believe the minister was relevant to the question. I am happy to review it, but I will not come back to the house if I decide I am not going to reinstate it.

David Davis: Further to the point of order, I welcome you looking at the transcript, but as to the level-of-detail issue, this is a matter under active consideration by governments around Australia. The Treasurer must have had briefings on this. She must know how much GST windfall has already been collected and how much is proposed to be collected, because there is active discussion between ministers about handing some of it back. In those circumstances it is not a level of detail she will not know – this is detail that will be right at the top of her mind.

The PRESIDENT: This is where I might disagree with you on level of detail, but it is fine. Just on the side, kind of on my way out, I have always wondered about this 'You can't reflect on the Chair.' I think you should be able to question the Chair from time to time because you might have a Chair that is rubbish. I am good, but you might have one that is rubbish.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: I have never been modest. I will look at it. Once again, it was hard to hear because there were interjections. Listening to some of the interjections jogged my memory about it, but I did say at the time that the Treasurer just gets shouted down and it is really hard for me to judge, so I think that will help in the future. But I am happy to do that.

Questions on notice

Answers

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:42): I have a number of overdue questions on notice that I would like to seek an explanation on. They are numbers 2501, 2502, 2539, 2564, 2565, 2566, 2567, 2568 and 2587.

The PRESIDENT: Can I get a commitment from a minister? Minister Shing will follow that up.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:43): I also have a number of outstanding questions that have failed to be answered. They are 2537, 2574, 2575, 2576 and 2577, and I ask that they be immediately attended to.

The PRESIDENT: Minister Shing has committed to following that up as well.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:43): I also have a number of outstanding questions I would like a follow-up on. They are 1966 and 1986.

The PRESIDENT: And they are both for Assembly ministers?

Evan MULHOLLAND: Yes.

The PRESIDENT: Minister Shing will follow those up too.

Constituency questions

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:44): (2276) My question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. From 1 October the government's midday power saver program will be rolled out. This will give eligible households 3 hours of free energy in the middle of the day, meaning that households in the south-east may be able to save up to $300 a year on their energy bills, which means more money back in their pockets. This will be especially useful for those workers who can work from home, carers and stay-at-home parents, as well as retirees. This will obviously complement other initiatives such as Victorian Energy Compare, the power saving bonus and the Victorian energy upgrades program. Minister, how will the government's midday power saver offer benefit constituents in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region?

Southern Metropolitan Region

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:45): (2277) I am wanting to ask a constituency question for the attention of the Minister for Police. It concerns another incident in my electorate, a terrible incident where a family were blocked – this is in Glen Iris – in their home and in their driveway by a group that sought to carjack them. This has just happened, in the last day or so. I have been emailed about this, and I will provide some details to the minister. What I seek is a proper response to make sure that there is adequate policing in Glen Iris. It is clear that there is not. The police would not attend in this case, despite a clear carjacking with the family in the car. Two young kids and a baby were in the car in Glen Iris, locked in by a group of thugs. The police, with their best intentions, have not been provided with the resources and would not attend.

Southern Metropolitan Region

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:46): (2278) My constituency question is to the Minister for Education. Across the Southern Metro Region we see littered examples of public schools missing out, spending years begging for essential infrastructure – like the St Kilda Primary School community hall, which has still not been built, in violation of promises from the Andrews–Allan government. Families, students and school staff across Southern Metro are standing in solidarity with Victoria's public school teachers, who have been on strike and are walking off the job because they are exhausted, underpaid and being asked to do more with less. At the same time the Allan government has still left Victoria short of full and fair Gonski funding, with the Victorian Department of Education saying the current agreement will reach 100 per cent of the school resource standard only by 2034, while the AEU says that Victorian public schools are being denied $2.4 billion through to 2031. Will the government commit to properly funding public schools in the Southern Metro Region now so teachers and education support staff have the resources, pay and support that they need to stay in the profession?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:47): (2279) My constituency question is to the Minister for Victims and Minister for Community Safety. Minister, what will you do to remedy this government's lack of meaningful action on drugs and crime? One of my constituents living in the Mordialloc district was recently assaulted in broad daylight at neighbouring Highett train station following a medical appointment. The perpetrator appeared to be under the influence of drugs and attacked him without provocation. My constituent's head was repeatedly punched and his shirt was torn. Sadly, he was recovering from recent surgery and was unable to run. In the end he was

bruised, cut and left with concussion. Minister, this is an absolute disgrace. My constituents deserve better than a state crippled by drugs and crime.

Northern Metropolitan Region

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (12:48): (2280) My constituency question is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. In the Northern Metro Region our rental market is more competitive than ever, with more Victorians now renting. Having a secure and affordable place to call home is a necessity. We have already led the nation by stopping no-fault evictions and banning the practice of rental bidding. We have also introduced a mandatory standard rental application form to stop agents asking for unnecessary personal information. These changes are about respect and ensuring that the rights of renters in the north are protected. Our government has a record of protecting Victorians in the housing market, and it is vital that these protections continue to evolve to meet the needs of the growing community. The question to the minister, on behalf of some young people I know looking to put in an application soon for their own rental property, is: what are some of the other rental reforms the Allan Labor government has delivered to help benefit and protect renters in the Northern Metro Region?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:49): (2281) My question today is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. Our city is growing, our backyards are getting smaller and the heat island effect is making our communities hotter. It makes our tree canopy, our street trees, even more precious. We need to protect as many of them as possible to keep our streets green and cool and our air fresh. Trees across my region, particularly in the Banyule area, are being absolutely butchered right now due to state regulations which are requiring far too much foliage to be trimmed around electrical lines. This sounds like a small issue, but I assure everyone it is not. While the Banyule council has to do the work, it is state government regulations that are requiring this clearance. I appreciate that there is currently consultation occurring on electric line clearance regulations. However, Minister, I ask that you please ensure that these line clearance regulations be updated in a way that minimises tree canopy loss in Banyule.

Western Metropolitan Region

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (12:50): (2282) My question is for the Minister for Emergency Services regarding the SES Hobsons Bay unit in Altona in my electorate. The unit handles over 300 calls to assist the police and ambulances in my electorate. However, the building is over 40 years old, is no longer fit for purpose and is affecting service delivery for the SES. Could the minister please update my constituents: does the government have a commitment or plan to update the existing building to a new structure to prevent delays in response times, address the health and safety issues of the building and also cater for exceeding numbers of volunteers, which it has at the moment in Altona?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (12:51): (2283) My constituency question is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. My constituent Helena, who rents in Brunswick, showers with a bucket and uses the old outside toilet because of drainage issues. In her last two rentals Helena raised maintenance issues and asserted her rights, and twice she ended up with bogus notices to vacate. Helena knows her rights as a renter. She also knows there is little enforcement and there are retaliatory evictions. She does not want to have to move again, so she keeps quiet. Eighty per cent of Victorian renters avoid asking for basic repairs and maintenance for fear of retaliation. Over 52 per cent of renters state their homes fail to meet minimum standards. There needs to be genuine enforcement or nothing will change. Minister, will you introduce a licensing scheme for landlords with penalties for failing to meet minimum standards or carry out repairs?

Southern Metropolitan Region

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:52): (2284) My question is directed to the Minister for Education in the other place, Minister Carroll. The ABS recently reported that families in Victoria are choosing public schools in record numbers. Victoria has recorded the highest uptake in public school enrolments in the country. This is in no short part thanks to the investment in public schools by this Labor government, which has invested $1.8 billion in our education system. This record investment in our schools has overseen 121 new public schools delivered across Victoria since 2014 and more than 2300 school upgrades. We rival the rest of the nation, with more than half of all new schools built in the country being right here in Victoria. Whether it is enrolments, student retention, workforce growth or school building infrastructure this government's proactive investment in our schools and students is building a stronger future for Victoria. My question to the minister is: how much has the Labor government invested in public school upgrades in my community of Southern Metro?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:53): (2285) My constituency question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and it concerns the needs of the Circolo Pensionati Italiani di Greenvale, a fantastic local organisation which provides a community for elderly Italian Australian residents in the Greenvale area. Minister, you recently announced a hall hire grant program for both the Chinese community and now the Sikh community, and I support this initiative as a great support for communities to meet and celebrate their culture. The Greenvale Italian pensioners club contacted me because Hume City Council for the first time have started invoicing the club for the use of the Greenvale Recreation Centre, which would cost them over $13,000 a year. The president Filippo Diamante informs me that this has not happened previously and it will come at a significant impact to the club. Will the minister commit to extending these hall hire programs to all multicultural community groups to provide equal support?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:54): (2286) My constituency question is for the Minister for Skills and TAFE. My constituent is a resident of Beaconsfield Upper. He is looking to study horticulture, with aspirations to become an arborist. My constituent has found course options in Cranbourne and Glen Waverley. However, he lives at home and does not drive. There are no viable public transport options from Beaconsfield Upper to these locations on weekdays. Beaconsfield Upper is a suburb of Cardinia shire, one of the fastest growing areas of my electorate, which currently has no TAFE facilities. My constituent would have no choice but to use a rideshare service to travel to TAFE. This is a cost many students simply cannot afford. My constituent asks: will the minister commit to expanding TAFE options in Cardinia shire?

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (12:55): (2287) My question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. The power supply has been cut off over 100 times in the past three years in Euroa. The power went off again on 27 March, and local businesses and residents have had enough. When you do not have power you cannot keep your business open. I have been to Euroa together with my colleague Annabelle Cleeland and met with local businesses and residents who are struggling and fed up. I ask the minister to address this issue as a matter of urgency and ensure that the residents and businesses of Euroa have reliable power. If this issue happened in Melbourne, it would be fixed overnight, and I ask the minister to give the town of Euroa the same priority and fix this issue.

Northern Victoria Region

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:56): (2288) My constituency question is for the Minister for Environment. Forest Fire Management Victoria have commenced their planned burns across the state, including in my own electorate of Northern Victoria. Despite the government's

continued claims that this is done to reduce bushfire risk, time and time again studies have shown that planned burns increase wind, dry out forests and exacerbate the likelihood and severity of catastrophic fires. There are also grave concerns about the proximity of planned burns to known endangered species habitat, and like all of their actions, FFMV are conducting these burns without any real or independent oversight. Can the minister confirm forest fire management have fulfilled their requirements under state and federal legislation for actions affecting listed threatened species when conducting planned burns in Northern Victoria?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:57): (2289) My constituency question is for the Minister for Planning. I have been contacted by families and educators from Pope Road Kindergarten in Blackburn regarding the proposed Blackburn activity centre. This is a longstanding local kindergarten, and parents understandably want to be sure that it remains a safe and appropriate environment for young children. They have raised concerns about overshadowing during the day, privacy and the potential health impacts of prolonged exposure to construction noise and dust. We are talking about 12-, 14- and 16-storey towers encircling the area. Parents are asking for the confidence that these issues are properly understood and taken into account before the decisions are finalised. My question to the minister is: what steps will the government take to ensure the impacts on the Pope Road Kindergarten are fully considered as part of the planning process?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:58): (2290) My question is for the Minister for Police. Residents living beside Cranbourne Racecourse are used to the sounds of horses and revelry from punters, but these sounds are being replaced with the sounds of revving dirt bike engines, illegal tree cutting and bush-bashing by paddock bombs. My office is receiving reports that the reserve owned by Southside Racing and managed by Casey council is being vandalised by trespassers, used as a makeshift rally track and disturbed by unlawful tree felling and dirt excavating. Some residents have also had their fences and other private property damaged by these hooligans. Casey council and Victoria Police have both been notified many times about these issues and attempted to help residents, but no long-term solutions to these ongoing safety issues have been implemented or proposed. Therefore my question to the minister is: will the minister investigate reports of vandalism, trespassing and other unlawful activity taking place within Cranbourne Racecourse grounds and implement a long-term solution?

Sitting suspended 12:59 pm until 2:02 pm.

Motions

Crime

Debate resumed.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (14:02): Crime is a very important issue. I thank Dr Heath for raising the issue of crime even though I have a difference of view on some of the issues, and that is what I am going to emphasise in my brief contribution today. Just covering off the government's interventions in this space, we are delivering the serious consequences early interventions plan; introducing a number of major reforms to reduce violent crime by youths; and adult time for violent crime. I am not going to go over these because I know, having listened to my colleagues, they have been covered very well. We have increased the maximum penalty for recruiting a child to engage in a violent offence to 15 years imprisonment; we are backing the Chief Commissioner of Police's overhaul of Victoria Police with powers and resources to get police reservists out from behind their desks; expanding visible policing out into the community; establishing a world-leading violence reduction unit; and investing $5.6 million in early intervention officers in schools.

That is the overview of the issue. In the 4 minutes that I have, I want to talk about the recent crime figures for Warrnambool, which is where I live. I did recently visit the Warrnambool police and they said the highest category of crime was family violence and sexual assault – these are still the highest categories of crime in the state actually, and they are not even mentioned in this motion. The most significant crimes occurring in our state are not mentioned in the motion. The second most common crime was speeding and distraction, and that is obviously discovered through car accidents and interventions, which are again not mentioned in the motion.

To draw down into specifics of what is happening with crime in Warrnambool, basically there are some ups and downs in the aggregate figures which constitute a 0.1 per cent increase, so I think what we have got is ups and downs equals the same. But if we drill into some of the specific issues, we see exactly what I have been saying. Crimes against the person offences are up. That has been driven by an increase in sexual offences, which are up 77.2 per cent to 202 offences, and that is in Warrnambool. That is basically backing up what I have been saying. But there is good news: property and deception offences were down 11 per cent; and there was a decrease in theft, which was down 18 per cent, property damage was down 5.6 per cent and drug offences were down 14.8 per cent – that was driven by a decrease in drug use and possession, which was down 18.4 per cent. In this regional capital city of nearly 40,000 people the profile is a bit unique, and we are thankful for that. I do thank the Warrnambool police for the service that they provide. When you are a regional police officer, you are not just a police officer, you belong to that community. If you join a sporting club, you will find yourself on a committee straight away. That is what I know. There is always more asked of police officers in regional communities. That can sometimes be draining, but it is also an honour and a privilege, and our community is all the better for it.

I am concerned about the rates of family violence and sexual assault in all of our communities. I really would like to see more discussion about the single biggest crime issue in our state, in our nation and likely around the world, and that is family violence and sexual assault. The women impacted by this are profoundly impacted throughout their lives. Their children are impacted and their extended family, workplaces and friends are impacted, and that provides an incredibly stressful environment for a huge number of people. If we have got about a third of our society affected by sexual assault and family violence, we must have about a third of our society perpetrating that. That is a huge issue for our community, and I think we have to try and face that and confront it. We have got youth crime in Melbourne, but I think the figures are getting better. I am really glad about and proud of what Labor is doing in that space, but we also need to focus on women as victims of crime.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (14:08): I would like to thank Mr Limbrick, Mr Galea, Mr Luu, Mr Bourman, Mr Batchelor, Ms Terpstra and Ms Ermacora. It has been a very good conversation, and I want to thank them for that. Firstly, I note that both Mr Luu and Mr Bourman mentioned their work in the police force during this debate. I just want to thank the two of them and also, in the other place, Brad Battin – and I am sure there are many other people that were part of the police force – for the contribution they make to this community.

Jacinta Ermacora interjected.

Renee HEATH: And Jackson Taylor. I just want to say that the contribution each of these incredible people have made to the community is absolutely extraordinary, and that is regardless of how long they served for.

Some members also raised during this debate that one of our colleagues had called for the scrapping of the violence reduction unit, so I will be very clear: that is incorrect. That is not our policy. We are absolutely –

A member interjected.

Renee HEATH: No, you are not listening to me. That is not correct. That is not our policy. We are absolutely not even speaking about that. This is our stance: the coalition will guarantee more funding

to crime prevention. That includes the $100 million crime prevention fund that will cover Jack's law and the Restart and Youth Start programs. By the way, those are things that the colleague that you mentioned strongly supports, and I do want to put that straight on the record. But while you guys go on and you think you have got a bit of a gotcha moment, this is the reality: the Allan Labor government has cut crime prevention. You did it. You did not just say it, you did it, and that is the difference between the government and us. You guys cut $20 million from crime prevention. We are going to invest in crime prevention. The starting point for that I have spoken about just today is $100 million. Let me be very clear: it is not the Liberals that have scrapped prevention programs, it is you guys. You guys cut them just recently, so you can roast whoever you like around contributions and think you are quite funny, but the 750 people that become victims of crime every single day do not find you that funny.

Mr Limbrick said maybe the coalition should read some research on Jack's law in Queensland and they will see it did not do anything. Funnily enough, I have some research right in front of me, and in Queensland Jack's law, since coming in, has removed over 1200 weapons and has led to 3200 arrests. You might say, 'Oh, that could be anyone.' If somebody is in a shopping centre or a train station and they are searched and there is a weapon hidden in their clothes – a machete, for instance – I can just about guarantee you that they are not on the way to mowing the lawn. Mr Galea boasted about the Allan Labor government having the toughest bail laws in the country, and I do want to acknowledge that, yes, they brought forward a bill called 'the toughest bail laws', and everyone apart from the government members saw straight through that and we amended it. We took the word 'toughest' out. But the truth is this: they amended it in 2023. They removed the charge of committing an indictable offence while on bail for youth offenders, and to this day they have not reinstated it. That is the truth.

Here are some other things. In 2016 Labor exempted minors from the offence of breaching bail conditions; they have not closed that for adults though. The bail conditions used in the tougher test, Labor weakened them, so they used to face a tougher test. Mr Batchelor spoke about how you are taking the advice of Chief Commissioner Bush and getting more police from out behind their desks and onto the streets. I think that is absolutely fantastic. However, what the statistics say is that every day in Victoria Victoria Police are 2000 police short. You might be intending to listen, but because of your mismanagement you do not have the resources to implement this plan. Thank you, everybody. It has been a great debate, and I commend the motion to the house.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (15): Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (22): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion negatived.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:20): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes:

(a) the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Bill 2026 was passed by the Legislative Council on 18 March 2026;

(b) the bill was rejected by the Legislative Assembly on 18 March 2026 at first reading;

(c) the broad community acceptance that the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) powers need to be strengthened to ensure that follow-the-money powers are available for IBAC to fully investigate corruption involving government contracts and contractors and subsequent contracts emanating from lead contracts;

(2) requests that:

(a) the Dispute Resolution Committee meet, consider the rejection of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Bill 2026 and conciliate the disagreement between the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly and report to the houses within 30 days; and

(b) the Clerk of the Legislative Council write to the members appointed to the Dispute Resolution Committee to convey the terms of this resolution.

It is a very straightforward motion. Last sitting week this chamber dealt with the follow the money bill on IBAC, which sought to strengthen IBAC in line with repeated requests by IBAC to provide it with the ability to follow the money to actually enable them to go down deep into contractor and subcontractor levels on particular major projects. This is a weakness that IBAC has. We know that there is massive corruption on building sites – the Big Build sites. We know what Mr Watson SC has said to the Queensland royal commission: that the order of these losses, these corrupt payments, could be between $15,000 million and $30,000 million – $15 billion. That is a huge amount of money. The Big Build sites across the state have almost invariably gone massively over budget. Many have gone over time, but many of them have gone into huge cost overruns. That cost overrun is in part only – not all – due to many of these corrupt payments, which are typical across these sites.

The involvement of bikies and the involvement of other corrupt practices on these sites have got to the stage where the state needs to act. Many of these projects we would support. The North East Link is a project we supported. It began at just a bit over $9 billion, but now the estimates are more than $26 billion, closer to $27 billion. That kind of cost overrun is just extraordinary. Part of it is obviously due to the cost of supplies and input materials and part of it is due to the cost of labour, but some of that cost overrun is directly attributable to corrupt practices on these sites. Those decisions to allow these corrupt practices are the government's decisions – the Allan Labor government's decisions – and it is I think very significant for the state to actually get to the bottom of these things. That is why we have called for a royal commission, but that in no way obviates the need for IBAC to have the powers to routinely investigate sites of this type, to routinely investigate these contracts and to get to the bottom of these problems.

This chamber in good faith passed a bill that would have provided those strengthened powers to IBAC in the last sitting week. It is not the first time that this chamber has passed bills strengthening IBAC's powers which have been summarily rejected by the Assembly. The bill was not even allowed to be introduced into the chamber. It went across on message from here and the first reading was defeated. There was not even a debate, not even a discussion for members in that chamber to see the bill, to have a genuine debate and to propose amendments – what an original idea! – to say 'We think you've missed this' or 'You shouldn't do that' or 'You should do something different.' That is all fine. That is all sensible democratic practice.

All I have said today is deeply factual and very clear. I am now going to step into the zone where some will have a different view, but I think what I am proposing here is very reasonable. Under our constitution, as part of our nature of activities here in Victoria, we have a thing called a Dispute Resolution Committee. That committee, established in the changes that were made by the Bracks government in the period leading up to 2006, has met on three bills over its life. For my sins, I was at each of those meetings, so I am one of the few in the chamber who understands and remembers what the committee actually does. It is true that the committee was fundamentally set up by the Bracks government for the purpose of deciding and dealing with disputes between the chambers and particularly laying out problems where the so-called Council would be recalcitrant or troublesome and would reject government bills summarily or in some high-handed way and would not allow legislation to proceed.

In that sense the Constitution Act 1975 lays out a number of key points. For those who wish to go home and read section 65A, the definitions are there and people can see what is intended by a 'disputed bill'. All of those are definitions which I am not drawing on today. What I am drawing on is the existence of the committee, established under section 65B, the Dispute Resolution Committee. I will read this for the benefit of the chamber. I am drawing on the fact that the committee is there and the constitution is silent about whether the upper house can propose a question to the committee or request the committee look at some matter or take some step.

Let us be very clear: the upper house has a clear way forward to proposing that the committee look at something, to request that the committee look at something. The words are very carefully phrased here: we cannot compel the committee to do anything, but we can request that the committee look at certain matters. I have asked that the Dispute Resolution Committee meet – I have requested it – consider the rejection of the follow the money bill and conciliate the disagreement between the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly and report to the houses, and that the Clerk write to the members of the Dispute Resolution Committee to convey the terms of the resolution. We cannot compel the committee to do it, but we can ask them to look at this matter, and that committee is sitting there. It has not met in this Parliament, I might add, in breach of section 65B(1) of the Constitution Act, which says:

> A Dispute Resolution Committee is to be established as soon as conveniently practicable after the commencement of each Parliament.

The committee has seven members appointed by the lower house and five members appointed by this chamber, so that is 12 members. Those members have been announced and appointed by the chambers, but the committee has never met in this Parliament. I say we can request it to do some work.

Ryan Batchelor: It says 'established', it doesn't say 'meet'.

David DAVIS: It has conveniently been established – it has not actually done a thing.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David DAVIS: I do not think it has been established to actually act. It has not appointed a chair. The act provides that it cannot meet until the Assembly and the Council have made the appointments. A member of the Dispute Resolution Committee is to be appointed as the committee chair. Each member of the Dispute Resolution Committee is entitled to one vote. In the event of equality of votes, the chair has a casting vote, and then it goes on to other matters.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David DAVIS: You may not care about $15 billion of money squandered corruptly on building sites. You may not care about that, but we know about you and corruption.

Ryan Batchelor: On a point of order, Acting President, this is a very narrow motion before the Chair which talks about procedures between the Assembly and the Council to resolve disputes. Nothing in the motion references the construction industry or $15 billion.

David DAVIS: Further to the point of order, at 1(c) I moved:

> the broad community acceptance that the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) powers need to be strengthened to ensure that follow-the-money powers are available for IBAC to fully investigate corruption involving government contracts and contractors and subsequent contracts emanating from lead contracts …

I would say to you that the Big Build fits squarely within that.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): I think you are right. It appears that it does say 'investigate corruption involving government contracts', so on you go.

David DAVIS: The Dispute Resolution Committee has been quiescent. It has not met. It has not done anything. It has not even elected its chair. Well, I say it can do some work. I will request it to do some work and the chamber will request it to do some work and, in doing so, shine a light on the state government's attitude through the Assembly, the state government's failure to even properly examine or consider the matters in the Assembly. I say that the Dispute Resolution Committee is well placed. It is important to note the genesis of the Dispute Resolution Committee.

A member: You were there.

David DAVIS: I was. And one of my colleagues, Philip Davis, wrote a paper.

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: He did. He actually wrote a paper, and he said:

> However, the underlying assumption seemed to be that this was just reinstating a formal mechanism reflecting the earlier arrangements relating to managers conferences which have fallen into disuse, but were taken to be given a new life under the new constitutional arrangements.
>
> The other changes were much more in focus and it is likely this was because these changes were indeed the most significant reforms since the passage of the Victorian Constitution through the House of Commons in 1855.
>
> It must be noted that the Constitutional Commission, in its consideration, concluded that the Committee of Managers, which had fallen into disuse, was a viable mechanism to resolve disputes or deadlocks on particular Bills between the Houses. It was a solution which was proposed in recognition of the inevitability that future parliaments would comprise of diverse parliamentary representation elected under the new arrangements.

The government at the time accepted the proposal for a Dispute Resolution Committee. It was a recommendation of the commission to ensure that any dispute on a bill between houses could be resolved outside the chambers rather than ping-ponging backwards and forwards – and that is my paraphrasing – bills or other matters.

A member interjected.

David DAVIS: I have already laid that out for you. I also want to draw on another paper, produced by Greg Taylor, *Victoria's Parliament and Constitution: The Bracks/Brumby Legacy*. He also discussed the Dispute Resolution Committee and how it operates. He talked about the activities prior to 2010:

> The first difficulty revealed by the operation of the new system is that no resolution has yet been found for the claim of the Legislative Council that a Bill that has been rejected by it has ceased to be a Bill …

So there is actually still a dispute which has never been formally resolved between the chambers, in my view, properly, but that I make as a separate and side point. The key thing here is that the constitution is silent on the ability of other mechanisms to give a request or an opportunity to the Dispute Resolution Committee. It is my view that our chamber is in a position to refer this matter and to request that the Dispute Resolution Committee meet and look at these matters. The committee would need to get off its tail and elect a chair and then get on and look at these matters in a constructive and thoughtful way. The committee could say that the chambers could set up some sort of conference or other process to look at ways that we could introduce these follow the money sorts of powers. It might be that the Assembly has some suggestions to make. This committee and the mechanisms that it draws on – the historical mechanisms of managers committees – would be a reasonable way for it to proceed. There is no impediment or constitutional restriction on us sending a matter of this type to the Dispute Resolution Committee. It is true that the deadlock provisions will not apply, but there is nothing to stop us in any way sending a matter to the committee on a request, and that is what I am proposing to do. Given the intransigence of the lower house – the repeated intransigence in Victoria under the Allan Labor government and the Andrews Labor government before them – in dealing with any matter that comes from the Legislative Council, I think this is one way. It is not the only way, but it is certainly a way that we could start to look at some discussions between the chambers. The Dispute

Resolution Committee could well be in a position to suggest a way forward and to suggest some sensible steps that could bring these matters forward.

Now, it might be that the Labor people in this chamber and elsewhere do not like this, but they do not like any bill that comes from our chamber – any bill that seeks to reform. The Greens, our parties – the Liberals and Nationals – and others have brought forward bills to try and provide sensible, practical reform. These are not, as was alluded to by a member of the chamber, sideshows; these are actually central to the costs that are being incurred in our economy now. Fifteen billion dollars is an extraordinary amount of money to squander on corrupt payments on building sites – $15 billion – and let the transcript record that Mr Batchelor thought that this was some sort of sideshow, that corruption of this type was not –

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David DAVIS: You think it is procedural, do you? But we are aiming at a solution here. We are aiming to actually –

Michael Galea: On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Davis is completely misrepresenting Mr Batchelor's remarks and verballing him. The only sideshow here is Mr Davis himself.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): That is not a point of order. I also might mention to Mr Davis that we allow him a fair bit of latitude in where he speaks from, but he is starting to encroach a long way across, so if he could remain roughly where he is, that would be good.

David DAVIS: I will remain here. It is a very simple motion. It recognises what has actually happened with a number of these bills. It recognises that there is public interest in this and a very big public need for these matters to be dealt with, and it seeks to set up a simple mechanism utilising an existing committee – a committee that has not elected its chair yet. It is time the committee did some sensible work and provided some solutions.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (14:38): I am very pleased to rise to speak in this debate about procedures within this chamber and between this chamber and the other chamber, which are the precise terms of the motion that Mr Davis himself moved. It is not a broad-ranging motion to debate corruption matters, which we have debated in this chamber at length over the last several sitting weeks. If people want to go and read the *Hansard* record, they can see the extensive contributions that I have made in this place about those issues in detail for the last several sitting weeks.

The motion today makes it very, very clear that it is an attempt to find a procedural mechanism to keep the private members bill that was moved by the opposition last sitting week somehow in the public consciousness. But of course the motion before us is not what the Liberal Party had intended to be talking about today. We know that earlier in the week they had flagged that they might use this opportunity to talk about other matters, that they might want to use this opportunity to talk about fuel excise. The problem with their plans for the week is that they were disrupted by Labor governments taking action on the fuel crisis. The federal and state Labor governments, through the mechanisms of the national cabinet, reached an agreement to cut in half the fuel excise, delivering real relief immediately to Victorians and Australians at the petrol station. When their grand plan got derailed, the Liberal Party turned their lonely eyes to Mr Davis.

Harriet Shing: Which Mr Davis?

Ryan BATCHELOR: I will get to the Mr Davises involved in the Liberal Party this week in just a moment, Minister Shing, but for now I am talking about David Davis. The Liberal Party turned their lonely eyes to Mr Davis, and he said, 'I've got a cunning plan.' A plan so cunning you could put a tail on it and call it a weasel, a plan so cunning it could be appointed professor of cunning at Oxford University – for the *Blackadder* fans out there. What Mr Davis said is, 'What I can do is I can use this little-known procedure' – using the dispute resolution procedure in the constitution – 'to get the dispute committee together and force a resolution on the deadlock between the two houses.'

The only problem was that Mr Davis had not read the Victorian constitution, because if he had read the Victorian constitution, at sections 65A, 65B and 65C he might have noticed a couple of flaws in his plan. I will step through them, if I may, the first being in section 65A of the Victorian Constitution Act 1975. A disputed bill, which is what Mr Davis is claiming the –

David Davis interjected.

Ryan BATCHELOR: If you want to interject, Mr Davis, go back to your seat. 'Disputed bill' means a bill which has passed the Assembly. This bill did not pass the Assembly, so on the face of the constitution this is not a disputed bill.

David Davis interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Order! Mr Davis, Mr Batchelor was right. If you are going to interject, which is disorderly, can you do it from your own spot, please.

Ryan BATCHELOR: So it is not a disputed bill. One would surmise that the disputes procedure in the constitution would not apply to it because it is not a disputed bill. There may be eminent scholars out there, and I will come to the other Mr Davis in a moment. There may be eminent scholars out there who think that just because something is said in the constitution, it means a different thing. We can go to a different section of the constitution. We can turn the page and go to section 65C, cunningly titled 'Dispute Resolution'. This is where it gets tricky. One, it is not a disputed bill. It talks about what the dispute resolution procedures are between the houses as set out in the constitution. It says:

> **Dispute Resolution**
>
> (1) The Dispute Resolution Committee must seek to reach a Dispute Resolution on a Disputed Bill …

It is not a disputed bill, so there are no powers, there is no function and there is no role for the Dispute Resolution Committee on the terms of the state constitution to do anything contemplated by the motion that Mr Davis has brought before us today. You just have to read the text of the constitution to show that what is being proposed by Mr Davis today is so plainly wrong as to defy any sort of decent interpretation.

In the absence of constitutional text to support the basis of the motion he has brought forward today, Mr Davis turned to another source in his contribution. He said, 'I will reach for an eminent expert on good governance and administration in the state of Victoria, on doing things properly in the state of Victoria', and he reached for his former colleague and current president of the Victorian branch of the Liberal Party Philip Davis. I am sure there are many weeks of the year when it may be reasonable to call upon the expertise and eminence of Mr Philip Davis in undertaking matters of administrative thoroughness. This would not be one of them, because what we have seen from the Liberal Party this week is one of the more shambolic episodes in contemporary Victorian politics. Their own members were walking into the Parliament earlier this week and describing the utter shambles of their processes. The mastermind of the shambles of the Victorian Liberal Party is the expert that Mr Davis is citing as to why his motion is valid and appropriate for the proposed course of action that he seeks. I think that says everything about how little we can take him seriously on these questions and how little we can take the Liberal Party seriously on these questions. They cannot get the basics right. They cannot get the reading of the constitution right. You just have to open the pages and read the act to know that what he is proposing is not within the scope of the Dispute Resolution Committee. Section 65C(1) makes it very, very clear what the process is to resolve disputes between the houses:

> The Dispute Resolution Committee must seek to reach a Dispute Resolution on a Disputed Bill …

That is their function, and a disputed bill, under the terms of section 65A, is a bill which has been passed by the Assembly – and this bill was not passed by the Assembly.

Harriet Shing interjected.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Minister Shing, by way of interjection, said that it failed at the first hurdle. It would have been okay if it had failed at the first hurdle, but he has kept running and he has hit every hurdle on the track. Instead of using the time today to perhaps have another debate about the substantive issues that he is trying to get to – just as we had a debate on those substantive issues in the last sitting week and the sitting week before that and the sitting week before that – instead of spending the time of the chamber seeking to go further into the substantive issues of debate, which we on the government have been willing to stand up and engage with the opposition on, Mr Davis has taken us on a procedural frolic to nowhere.

He said to his colleagues, 'Don't worry about it. I've got a great idea. I've got a cunning plan.' The problem is they believed him, and they gave him this slot to talk about a matter of process and procedure instead of focusing on the substance of the issue. I would be absolutely willing on this sitting day – as I was in the last sitting week, the sitting week before that and the sitting week before that – to engage in debate about the substance of the issues that are underlying this procedural motion. But that is not what we have got. We have got a procedural motion that does not even accord with the Victorian constitution. It is a joke.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (14:48): I rise to speak in support of this motion. There has been a lot of chatter about the need to pick up and read the constitution, but I think that has missed the point. Perhaps someone needs to pick up the motion and read the words in the motion, because the motion does not assume that the Dispute Resolution Committee can look at this; it is making a suggestion. That is all this is. If you want another example of the contemptuous, anti-democratic way this Labor government operates, you really have to look no further than what happened with the bill that is the subject of this motion. It was a bill that was passed convincingly by this chamber. Every non-government member of this chamber supported this bill, but it was promptly shut down as soon as it went to the Legislative Assembly and was sent back here within 20 minutes. The government did not even have the decency to spend a bit of time looking at it and debating it. They did not even have the decency to stand up and debate and say why they did not think it was any good. They just shut it down as soon as it arrived. This is a government that will not allow non-government business time in the Legislative Assembly; it is the only Parliament in the country that does not allow this. That means no private members bills and no documents motions, and they do not allow non-government amendments to be voted on in the Assembly. They self-refer their own orchestrated inquiries to standing committees that they chair and have a government majority on. And that is before we look at things like the joint investigatory committees, which, apart from the Integrity and Oversight Committee, have government chairs and majorities, which leaves this government to mark its own homework.

Despite not having a majority in this place, the government still treats us with the same arrogant disrespect, as exemplified by their failure to follow the standing orders with respect to executive privilege claims on documents orders – and that is if they respond to the documents orders at all. It is made worse by the fact that their own members argue vociferously that they are doing nothing wrong despite clearly demonstrating they have not actually bothered to read and understand our own standing orders. They do not understand our standing orders, and then they argue against them. The Victorian Parliament has been dubbed the least democratic in the country, and that is a title that this Labor government seems quite proud to retain, because they have shown no interest in fixing any of these issues.

Maybe it should not be a surprise. The most significant corruption scandal ever in this state occurred under this Labor government's watch, and their response was to pretend they had acted by referring it to our anti-corruption agency, which they knew did not have the power to investigate. IBAC has long called for greater powers to be able to investigate corruption in this state, and the government had the opportunity with this bill to support a modest change that would allow it to follow the money. Every party, as I said, in this place, apart from the government, supported this. But instead of showing even a modicum of respect for the Parliament and for the community, who want this to happen, or providing

an alternative bill, which they were welcome to do, they threw a tantrum – we have seen a bit more of it today – and acted as though they were the ones being treated unfairly and refused to engage. You know who has been treated unfairly with all of this behaviour? The Victorian public – they are the ones who lose out when a government lacks integrity and does not take corruption seriously.

There has been $15 billion of public money lost, and that is likely a conservative estimate, while we have more people than ever without a roof over their head. We have teachers and healthcare workers who are asking for a tiny bit more pay so they can pay their rent. There were some of them out there today. Schools are falling apart, being held together with gaffer tape. People are languishing on public dental waiting lists for years and years with permanent pain, missing teeth or rotting teeth. People are skipping meals. Kids are going to school hungry or going without lunch, because they cannot afford it. This government turns around every time we have a suggestion for how they can do it, saying, 'We don't have enough money. We can't afford it', yet they are willing to turn away from their responsibility to look into what happened to at least $15 billion of public money. Every time Labor says they cannot afford something, look no further than their priorities. They are not interested in rooting out corruption. They are more interested in protecting corporate and industry mates and their own power than protecting the community. But the thing is the community has had enough. They have had enough of a tired government that disrespects the Parliament and in doing so disrespects them.

I think what we are seeing in the debate on this motion is yet another example of this behaviour, but I have a feeling eventually all of this is going to catch up on them. In the meantime it is the Parliament and the public who lose out. We will be supporting this motion today. We understand the purpose of this motion. We agree with the principle in it. I urge all other members in this place to also support the motion.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:53): I thank Dr Mansfield for her contribution to this motion; she actually got it completely right. I thank Mr Davis for his motion. I am very supportive of it, because the way the Legislative Assembly, the Labor government's plaything, has treated the bill in question is a disgrace. Frankly, you are a disgrace over there for completely missing the point when it comes to open and transparent government. You treat this Parliament – you treat the taxpayers of Victoria – as an absolute plaything. It is a disgrace how you all behave over there, and you have got 15 billion reasons why you should be thrown out in November.

What they did in that whole process in the lower house was not a simple procedural rejection of a bill. They decided in the Assembly, without debate, to reject the view of this house, the view of the experts involved and the view of the Victorian people – how dismissive, how arrogant, how Allan Labor. We debated Mr Mulholland's Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Bill 2026 thoroughly, seriously and in good faith. Members from across the chamber here made their contributions. The bill was passed by this house. It was then transmitted to the Legislative Assembly, where at first reading, without so much as a debate, Labor used its numbers to kill it – no committee consideration, no amendments, literally no engagement whatsoever. Are you so afraid of transparent and open government that that you shut down debate? You run the place like a politburo. They did not even do the bill in this house or Victorians the courtesy of pretending to take it seriously.

Of course I understand that governments reject opposition bills from time to time. That is the nature of politics, and the electoral arithmetic in the lower house makes it a real temptation for Labor. But the way they rejected it tells you everything you need to know about this government's attitude, not just to Parliament or to this particular bill, but to the principle that underpins it: that Victorians have a right to know where their money goes and that an anti-corruption body should have the power to follow it. This was not some fringe proposal dreamt up by the Liberal Party room – IBAC itself, the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission, the body this Parliament established to be the guardian of public integrity in Victoria, has been asking for these powers since 2017 – not since last year or since the CFMEU scandal, but since 2017. IBAC's own commissioner has told this Parliament directly that the current laws are too weak, that the commission cannot trace public money beyond government

agencies and into the hands of private contractors, subcontractors and the labyrinth of third parties where taxpayer funds ultimately end up. And year after year, this government has said no.

Anthony Whealy KC, the chair of the Centre for Public Integrity, fully supports IBAC's call for urgent reform and states that Victoria's watchdog needs wider powers, comparable to what New South Wales ICAC already has. Professor Will Partlett has argued that these amendments would give IBAC the capacity to oversee the misuse of power and money by modern government, including conduct done through private companies and the kind of grey corruption that has become a hallmark of how the Allan Labor government operates. And former IBAC commissioner Robert Redlich KC, a man of the highest standing and integrity, who Mr McIntosh a few weeks ago decided to attack rather than listen to, has said it as clearly as anyone:

> IBAC needs the power to root out corruption and follow the money – wherever it leads and no matter who is implicated …

Wherever it leads, no matter who is implicated – that is the line this government cannot abide because they know exactly where the money leads: it leads to the CFMEU; it leads to the Big Build worksites, where Geoffrey Watson SC documented organised crime operating in broad daylight, drug distribution, bikie infiltration and billions siphoned away through a system designed to reward Labor's friends. It leads to the cosy nexus of contracts awarded to mates, appointments of former ministers and MPs to plum positions and the entire apparatus of soft corruption that has become the government's stock-in-trade. And it leads inevitably to the deep structural entwinement between this Labor government and the union movement, an entwinement so profound that Labor cannot extricate itself, even when it wants to. It leads to Labor. That is why they killed this bill without a word of debate – not because the policy was wrong or because the drafting was flawed, but because they are terrified of where the trail leads.

It is not just us passing a bill who realise this. The Victorian public knows too. A Freshwater Strategy poll found that 74 per cent of Victorian voters support a royal commission into alleged CFMEU and Big Build corruption – 74 per cent, with only 7 per cent opposed. It is a serious consensus. Three-quarters of the population are demanding tougher corruption scrutiny, and the government responds by blocking the very bill that would deliver it. That government is no longer governing in the public interest; it is governing in its own interest.

I made a contribution when this bill was debated in this house, and I spoke then about the quiet contract between a government and the people it serves. Most people are not particularly interested in politics. They want to get on with their lives. They put up with silly games, the stunts and the announcements. They accept that disagreements happen. They are even prepared to forgive poor policy and mistaken decisions. That is the contract: we get on with the business of government and we do not trouble them unduly. But that contract breaks when government conduct spills over into something the public cannot look away from, and what they cannot look away from now is open and undeniable corruption – billions of dollars lost not to inflation and not to inefficiency but to corruption. What makes it unforgivable is not just the corruption itself but the government's utter failure to respond with any semblance of integrity. They ignored the warnings. They buried what they could. They deflected and denied. They attacked the messengers. They hamstrung the bodies that could have investigated. They restricted IBAC's funding, they denied it the powers it asked for and they have certainly never apologised.

This motion matters. It puts on the record that the Legislative Council will not stand by and accept what comment is made by the Legislative Assembly's refusal to even discuss the strengthening of our anti-corruption framework. We are asking through this motion that the Dispute Resolution Committee do what the Legislative Assembly refused to do: engage with the substance of this bill, consider and debate it and report back to the house within 30 days. That is not an unreasonable ask; in fact given that IBAC has been waiting nine years for these powers, 30 days seems remarkably generous. The Victorian public wants corruption investigated properly, IBAC wants the tools to do it and legal

experts want the framework reformed. The crossbench wants action. This Council has already passed the bill. The only obstacle is a Labor government that would rather protect its mates than protect the public purse. That is how corrupt you are. You would prefer to protect your mates than the taxpayers of Victoria. I support this motion, and I urge every member of this house to do the same. If you do not support it, you people on the Labor side over there, you will be held accountable.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:03): I rise to also speak to Mr Davis's motion 1380. What can I say? I thought it might be a first. I thought it might actually be a first when I heard about what we would be debating today. Mr Davis, possibly for the first time in 30 years in this place, was actually going to bring something to the chamber that was relevant to the lives of Victorians. He was actually going to talk about the fuel excise and give us an opportunity to talk about what is being done, what can be done and what further can be done to support Victorians in this cost-of-living crisis. Then I look in the notice paper today and what do I see? I see it is Wednesday 1 April and Mr Davis once again, the perennial April fool, has done it again. He had an opportunity to actually talk about something of vital importance to this state right now that people are talking about in the streets. People are talking to me about this important issue. I am sure if you went out and spoke to people, Mr Davis, you would find that they were talking about that too.

Members interjecting.

Michael GALEA: If you do not think that the fuel excise is important, Mrs McArthur, I think you should be going and telling that to your constituents. But it is important.

I thought, 'Knock me down with a feather, Mr Davis has come up with something that we can all actually talk about that's actually going to make a difference, on a Wednesday, to Victorian people.' And what do we have? No, we have a procedural motion that he cannot even get right.

Bev McArthur interjected.

Michael GALEA: He cannot even get it right, Mrs McArthur, no matter how valiantly you try and defend him. I congratulate you on your win over the weekend. Mr Davis probably was not too pleased with that, but I congratulate you nonetheless.

Bev McArthur: Mr Davis and I are very good friends.

Michael GALEA: I am sure you are very ambitious for him, Mrs McArthur.

A member interjected.

Michael GALEA: Yes, which Mr Davis is your friend, actually? 'Which Mr Davis?' we should ask.

Bev McArthur: My colleague here in this red chamber.

Michael GALEA: Very good – not the other one. We will clarify that: not the other Mr Davis. We will take note of that. The present Mr Davis's constitutional expert, the other Mr Davis, as Mr Batchelor outlined, did a not quite so thorough job of ensuring the integrity of an internal election process. Notwithstanding that, we are here today to talk about a very narrow motion and indeed the cunning plan, as my colleague referred to, that Mr Davis has come up with. He has spun a frolic and he did a feint towards, 'Let's actually do something that people might care about.' Let us talk about the fact that the federal government has halved the fuel excise in this country. Maybe let us talk about how the state government has fulfilled its duty in making public transport free. That is what we thought you wanted to talk about, but no. The date on the front of the notice paper is Wednesday 1 April, and the April fool himself has put this before us today to talk about a narrow procedural motion that, despite its narrowness, fits squarely outside the constitution, as Mr Batchelor extensively went through in his remarks: section 65A, section 65B –

Bev McArthur: The only people with cunning here in this place are you lot.

Michael GALEA: I am not sure you meant it that way, Mrs McArthur.

Bev McArthur interjected.

Michael GALEA: I am enjoying your second contribution, Mrs McArthur. But the sections of the constitution clearly outline what constitutes a disputed bill, and through Mr Davis's interjections in Mr Batchelor's speech he admitted that what he is trying to do sits outside of that scope. He admitted that it is not a disputed bill under section 65A of the constitution, thereby taking away any and all argument he has under section 65C of the constitution.

In relation to Dr Mansfield's remarks, who implored us to be democratic, I literally do not see what is democratic about taking the constitution that governs how we operate in this Parliament – we have all been elected here by the will of the people, just as the Legislative Assembly has been elected by the will of the people, to come in here, and our job is to enact laws, to debate and to conduct motions – and saying, 'That's nice. We're going to do something different.' If we wanted to have a debate about a sensible change to the constitution, that would be quite something else. That would be something that you could consider proposing. But that is not what you have come here with today. You have come here with a vague sense of a plan – a cunning plan, as it were – to look at this and say, 'Let's just throw things around and bombastically say we can do this. I've spoken to my friend Phil Davis. He says we can do this. Let's give it a whirl.' That is not the way to conduct governance in this state. He said that a few times. Mr Davis himself acknowledged that he was –

Members interjecting.

Michael GALEA: I am going to take up the interjection from Mr Batchelor and remind Mrs McArthur that we are in the Legislative Council. We are not in the Legislative Assembly. The Legislative Council has been through a process, and the Legislative Assembly has been through its process.

Enver Erdogan interjected.

Michael GALEA: Mr McGowan is your expert. Yes. You are quite right, Minister Erdogan. Mr McGowan will no doubt be able to advise you on the ins and outs of the Legislative Assembly as he continues his quest to join them and to abandon us all here. I am not sure why he would possibly want to abandon you lot on those benches over there, but some of you might have a few ideas – those of you who are left anyway, and indeed you are one of them, Mrs McArthur.

Members interjecting.

Michael GALEA: Acting President, I do enjoy a provoked interjection, but I am actually struggling because I am trying to listen to too many of them at once. What I will say is –

Jacinta Ermacora: On a point of order, Acting President – I think you know what I am going to say – I cannot really hear this powerful contribution from Mr Galea. I am really trying to listen to it.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): It is a little lively in the chamber. It is very entertaining for everyone watching, but I ask Mr Galea to continue with a little less activity.

Michael GALEA: I concede I may have brought it somewhat on myself. But it does come back to a very straightforward and simple point: that Mr Davis has done what Mr Davis does best, and that is come into this place with a concept of a plan, a thought, an idea. Maybe he has written some things out himself and said, 'Let's run with this', and consulted his wise and earnest colleagues. I do not know if, Mr Davis, you were speaking to them and distracted them from other things that they perhaps should have been focusing on in the past week. But the fact remains that it is squarely outside of the constitution, what Mr Davis is trying to do. Now, good on him for trying. That is all well and good. But suggesting that not supporting this has some anti-democratic bent to it is completely misguided and wrong, because to follow the constitution is actually the democratic thing to do – to follow the rules and procedures of the chamber that we have been elected to.

As I said, if you want to bring a reform proposal on the constitution, you are free to do so. Mr Davis, I note that, as you said in your contribution, you actually were in this place 23 years ago when the current constitution act was put into place, and I believe you asked several questions in the committee stage alongside your then colleague in the chamber the other Mr Davis, as well. So you had plenty of opportunity to be deeply across this. And indeed, pursuant to your own remarks – you and Ms Lovell, I think, are the two members here who were here at that time – you should be all over this. The fact that you have come here today with this motion suggests to me that you know that you are pushing the proverbial hurdle up the hill –

Ryan Batchelor: It would be easier if he had a straight face.

Michael GALEA: It would be easier if he had a straight face. But look, it is a valiant attempt. Certainly, I think those of us newer members can all learn quite a great deal from you, Mr Davis, not necessarily much of it productive but certainly much of it fascinating, as it comes to the manipulation of parliamentary processes. But even for your good self, this is simply outside the scope of the constitution, and you know it. What disappoints me is that I fell for it. I absolutely fell for it. I thought Mr Davis was going to bring up a discussion motion about the fuel excise. It would have been a terrific opportunity to talk about how Victorians in my electorate, in all members' electorates, are doing it tough and are facing anxiety and uncertainty. Whilst this government is getting on with the job, Mr Davis, probably from his time as a minister, is not used to knowing what it is like to be a government that does its job and does so in a fast manner. But this government is getting on with it, making those reforms. We have seen through national cabinet the agreed halving of the fuel excise. We have seen, through a bill that will be in this chamber tomorrow, further reforms to ensure the state has appropriate oversight of our fuel supply. Indeed, free public transport is one additional measure that we can do to support the cost of living of Victorians, whilst also going a little bit further to ease the pressure on the fuel pump. We could have been talking about those things. Indeed, I think many Victorians would be expecting us to.

Bev McArthur: On a point of order, Acting President – on a point of relevance, Mr Galea – what has fuel excise got to do with $15 billion worth of corruption? $15 billion of corruption is what we are talking about here, not fuel excise.

Michael GALEA: On a point of order, Acting President, Mrs McArthur was actually being irrelevant to the motion in her own point of order, but I am being relevant to the original motion that we should have been debating today.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): Your time has expired, and what a fitting way to finish – a point of order on a point of order. Thank you. It was a wideranging debate.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (15:14): I rise to speak on Mr Davis's fabulous motion that he has brought to this chamber, and I thank him for it, because we know the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Bill 2026 was passed by the Legislative Council on 18 March, and it was a bill that was in my name. It was a bill that was supported by the entire chamber besides the 15 members of the government. That does not happen very often, and we know the views of Victorians on this particular issue, which is the $15 billion that has been rorted from Victorian taxpayers on construction sites and fleeced for the criminal underworld and bikies.

This is a very serious matter. We know that about 75 per cent of Victorians want a royal commission and about the same want an expansion of IBAC's remit to follow the money to contractors to be able to get to the bottom of the deeply rooted corruption that has gone on in this state. Mr Batchelor and Mr Galea kept saying that if we want to bring a substantial motion on it, they will deal with that and debate it. But every time we do, the government votes against it. The government voted against it in this chamber, and then it was brought to the Legislative Assembly, and the government did not even give it an opportunity to be debated before it shut it down completely.

Bev McArthur: Running scared, they are.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Exactly. And guess who the chief culprit, running scared, was? It was the Premier, who did not even turn up to a vote. She was too cowardly to turn up to a vote to expand IBAC's remit, something we know even her own colleagues want her to do. Her own colleagues want her to call a royal commission into corruption. Seventy-five per cent of Victorians want a royal commission into union corruption because of the $15 billion that has been rorted. And who stood idly by? This Premier did nothing when reports were put to her in 2020, in 2022 and in 2023, and then she has the gall to keep repeating that she only found out about it when the *60 Minutes* story came out. We know that is bollocks. We know the Premier was repeatedly warned. I had to fight the government in court, in VCAT, to get documents from a 2023 progress report for the North East Link, which showed the CFMEU was kicking surveyors off the North East Link Program and was doing a go-slow on the assembly of tunnel-boring machines to establish industrial dominance. This is the kind of thing that costs taxpayers money. Have a look at what happened on the Hurstbridge rail line site. You had absolute gang warfare. You had women being abused on that site and on several other sites. Yet this government are happy with the settings as they are. They are happy to sit there and say, 'Nothing to see here. We don't need greater powers. We don't need an expansion of IBAC. We don't need a royal commission.' Well, yes, we do. We do need a royal commission and we do need an expansion of IBAC's powers – to get to the bottom of the systemic corruption on our Big Build sites. $15 billion is a lot of money. It could have paid for 130,000 new teachers, police officers or nurses, and it is an enormous amount of money in a crime crisis. I think Victorians deserve to know what has happened.

The Premier Jacinta Allan, the most unpopular state Premier in the country –

Bev McArthur interjected.

Evan MULHOLLAND: She actually wrote to IBAC. Labor colleagues must have been shaking their heads when they saw the Premier bandying about a letter from IBAC only to have IBAC release a statement days later saying that they did receive a referral, and they actually responded that they had no powers to investigate that letter. Did the Premier release that letter or come back to the media or the chamber and say, 'I'm going to bring in a bill to expand IBAC's remit, given I wrote to them asking them to investigate and they said they couldn't because they didn't have the legislative power and they would very much like that'? No. The Premier, when she had an opportunity to act, decided to do nothing. Then some probably harebrained media adviser in the Premier's private office said, 'I reckon you should bandy about this letter to IBAC that you wrote in 2024. I reckon that's a really, really good idea. I reckon that's a really good idea because it shows that you acted back then' – only for IBAC to come out publicly and declare what they wrote back to the Premier. How embarrassing for the Premier to be exposed for misleading Victorians, because she said that she acted by doing it, but they quite clearly responded saying they could not and they would very much like the power to do so.

We have seen, as Mr Davis has discussed, that the constitution is silent on bills from the Council to the Assembly, and we are requesting that the Dispute Resolution Committee meet. I am wondering why the Premier was not there at that vote in the Assembly. Was it because of the things that her colleagues were saying during that sitting week, like that a challenge will become inevitable if poor polling continues? Another colleague said there is genuine discontent among ministers and factional powerbrokers.

Ryan Batchelor: On a point of order, Acting President, we have had a wideranging debate, but Mr Mulholland is straying even further away from the procedural issues that bedevil Mr Davis's motion. I do not think that this content is relevant to that motion.

Evan MULHOLLAND: On the point of order, Acting President, I was connecting it to the blocking of the debate in the Assembly in the Premier's absence. I would also note that Mr Batchelor went on a wide spray about the Liberal Party.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): Reflecting on the debate that we have had, there have been a few names that have been referred to on both sides of the chamber, so I ask Mr Mulholland to continue.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I would love to continue because I was trying to explain why the Premier was absent from that debate. We know that several of her colleagues were not pleased last sitting week. They said that she was politically vulnerable and that:

> Jacinta calling MPs scallywags is f – -ing rude, why would you poke the bear?

Maybe she was at the Shark Fin Inn for a dinner and then a lunch.

Harriet Shing: On a point of order, Acting President, I am just wondering whether there is any kind of food and wine festival that involves the Shark Fin Inn followed by the Lobster Cave.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): I will take that as an interjection rather than a point of order.

Evan MULHOLLAND: That will not be the last time Minister Shing leaves this chamber if Mr McIntosh gets his way, because we know on the other side there are plenty of disputes, whether it be Ms Watt versus Mr Erdogan or Mr Batchelor versus Mr Berger. The infighting and disputes amongst Labor Party members probably go a long way to explaining why the Premier did not have the guts to turn up in the Legislative Assembly on this bill and explain herself – explain why she did not release the letter from IBAC to her explaining that they did not have the power and would like the power to expand IBAC's remit. I think this is a fantastic motion by Mr Davis. It very much should be supported because we need to get this bill passed.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:24): Wow! What an interesting day it is today on this wacky Wednesday. We always love to be in the chamber when we are debating some kind of motion. I rise to make a contribution on this motion in Mr Davis's name, which is basically about a bill that was passed by this chamber but then went to the Assembly and was not passed by the Assembly. The motion calls on the Dispute Resolution Committee to meet to consider the rejection of the bill and resolve the deadlock. That all sounds amazing, but Mr Davis I guess missed some important steps in this process – in fact the whole process – and about what is actually set down here. The constitution actually sets out the role and the functions of the Dispute Resolution Committee. If Mr Davis or perhaps one of his junior advisers might have looked at the landing page for the Dispute Resolution Committee on the Victorian Parliament website, it would have alerted them to the fact that, effectively:

> The Committee works to resolve disputes between the two Houses, where a bill has passed the Legislative Assembly but failed to pass the Legislative Council.

So again, it cannot come from here and go there. It has to come from –

Bev McArthur: It doesn't say that. It's silent.

Sonja TERPSTRA: It does. It has to. I am going to go to the constitution in a moment, Mrs McArthur. And it is kind of handy that I am a lawyer, because I can read law. It is disappointing that we have to. It is opposition business day, so you can fill your slots with whatever you want to fill them with, but you cannot rewrite the laws, and you cannot rewrite history. The constitution is an important document. It is not just the vibe of the thing, as Dennis Denuto says in *The Castle*. It is actually a very important document, because the genesis of all the things we are talking about today is the constitution. But again, I will refer to the landing page, on the Victorian Parliament website, for the Dispute Resolution Committee. Mr Davis, if you took 3 seconds to have a look at this, you would have found that what you are proposing today would not pass any muster at all – and it does not; it quite clearly does not. We heard from Mr Mulholland all the usual stuff about IBAC, the CFMEU, blah, blah, blah. It is a distraction from the fact that this is ill-conceived and was always fatally flawed.

It cannot go anywhere, because it has no power to do so. So again, I refer to the Dispute Resolution Committee landing page:

> The Committee works to resolve disputes between the two Houses, where a bill has passed the Legislative Assembly but failed to pass the Legislative Council.

And then it goes on to say:

> If the Committee cannot reach a resolution, or does not meet, the bill will become a deadlocked.
>
> It can be reintroduced to the Parliament.

Again, it states that:

> The Committee was established under the Constitution Act 1975.

I know my colleagues Mr Batchelor and Mr Galea have also referred to these provisions: 65A, 65B, 65C and 65D. But again, a cursory look at the Constitution Act 1975 and 65A, the definitions section, would have pointed us to a pretty important thing, which I have just mentioned in terms of the Dispute Resolution Committee. It says:

> Disputed Bill means a Bill which has passed the Assembly and having been transmitted to and received by the Council not less than 2 months before the end of the session has not been passed by the Council within 2 months after the Bill is so transmitted, either without amendment or with such amendments only as may be agreed to by both the Assembly and the Council.

And it goes on. It is crystal clear – there can be no other reading of this provision – that the bill has to have passed the Assembly and come up here; it cannot go the other way. Mr Davis, you can shake your head as much as you like, and we can talk about all these other things that have no application to this debate. We heard the Greens lecturing us about how arrogant we are, but we are not, because we are just relying on the law here. I do not know – on anyone's reading, law, democracy. And let us not forget that the members in the other place, in the Assembly, where government is formed, considered your bill and rejected it. If you do not like the outcome, then take it up with the Victorian electorate, because they keep re-electing Labor governments. In the Assembly there is a thumping majority that considered your bill and resoundingly rejected it, so this motion and your bill should have died a natural death in that chamber. There is no way that it can be resurrected through a crazy motion in this chamber.

Also, Mr Davis, I know you have been around here a long time, and this is what I find really interesting and fascinating, because you should know better. Someone has very handily provided me a copy of the *Hansard* from, I believe, 27 March 2003, and you were a member in this chamber back then. I do believe that when the Constitution (Parliamentary Reform) Bill 2003 was being debated you did not ask any questions in committee on this provision at all – you did not. I do not know – do you have a different recollection? It seems to me this whole entire debate is about trying to rewrite history and having recollections of things that actually never existed in the first place. Mr Davis, someone very handily provided me with the *Hansard*, and I have looked through –

A member: The Premier's office, was it?

Sonja TERPSTRA: No, no, no, it was not. I have looked through and read all of this. I do not need the Premier's private office to help me; I can read things for myself. But clearly, when you look through these things, Mr Davis, you had ample opportunity in committee at that time to ask questions about this provision and clarify whether a bill could have a genesis in this chamber, go down to the Assembly and then come back up. You did not ask those questions, Mr Davis. So again, I refer to the facts. And again, the lecturing from the Greens we find really interesting, because we actually have a leg to stand on on something, like the law, the constitution. Simply then saying to us that we are just being arrogant I find quite astounding. We are being arrogant because we are relying on the constitution? That is completely breathtaking.

Again, the constitution is actually very clear on this. Mr Davis, you have wasted a slot for your party on your day by again not doing your homework. Your homework gets an F on the report card today, Mr Davis, because again, as my colleagues remarked upon earlier, what you could have done is actually talk about fuel excise, cost of living, all sorts of things that are really important to Victorians right now – Victorians who are looking for cost-of-living relief, not some spurious, ill-fated motion. The constitution and trying to argue it is the vibe of the thing and Dennis Denuto having another run at it – it was always fatally flawed and a complete waste of this slot. To try and support this motion is a stunt. It is an ill-fated stunt, and it will just reflect poorly on you. What would you do if you were ever in government? These sorts of stunts – that show you cannot even understand the legislation, the constitution and the role and function of parliamentary committees – are actually breathtaking, particularly for someone who has been in this Parliament for decades. You have been in this Parliament for decades, Mr Davis, and even you are laughing because you know you have no excuse. You have no excuse whatsoever.

Again, this motion is incredibly ill-fated and flawed. It is another example of trying to scramble around wanting to fill a slot which we were originally advised would be a motion about cost of living and the fuel excise. But again, at the last minute they try and scramble away and get something where they can try and get some hits on the government. It is an F on the report card for the dog eating your homework, Mr Davis. You have not done any homework, or this is a really lousy attempt at some kind of homework. We know that trying to get a resolution up through here to get it to the dispute committee cannot occur. The constitution prevents it.

This motion is just another ridiculous stunt. It is really embarrassing. I do not know what else can be said on this other than to say again that the fact that you think you can come into this chamber and get this chamber and this Parliament to act on something that is so fatally flawed and ridiculous says a lot about you if you were to ever get in government. I would recommend, Mr Davis – perhaps through you, Acting President – a thorough review of the Constitution Act, in particular sections 65A, 65B, 65C and 65D, and also perhaps a review of the parliamentary committees landing page for the Dispute Resolution Committee. That clearly spells out why things can and cannot occur. The government is not supporting this motion. Obviously it is ridiculous and spurious and a complete waste of time, but it is your wont. If you want to waste a slot on your day, go right ahead.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (15:34): Acting President, you have hit me at a point of surprise because I was actually expecting a member of the opposition to perhaps follow Ms Terpstra on the motion. I am always delighted to get up and make a contribution on motions from Mr Davis, as has been my custom and practice over the last many, many years now. But I was expecting of course to follow perhaps one of your colleagues over on the other side, Mr Davis. But that is all right; here we go. I am going to make a contribution on this motion regarding the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Bill 2026. I think the position of the government has been made abundantly clear many, many times by my colleagues, and I too join them in saying that we do not support this motion, because it is of course another really desperate motion that does not speak to the lived realities of the community out there. In the conversations that I am having, people that come to my door and hit up my social media and all the rest of it are talking to me about bread-and-butter issues of supporting their families and the cost-of-living crisis. They are talking to me about what we are doing. They are talking to us about filling up their cars. They are talking about filling up their trucks. They are talking about the availability of fresh fruit and vegetables into the future. That is what people are talking about right here in Melbourne, particularly right across the northern suburbs – and folks out there in regional Victoria.

Interestingly I have spent the last month talking up EV cars. I know that some have a deadset feeling against EV cars, but I will tell you what is happening; they are the conversations that are filling me up.

Nick McGowan: Do you have one?

Sheena WATT: I do not have an EV car.

A member: Why not?

Sheena WATT: Because of the ancient, desperate behaviours of some body corporates that exist out there. That is why I do not have an EV car, and I have done my utmost to convince them that things need to change. That is why I am really proud to be part of a government that is taking on body corporates and smashing the way that body corporates are behaving. I am completely off track, because I could go on about how good EV cars are for quite some time. I could talk about the range of them and how they have now been included in the new free trade agreement with Europe, but instead I am going to go back to the motion, because I have got some things to talk about.

We are discussing IBAC, and it is extraordinarily serious, there is no denying it. I cannot stand up here in good conscience and discuss a motion that, frankly, wastes the chamber's time.

Bev McArthur: Why are you speaking on it, then?

Sheena WATT: I was not, in good faith, expecting to speak – I will be honest with the chamber – because there was a slot there for the opposition to speak and for members of the crossbench to speak. And do you know what happened? None put their hand up to speak on their own motion. That is why I am here discussing the important elements of anti-corruption efforts here in our state.

Bev McArthur: Our case was so good we didn't need any more debate.

Sheena WATT: That is not true. We know that with the bill that we debated not too long ago right here we discussed the ins and outs of IBAC, its powers and all of the efforts that the government has taken to address corruption in this state, and we know that IBAC already possesses the necessary jurisdiction over contractors who are performing public functions. That is clear. That has been heard by members of the team over here, and I will repeat it. What we thought was that the bill before us was supposed to broaden IBAC's reach, to follow the money. But what I heard and what I saw was the actual text of the bill contained no specific references to money, funds or dollars whatsoever. What in fact was proposed was granting IBAC powers identical to those of the Auditor-General regarding the scrutiny of contracts and subcontracts. I think we need to be clear here in this chamber about what those powers are actually for. The Auditor-General is empowered to conduct performance audits – that is their job – with forensic processes used to determine if government agencies are hitting their targets and whether they are managing resources efficiently and strictly adhering to the law. That is the role of the Auditor-General, and can I thank them for the really diligent role that they have continued to play over the entirety of this term. Almost every sitting week we have the good fortune of receiving some of their reports.

You see, attempting to force the very different functions of two very different bodies together is simply not the right way to manage our integrity system. When it comes to addressing criminal behaviour and specific types of industry misconduct, organisations like Victoria Police, frankly, are better equipped for the task. It is precisely why our government has ensured that Victoria Police and the Labour Hire Authority have the specific and very detailed authorities required to do their jobs effectively. We are already seeing the tangible results of these powers being put into action. To date, Victoria Police have laid more than 70 criminal charges, while the Labour Hire Authority has moved to cancel 147 licences.

I see that beyond enforcement we have taken some very structural steps by initiating an independent review and committing to every single one of the recommendations, as discussed, and we have implemented some really strict new legislation to prevent bikies and other criminal elements from being on our worksites. We have also established that secure, protected pathway for complaints backed by criminal penalties for anyone that threatens whistleblowers. These changes are actively working, and we are seeing the culture on our worksites improve every day because of them.

It is important to remember that the Integrity and Oversight Committee specifically recommended that the exceptional circumstance test for public examinations be kept in place. I know that there are members here in this chamber that serve on the Integrity and Oversight Committee. I thank them for their work, including the work of the committee, in determining that retaining this specific requirement

is essential when you weigh the inherent risks involved in public proceedings. We have to acknowledge that IBAC does possess extraordinary powers that even exceed those of a criminal court, yet they come with fewer protections for those involved. That does require some element of discussion here, and I am glad to make a contribution on that. In examinations a witness's lawyer is restricted from speaking and there is no opportunity for cross-examination to provide a right of reply, exhibits are not shared with witnesses or their legal counsel in advance and the threshold for making findings of guilt is much lower than what is required for a criminal trial.

This bill failed to address the necessary safeguards to protect witness welfare or to prevent the prejudice of ongoing criminal proceedings. IBAC itself has previously highlighted that maintaining the confidentiality of its investigations is vital to ensure that they are not compromised. I recall this came up time and time again in contributions in the original bill debate, and that is probably why I am repeating it here. The decision of the chamber stands, and I do recognise that was sent to our friends in the Legislative Assembly.

I think that what we are seeing is kind of extraordinary. I could talk all day about the powers of IBAC to conduct investigations, but briefly, underpinning all of that is the fact that Vic Police have the power and authority to conduct investigations, and anyone with any knowledge of criminal behaviour on worksites is recommended strongly to speak to Victoria Police or any one of those bodies that have been set up as a result of the review that we conducted and called upon very rapidly after hearing about some really tragic circumstances. The truth is that IBAC is valued and respected by this government, and year on year we have seen an increase in IBAC's base funding. When we came to government in 2014 it was $31.5 million; it has gone up and up, and this year it now sits at $65.6 million. That is evidence straight there that this government is committed to IBAC and what they do. I will leave my remarks there but just say that I am deeply disappointed to see that we did not receive more contributions from the opposition on a motion that is theirs about a bill that they proposed to have committed and cared about so deeply. So I encourage others – *(Time expired)*

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (15:44): The only thing that is left to say is I am the fifth Labor MP in a row to speak on this motion. The only conclusion is that you are utterly ashamed of your own motion. You cannot get enough speakers to fill your own time. We will debate it, but you cannot debate your own motion. You cannot follow through on your own agenda, erroneous as it is. It is deeply embarrassing, but we will do our bit. We have filled your roster on something you should have filled your roster on. Obviously something has gone wrong. There are more arguments going on, there are disputes going on and there is tension at play. It is very, very embarrassing for your side, I would say.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (15:45): This is a very straightforward motion. It is a motion that deals with the fact that the Assembly continues to refuse to deal with bills that properly come from this chamber, bills that are very important for the community. We heard from the government suggestions that we had not filled the slots. We had three speakers, and we are today trying to make sure that there is sufficient time for Mr Ettershank to do his work.

I also want to make the point that the government tried to argue that this was not about things that are material to the community. That is complete nonsense. The $15 billion that has been squandered corruptly on Big Build sites – the minimum $15 billion, as Dr Mansfield made very clear – is a very important matter of public concern. It is money that could be spent on hospitals and schools and roads, a whole range of things, but the money has been squandered corruptly on Big Build sites. We are seeking to remedy that by tightening the law and making sure that it is dealt with properly.

I notice that the IBAC Commissioner has today renewed her comments about the need for follow-the-money powers, saying:

> When a public body pays a contractor who hires subcontractors, and so on, the public funds move further down the line and into a gap – where any alleged corrupt conduct which occurs, is no longer within IBAC's remit to investigate …

> Since 2016, IBAC has publicly advocated for 'follow the dollar' powers, which would provide IBAC the ability to follow the public funds through subcontractor arrangements …

This is a key point. It is central to what needs to occur here. There are other reforms needed by IBAC, but this is an important one.

What we are suggesting today is a very simple step. We request that the Dispute Resolution Committee meet and conciliate – that is the word I have used deliberately – between the chambers. It is true that bills coming from the Assembly follow a particular deadlock provision, a dispute provision. But I have argued in this case that a bill coming from our chamber which has been shabbily treated in the Assembly is a bill that the Dispute Resolution Committee could quite properly conciliate over. There is nothing in the constitution that prevents that. It is silent on this matter. It is very clear that it could conciliate.

That would fit into the mode of previous management committees on which the Dispute Resolution Committee was explicitly founded by the Constitution Commission Victoria when it recommended changes to the constitution. It was accepted by the then Bracks government and legislated in this chamber. Old-fashioned management committees used to discuss things between the chambers and set up mechanisms to conciliate arrangements across the chambers. That is what I am proposing here. It is new and it is fair, and it does give an additional lever to the chamber. I urge people to support it. It is a modest and thoughtful way to deal with this issue.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Equal Opportunity Amendment (Medical Treatment) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of David Ettershank:

> That the bill be now read a second time.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:49): I am pleased to rise today to make some remarks on the Equal Opportunity Amendment (Medical Treatment) Bill 2026. In doing so I note that I am very pleased to be talking about a bill today that I will go into some detail on. But I do wish to acknowledge that this has been put forward to us by our colleagues in Legalise Cannabis Victoria (LCV), in particular my regional colleague Rachel Payne and also Mr Ettershank.

It is important, perhaps peripherally, that in a previous debate we talked about the various roles of our respective chambers here in the Parliament. This Parliament that we are privileged to sit in – because of course we are the better chamber – has the fortune of being able to take the time to delve methodically into and analytically through legislation that appears before us, and I certainly welcome the opportunity to do so. This is a topic I have been privileged to speak on in different aspects over the course of the past 3½ years, whether it was in engaging with the inquiry from which the recommendations that led to this bill before us today arose or whether it has been in relation to the matter of medicinal cannabis use whilst driving.

The inquiry received a number of submissions from different stakeholders and had witnesses appear. I was regrettably not able to attend the hearings owing to the fact that I was in another committee at the time, the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, but I did engage with the process of this inquiry. I certainly found reading the transcripts of hearings and the submissions quite fascinating. I will come back to the report a little bit later in my contribution. But what this bill fundamentally seeks to do is implement a new section of the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 specifically providing for protection for people's medical treatment for whatever condition they may be suffering and have

prescribed treatment for. That may include medicinal cannabis or it may be something else altogether. My remarks will vary across the two facets of that in my contribution today.

What this is really is about the meeting point of workers rights and workplace safety. It is something that, as this inquiry explored, is a very important subject for us to be getting right, to be striking that balance in the best possible way. I will at the outset note that many of the protections are already in place to some degree through disability protections in the Equal Opportunity Act. That does provide a mechanism for some coverage for people, but there is case law both strengthening and querying that point, and I think it is an area of potential gap that is certainly well worth careful consideration. On that point I will say that this is something the government has been particularly interested in and engaged with, both through its response to the inquiry and the ongoing work which I understand is taking place right now.

The government remains committed to strengthening protections for Victorians living with a disability and indeed protections for Victorians who require medication to perform their essential work. We are also committed to ensuring that the law keeps pace with people's lived experiences, and I think you would find no better exemplar of that commitment than in the anti-vilification laws which were passed through the Parliament about a year ago and pushed forward very strongly by this government, which for the very first time included the attribute of disability. Whether it be in that space or in the space that we are looking at today, we do have that track record of interest and of delivery and reform in this space, and it is something that I will continue to be deeply engaged with and supportive of as a member of the government, having as I said the privilege to take part in many such previous debates in this chamber.

The government – this will not be a surprise to other members in this place – consistent with the convention of not supporting private members bills, is not in a position to support this bill today. However, work is currently being done, as I say, to assess the viability of such a reform going into the future. Anti-vilification is a very recent example of that reform in this space, but perhaps the most foundational reform that I could refer to was over a decade ago when this government became the first jurisdiction in Australia to trial and then formally legalise medicinal cannabis as a treatment for Victorians.

We saw for a very long time advocates explain their frustration in seeking support and finding that the best medication for them was something that they were legally barred from accessing and the very real pain and the very real trauma that that led to and indeed the very real consequences that had for workforce participation as well. We have come a long way since that point. Indeed in a debate a couple of years ago I made reference to the fact that some 400,000 prescriptions had at that time been made for medicinal cannabis in the state of Victoria, a figure which I have no doubt has continued to grow from that point. I shared at that time, in 2024, a story of a friend who had a friend who was suffering from an epileptic fit. They were driving on the Monash Freeway. My friend had to pull over and had to physically restrain his friend on the nature strip on the side of the road – a very dangerous situation, but one which ultimately through medicinal cannabis they would find a treatment for, which was life-changing for them. The medical evidence is clear, and what we can do to improve the experience for people who are undergoing treatment through medicinal cannabis is really critical.

This draws me to another debate that we have had in this chamber and that does have a lot of interaction with the bill before us today, and that is the impairment test and how we actually define what impairment is. We know that typical tests do not accurately measure impairment, they just measure presence. What that means is someone may have taken a substance over a week earlier and be completely unimpaired by it but they still have that substance show up in any testing. This of course particularly causes concern when it comes to driving.

I was very pleased a couple of years ago to work with colleagues in the Legalise Cannabis Victoria party to formulate and refine wording on a motion which actually led to the commissioning of a report by two eminent Victorians: Tony Parsons, who is a former supervising magistrate in the Drug Court,

and Dr Hamish McIntosh. Their review, which became known as the Parsons review, did extensive research into how we can best support motorists, many of whom would be using medicinal cannabis for very legitimate reasons, and engaged at a high level with 18 stakeholders to get feedback on the best way we could implement legal reforms. There were a few clear paths that came out, but the most immediate path, which was very self-evident, was that the system, as it was back then, was extremely prohibitive, as for anyone who was faced with a test result and then went before a magistrate, that magistrate found themselves with no ability to apply discretion to the case and in fact would have to then suspend their licence or otherwise impose a restriction on their ability to drive, which was deeply unfair in the case of not being able to sufficiently test impairment.

The interim solution, which has since been legislated by this chamber, was to change that rule to give magistrates that discretion so that in those cases where someone finds themselves embroiled in that, they can actually have a defence in the Magistrates' Court and the magistrate can apply that commonsense discretion, meaning that they will not be nearly as likely to have their livelihood impacted. It does not change the fundamental issue, though, and that is why I have been very pleased to see the so-called medicinal cannabis closed-circuit track trial, which is currently underway in Lang Lang. I know members – all of us in this place – are very keenly anticipating the results of that trial. As the Parsons report outlined:

> What became clear during the 18 consultations was a shared desire for more data.

This is something that I hope can be delivered by the track trial. I have had as recently as a few weeks ago, and on a number of occasions now, constituents from my electorate write to me about their concerns – people who want to or need to drive, for whatever reason, should have the absolute right to do so whilst appropriately managing their medication, as well as with medicinal cannabis. It is a genuine concern. Whilst we have updates and progress to report through the recent legislative changes, there is certainly more work to do, and this track trial will provide the basis of how we can come to a more accurate test of impairment. That in turn will assist this process when it comes to the workplace, and there is in many workplaces a direct correlation. Much work does involve driving, be it delivery drivers, the rail industry, the public transport industry, trucking, commercial passenger transport or various other jobs which people may need use of a car for. There is a direct correlation here but also a further correlation, a broader correlation, in terms of what is impairment as it relates to safe workplace conduct just as much as it applies to safe driving.

I think a further point which is worth just briefly touching on is some other work that the Legal and Social Issues Committee has undertaken in this term, and that is a separate inquiry into the decriminalisation of cannabis. That is certainly not what we are talking about today, but given that we are talking about medical treatments and impairment, in the case of such decriminalisation that is something that would need to be considered appropriately by government as well. Noting that in the government's response to that inquiry the government did not support a decriminalisation process, that is something that nevertheless should be, albeit briefly, noted should legislation such as this or this legislation indeed pass.

Presently, as I was saying just a few moments ago, we do find ourselves in a space where the Equal Opportunity Act does cover disability specifically. We have seen comments from Ro Allen the commissioner – in fact I was talking about those comments with the minister at the table this morning – who has repeatedly affirmed that the discrimination provisions as they pertain to disability do then apply to treatment as well. We have seen that the submission that the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission made to the inquiry affirmed that is part of a broader direct or indirect discrimination. This does still leave a gap to a certain degree, but the VEOHRC submission says:

> Under the EO Act, persons with disabilities are protected from unlawful discrimination. Employers also have a positive duty to eliminate as far as possible, discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation from their workplaces. Some exceptions apply that are discussed … for example, discrimination reasonably necessary to protect health and safety.

The submission goes on to say that:

> The definition of discrimination in section 7(2) confirms that the EO Act protects people from discrimination because of a characteristic that a person with that disability generally has, however it is not expressly clear in terms of how it may apply to people receiving prescription medication or treatment for a disability.

That brings us to the heart of what this bill seeks for us to address. As part of the deliberative process of this chamber and of this Parliament we also have the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, which released its routine, regular report just yesterday, including on this bill. The SARC said to the Parliament that:

> The Committee notes that the EO Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of a disability in employment and employment-related areas, education, the provision of goods and services and the disposal of land and accommodation, and by clubs and club members and in sport and in local government. Each of these prohibitions (except disability discrimination by clubs and club members, in sport and in local government) are subject to exceptions (in some circumstances) where adjustments required by a disability are either not reasonable or where the person could not perform the employment or derive a substantial benefit from the activity even if the adjustments were made. Additionally, section 86(1) generally provides that a person may discriminate against another person on the basis of disability if the discrimination is reasonably necessary to protect health or safety or property.

The central recommendation of the VEOHRC submission to the Legal and Social Issues Committee's inquiry is providing for reform of the Equal Opportunity Act, and it provides two options by which to do that, of which this bill has selected I believe option 1. I think it is important to note that, in support of this reform, it is something where we will see a gap between what is already covered by disability and what is generally, indirectly or implicitly implied through treatment of that disability or other condition but not directly covered as it relates to the treatment of that condition through substances, prescriptions, including for medicinal cannabis, or anything else that a patient may be using.

I note that disability as an attribute is something that this government has been focused on supporting, and indeed, as I mentioned earlier, we have been working with people with this lived experience to make changes to laws as they become necessary, including with the anti-vilification reforms which essentially made disability, as well as sexual or gender identity, sexual orientation and racial and religious attributes, components and attributable factors under the anti-vilification laws. It has also come up through other reform work to equal opportunity legislation that this government has undertaken, namely, the Equal Opportunity (Religious Exemptions) Amendment Act 2021. Many of the concerns that relate to this do come under VEOHRC's responsibility and the Equal Opportunity Act, but it also pertains to the Fair Work Act 2009. Much of the case law as it comes to this matter has been done through the federally originated Fair Work Act.

The Legal and Social Issues Committee conducted an extensive inquiry into the issue in 2024, and as well as submissions from VEOHRC, which I have already referred to, received submissions from a wide range of stakeholders, including the Police Association Victoria, Trades Hall Council, the Penington Institute and the Drug Advisory Council Australia, who we have seen at a few other inquiries too. The findings and recommendations of that report are relatively straightforward. Three findings and seven recommendations were made. Finding 1 in particular goes to the heart of some of my earlier comments, saying that the tests for presence, not impairment, are not effective at assessing someone's mental wellbeing or safety in terms of being able to facilitate their work. The impairment test issue really does come back to needing that reliable methodology that I am very much looking forward to seeing through other reform and review work that is underway at the moment, acknowledging that that is the central issue.

Recommendation 3 goes to the heart of what we are discussing today, and that recommendation is:

> That the Victorian Government amend the definition of discrimination in Section 7 of the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* to clarify that where a person uses prescription medication or requires medical treatment for a disability, this is a characteristic that a person with that disability generally has.

Affirming my earlier remarks that this is something that is being actively reviewed and considered by the government at this time, the government's response was that this would be under review, saying that the government is committed to protecting and promoting the human rights of Victorians with a disability, including by recently legislating to expand anti-vilification protections to include the attribute of disability through the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Act 2025.

Importantly, there are a range of existing legal protections in both Victorian and Commonwealth legislation that may assist people with disability who are experiencing discrimination. The EO act, for example, provides protection from discrimination for people with a disability in the workplace and in other areas of public life. It is also noted frequently through the government's response that employers have a positive duty to eliminate, as far as possible, disability discrimination from their workplaces, and this interacts with the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004, the Fair Work Act and the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, those last two being Commonwealth acts also providing a range of protections for people with disabilities.

It goes on to say that expanding the definition of discrimination in the Equal Opportunity Act to expressly capture the use of prescription medication or medical treatment for disability does require further analysis but it is something that could be considered as part of any future broader reform to the Equal Opportunity Act. Any future reform to the EO act will require thorough consideration of resourcing and economic impacts to Victorians and comprehensive consultation with a range of stakeholders. I am very pleased to see that recommendation not just keeping the door open, but actively committing to further pursuing that work as part of future reviews and ongoing work that has already been undertaken by the government and as part of the bedrock for a future reform.

There are also responses to other recommendations in the report, in particular recommendation 1, which the government supports in part, about where there is a well-founded belief by employers. The issue with this one is that a well-founded belief could be subjectively misused in some cases by some employers. As a former union official myself and someone who has represented workers through alcohol and other drug (AOD) screening queries, I would also be concerned about the level to which this broad interpretation, as proposed by our committee, may be misused by a small number of employers by targeting workers based on reasons of personal prejudice or performance rather than on observed attributes or observed behaviours. Nevertheless it is something that is worthy of consideration how we can get that appropriately done.

Further recommendations, such as WorkSafe conducting and providing updated advice on alcohol and other drug management policies, would certainly be very useful as well. That has received the support of government through its response to the inquiry recommendations, with WorkSafe investigating impairment testing methodologies as well to provide that further work and further support. Recommendation 7 goes to referencing the closed-track trial being supported by WorkSafe and what WorkSafe can do to continually review the new and emerging evidence, particularly through that trial, but certainly not exclusively through that trial, and through best practice cases from overseas and how that can inform better advice from WorkSafe to employers, to unions and to workers as well.

There are, as the inquiry went into, a number of key pieces of legislation that this issue pertains to. One of the key pieces outside the Equal Opportunity Act is the OH&S act, which is one of the other key pieces guiding the WorkCover system but also general occupational health and safety across Victorian workplaces. This goes to the shared duty of reducing and eliminating risks. This of course includes the role of health and safety representatives, who are a very important part of a healthy workplace culture, with employers having a duty to maintain a safe working environment and take reasonable care for the safety of their staff. Interestingly, there is actually only one sector under the Occupational Health and Safety Act that is specifically called out in relation to alcohol and other drug testing, and that is the mining industry, which is of course a relatively minor industry in our state compared to most. There are certain provisions in the act about how the mining industry must comply with its obligations when it comes to AOD testing and how that operates.

There is the Equal Opportunity Act itself, as we have already been through extensively, as well as the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. The various agency acts, including both the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 and the Victoria Police Act 2013, provide directions and guidance on how this testing can be conducted in relation to serving officials and serving officers, including that directions to take a test cannot be refused. They set out appropriate frameworks and parameters, including the circumstances in which a test may be directed to be taken, such as if a serving officer is involved in a critical incident due to reasonable suspicion that they may have been affected by a drug of dependence or alcohol, if they appear to be unfit for work and through some limited provisions for random testing as well.

A broader application of these rules comes through three other acts, being the Bus Safety Act 2009, the Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017 and the national law from South Australia, which is the Rail Safety National Law Application Act 2013, in terms of rail safety for people involved in the direct and related operations of railways and other transport industries across the country. Interestingly, between these various different acts there is some variance in timelines and requirements for different workers as well, all of which was explored in the inquiry. The Equal Opportunity Act amendments would effectively apply a consistent approach of protection, even if further detail would be resolved through regulations in that or other pieces of legislation.

There are certain case studies – and I understand that my colleagues in the LCV party have discussed some extensively already – in relation to specifically medicinal cannabis and its application. In various Fair Work Commission cases, which I believe are all from other states – in relation to *Haigh v Platinum Blasting Services Pty Ltd*, *Millar v FQM Australia Nickel Pty Ltd* and *Sharp v BCS Infrastructure Support Pty Ltd* – it has generally been held that the use of medicinal cannabis, where it has been legally prescribed, has been accepted and upheld. Although in one particular case it was found that the employee's failure – 'failure' is perhaps a stronger word – or the fact that they had not notified their employer of their prescription prior to the offending test had worked against them in that decision. This is an area – albeit it applies to interstate examples under the national Fair Work Act 2009 – and something that, in the provisions under the EO act that this bill seeks to address, could certainly apply.

Indeed from my time previously as a union official in supporting members through AOD findings, albeit that it is not a significant occurrence in the retail industry but when it comes to the role of delivery drivers – and Acting President Berger, you would know all too well about these issues and concerns – I know the importance of propriety in making sure that the testing regimes are fair and are not used as punitive measures at the personal whims of a certain number – a small number – of managers who are seeking to use it for purposes outside of what a reasonable testing regime would seek to achieve. There are various other aspects that this government is committed to and ongoing work in this space as well. I will pass over the contributions that the state makes to the national disability insurance scheme and indeed the state disability plan, which is due for renewal this year and which consultation is to be commencing on very shortly. There is certainly ongoing work, as I have pointed to already in this contribution, about what is being done and what the track record of this government is to achieve meaningful progressive reform.

Again I come back to the fact that this was the first state in the country to bring in medicinal cannabis, first through the trial and then through legislation, and we have seen the transformative impact it absolutely has. As we have this system, it is really important that we provide the safety so people can take medication which is supporting them – which is in many cases helping them to actually function – without unfair pressures or standards being held against them. It goes to the very fundamental right that people have to be able to work and to have their dignity, but it also goes to a level of status and understanding that, for example, medicinal cannabis – or indeed any type of prescription medication that someone may need to take – provided it does not interfere directly with the safety of their work, is not something that should be in any way viewed as less worthy of consideration.

The more that we can reform these laws, whether it be in the space of driving – as we have already done in some interim fashion, and there is more work that needs to be done – or when it comes to supporting workers in the workplace so that they have got those protections there, the less of a stigma is attached and the more they can fully contribute freely without that fear of discrimination and of being viewed or treated differently, especially in the most extreme sense but also, very importantly, in the day-to-day sense as well. The work that we can do in this place can set the groundwork for that cultural reform.

Whilst the government's policy remains to not support a private members bill, I do point to the fact that we have a clear legislative track record of support for sensible and commonsense reform in the space of medicinal cannabis. I certainly look forward to seeing the outcomes of the work that is being undertaken on this very issue and indeed to working with colleagues in the Legalise Cannabis Party to ensure that all Victorians have the right to access their treatments and to access care that allows them to function and be the best version of themselves in society. I will continue to very much look forward to seeing that work take place.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (16:19): I rise to speak on the Equal Opportunity Amendment (Medical Treatment) Bill 2026 proposed by Mr Ettershank and the Legalise Cannabis Party. I respect that Mr Ettershank has brought forward this bill and, having read his second-reading speech, know that he does so earnestly, with passion, goodwill and intent. However, the Liberals and Nationals will be opposing this bill. I want to take a small amount of the chamber's time – much smaller than Mr Galea's – to explain why.

The Equal Opportunity Act 2010 contains a very broad definition of 'disability', which captures many of the scenarios described. This bill risks duplication and legal confusion rather than clarity. Our main concern, however, is the risk that continually adding subcategories of protected attributes creates a never-ending expansion of the act. An activity is not a protected attribute. If medical treatment is carved out, you have to ask: what comes next? I am a St Kilda Football Club fan, a long-suffering one at that, and you have to ask: will that eventually be a protected attribute too? The Equal Opportunity Act rightly prohibits discrimination based on specific personal characteristics and attributes. These include age, gender, race, marital status and disability, and there are several more. We strongly support these protections, including the absolute equality and protection of people with disability. Though we understand the sentiment of the bill, we support the protections that are in law. We would be concerned that if we extend these protections to certain actions or behaviours, it could unintentionally imply that other actions or behaviours are not protected. We strongly support complete protection of equality for people with disability, full stop. However, this bill risks turning the act into an overly complex and unworkable piece of legislation. The bill is well intentioned but I think poorly targeted. It adds complexity and legal risk while delivering uncertain and duplicative protections that already largely exist in law. The Liberals and Nationals will not be supporting this bill.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:22): I also rise to make a contribution on the Equal Opportunity Amendment (Medical Treatment) Bill 2026, which has been brought to the chamber by Legalise Cannabis Victoria. The government's position on this bill should come as no surprise to anyone in this chamber. The government does not support private members bills as a matter of convention. This specific issue requires further consultation across the community and legal sectors, but overall the issue is worthy of discussion. I would like to thank Legalise Cannabis for their advocacy on this topic. They have not done anything other than consistently advocate for law reform in regard to medicinal cannabis, because people who may be suffering from chronic pain and the like might avail themselves of medicinal cannabis, and of course that has some implications for people who may drive their cars and may be pulled over by Victoria Police.

My understanding is – and I have heard my other colleagues in the chamber make their contributions and touch on this issue as well – anybody who is a medicinal cannabis user, if they are roadside drug tested and the like, they can then go to the Magistrates' Court to have that matter reviewed. I understand that Legalise Cannabis are wanting to do more than that. It is a fraught situation, and

nobody wants to be pulled over and potentially fined for taking a substance that is there to help deal with chronic pain and the like. However, there are issues around that. I know in debates on these matters before we have talked about what impairment is and what impairment looks like. To my knowledge, around the world there is still no adequate test that determines impairment. Likewise, that is why when you look at blood alcohol content testing, a figure of .05 was arrived at. We know that impairment levels can vary widely for people, even if they are under .05 and drinking alcohol. It is a very vexed and tricky topic. As I said, on this particular issue, for cannabis there is no international standard for determining impairment, so it is inherently difficult. Nevertheless, I acknowledge Legalise Cannabis's advocacy on this topic. And again, this bill has largely come out of the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into workplace drug testing, which was also championed by Legalise Cannabis. As I said earlier, the government's position is, as always on a private members bill, the government does not support private members bills, and we will be opposing this bill. But again, we are always committed to strengthening protections for Victorians who may have a disability, and we want to make sure that the laws keep pace with individuals' lived experiences. We are constantly looking at how we can improve things and make sure the laws are reformed to an extent that keeps pace with modern circumstances and challenges.

We have taken deliberate steps to strengthen Victoria's equal opportunity framework over time, including reforming religious exceptions and expanding anti-vilification protections to include disability, and the Allan Labor government recently legislated to expand anti-vilification protections to include the attribute of disability through the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Act 2025. This is legislation which the Liberal Party and their One Nation partners actually opposed as well. The Equal Opportunity (Religious Exceptions) Amendment Act 2021, which commenced in 2022, narrowed the scope of religious exceptions introduced in 2011, and that means that religious bodies and schools can no longer discriminate on a wide range of attributes in key settings, and discrimination in government-funded services is now significantly restricted. These reforms demonstrate the government's commitment to strengthening protections in a considered and targeted way, and we recognise that people with disability should not face discrimination because they are accessing prescribed medication or medical treatment. It was a Victorian Labor government that delivered stronger protections under the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of disability, including characteristics associated with disability. These protections provide an important foundation, including protections relating to characteristics associated with disability. The definition of 'discrimination' in section 7(2) makes clear that the act extends to characteristics that a person with a disability generally has. It is arguable that this already captures circumstances where a person requires prescribed medication or medical treatment.

At the same time, we recognise that the law must continue to evolve, as I said earlier, and we are actively considering how best to ensure it reflects the realities of the prescribed medication environment and treatment for people who may be living with disability. There are a range of existing legal pathways, as I said earlier. Like I said, if you are pulled over on the roadside and you are issued with an infringement or whatever, there are ways to have that reviewed in the Magistrates' Court. But also, employers have a positive duty to eliminate, as far as possible, discrimination in their workplaces, including discrimination on the basis of disability. So, as I said, the government response to the inquiry into workplace drug testing stated:

> Expanding the definition of discrimination in the Equal Opportunity Act to expressly capture the use of prescription medication or medical treatment for a disability requires further analysis and … consideration of the resourcing and economic impacts on Victorians …

It is not a question of whether protections should exist or not; it is about ensuring that any changes to the law are clear and workable and do not create unintended consequences. At the same time, I am mindful that some industries require robust drug and alcohol policies to ensure the safety of employees and the broader community. Of course for anybody in the workplace who might be working with heavy machinery and equipment, obviously there is drug testing that happens in those working environments. Some of these environments are inherently dangerous, and working with heavy plant

and equipment can be inherently dangerous, so there absolutely needs to be a balance – a delicate balance – that is struck. Nevertheless, our government has demonstrated its commitment to strengthening protections through recent reforms that, as I said, expand anti-vilification laws to include disability.

It is a challenging environment. We talk to industry all the time about what their needs are. You only have to look at the wide array of decisions that have come out of the Fair Work Commission about workers who have been impaired through drug or alcohol usage not only in construction environments but also professional driving environments like trucking or rideshare – any of those environments where someone may be affected or impaired by substances they take. These things have real-world consequences. It might be something for one person to take something to alleviate pain that they might be experiencing due to a chronic pain condition, but there is still an inherent risk to other road users and potentially to other people in workplaces who they may be working with. These are some of the things that need further careful consideration.

I would also like to thank and acknowledge the many organisations who made submissions to the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry, where these reforms emanated from. At the time there were submissions from the Drug Advisory Council of Australia, the Police Association Victoria, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, the Australian Industry Group, the Penington Institute, the Victorian Trades Hall Council and Harm Reduction Australia. All of those organisations obviously have an important role and stake in this matter, and they made very considered contributions and submissions to the inquiry.

As I said, this bill is larger than just being about medicinal cannabis, but it is also important to note that Victoria is a leader in medicinal cannabis. In 2016 Victoria became the first Australian state or territory to legalise medicinal cannabis under prescription for therapeutic uses. I know many people in my electorate who emailed me at the time when we were doing this and later on, when there had been further discussion around this, talked about the importance of this to them. But again it was all done in a very careful and considered way. In terms of legalising medicinal cannabis originally, this was a commitment that Victorian Labor took to the 2014 election, and we have in fact delivered on that commitment. It was followed by the 2015 release of the report of the Victorian Law Reform Commission on how to amend the law to allow people in exceptional circumstances to safely access medicinal cannabis. As I said, it has been a game changer for many.

The Allan Labor government believes in equal opportunity for Victorians with a disability across areas in which they live, work and play. We provide for disability inclusion supports in our schools, a reform which was delivered by this Labor government to provide practical infrastructure supports in kinders through Building Blocks inclusion grants, and many of us have seen some amazing inclusive play spaces that have been delivered as a consequence of those Building Blocks inclusion grants. It really has been game changing for kids to be able to play in some of those spaces. We also support Victorians with disability with transport assistance through the multipurpose taxi program; I know Mr Barton, who was a member of this place, advocated strongly for those reforms.

When it comes to the NDIS, one of the greatest social reforms this century was delivered by a Labor government, and the Allan government is providing a $3.2 billion contribution each year to that. For Victorians with disability that need specialist disability accommodation, the Allan Labor government is one of the largest providers, if not the largest provider, of specialist disability accommodation in Victoria. Importantly, we are ensuring these buildings are fit for purpose through building 27 new homes; 19 have been completed so far, and a further eight are under construction. We recognise that equal opportunity for Victorians with disability needs to be a priority, and we take a whole-of-government approach to that.

That is why we are commencing consultation shortly on the next phase of the Victorian state disability plan, which follows success of Inclusive Victoria, which was the state disability plan 2022 through to 2026. Now, at the midway point of the current state disability plan, the vast majority of actions outlined

in that plan are either completed or on track. Some of the completed actions and achievements include the appointment of a chief accessibility advocate within the Department of Transport and Planning; endorsement of the national principles for the recognition of assistance animals; Sport and Recreation Victoria's Together More Active program, which invested $1.74 million to support 15 inclusive participation or workforce development projects; and the disability liaison officers in hospitals, who have responded to 37,500 referrals from people with disabilities seeking support to access health care. The government funded the mental health interface program to strengthen the interface between consumers, mental health inpatient services and the NDIS, which is critically important. Homes Victoria is using best practice universal design principles in social housing as well. Thirty-four specialist disability practitioners are supporting families with disability with access to the NDIS and necessary supports. Emergency Management Victoria created a senior adviser for accessible communications role to support accessible public communications in emergency preparation, response and recovery.

You can see some very well thought-out actions have arisen from that plan, and our government has consistently and steadfastly been working through implementing all of those actions to ensure that Victorians living with a disability are able to feel more included and inclusive in a whole range of services. Family Safety Victoria has embedded universal design and a disability-confident and inclusive workforce into its policies and program planning for people with disability and their families who are victim-survivors of sexual violence as well. I could go on; there are still many more reforms that this government has done. But again, I just note that our position on private members bills is that we do not support them. This specific issue requires much further consultation and more detailed engagement with the community and legal sectors. It is a vexed issue, but nonetheless, I thank you and I will conclude my contribution there.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:37): I rise to speak on the Equal Opportunity Amendment (Medical Treatment) Bill 2026, introduced by my colleague David Ettershank in relation to medical treatment for disabilities and for other purposes. I think I might just start today by acknowledging some of the contributions in the chamber, because it seems as though not many people who are contributing on this bill have actually read the bill, because we are not talking about adding further attributes to the charter. What we are actually talking about is amending part of the charter, which is already there and already provides coverage for disability, and adding a part to that for clarification purposes. So the conversations that I have heard across both sides of the chamber around attributes and adding further attributes to the human rights charter are not correct. This is actually a referral that has come from the human rights commissioner themselves, and what it states is that we need clarification around that definition of what disability is, and that would include access to your medication as part of that attribute.

The intent behind the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 is simple: to make public life free from discrimination. The act recognises that discrimination causes real harm. It affects all aspects of public life, from employment to education, transport and commerce. It erodes real-life opportunities and has a terrible impact on the mental and physical health of individuals and entire groups. Worse, the greatest burden is borne by those with the least power and opportunity. Ending discrimination remains an important human rights issue. The Equal Opportunity Act is about reducing that burden and enshrining the fair go for all Victorians. Further, it is proactive. In fact the Equal Opportunity Act includes a positive duty to eliminate discrimination, and we have that opportunity today to end discrimination against Victorians for simply taking medicine prescribed by their doctors. I make reference to that term: 'medicine prescribed by their doctors'. This bill is not explicitly about medicinal cannabis, although obviously as a prescribed medication that would be covered. But again, contributions today allude to the fact that this is a protection based on medicinal cannabis, which is not the intent of the bill. The intent of the bill is to provide protection based on medication you take in support of your disability. To be honest, it beggars belief that we are even having this discussion in 2026. I think it is fair to say that almost all Victorians take some form of medication for something. If they do not currently, they are likely to have to at some point of their lives. Advances in medical science mean

that we have access to incredible and life-changing medications and treatments. These range from over-the-counter paracetamol for headaches to prescription statins for cholesterol, to antibiotics for flus and to chemotherapy for cancer. It was not too long ago in human history that dentistry was performed without anaesthetic – can you imagine – painkillers consisted of alcohol and hope and people died well before necessary in acute pain from diseases we can now prevent and/or manage.

Advances in medical science are good, but we all know that some medications are more socially acceptable than others. As Legalise Cannabis MPs for Legalise Cannabis Victoria, we can assure you that not all drugs are treated equally or without prejudice by the law. Medications associated with lesser understood or even taboo conditions – things like mental health, sexual health, pain, addiction and so on – are still heavily stigmatised. Victoria proudly led the way as the first state to legalise medicinal cannabis in Australia, but there is still stigma due to misinformation and the prohibition of cannabis more generally. This stigma exists in the media, in the law and to some extent in medicine. It is immature and outdated; at times people even joke about it. I can assure you that being fired from your job for taking medicine that helps you is no laughing matter. Being denied housing, goods and services, access to clubs, volunteering and education and the like is similarly serious and life-changing. We have case studies and numerous real-world stories from people who have experienced discrimination for taking prescribed medicine. Many of you will know elite athletes like Lauren Jackson, Damien Oliver and AFL coaches Damien Hardwick and Alastair Clarkson, who have all spoken out about discrimination they have faced as medicinal cannabis patients. And for what – taking medications recommended to them by and prescribed to them by their doctor, that helped them? But this is not about well-known personalities or celebrities. This issue affects everyday Victorians and it destroys lives.

I would like to draw your attention to a couple of examples in a bit more detail. Angelina is a woman in her late 30s. She was offered her dream job through a national disability employment program that placed her with a major Australian organisation. Disability is one minority that can be acquired at any point. We all can, and likely will, be part of a disability community at some point, whether by injury, illness or age. Angelina became a person with a disability in 2019 when her right arm was injured at work. This led her to develop complex regional pain syndrome, or CRPS, which has been described as one of the most painful conditions in the world. The pain is unpredictable and debilitating. At first Angelina managed the pain with opiates, which caused significant side effects. Then she was prescribed medicinal cannabis to replace them. Angelina worked full-time until she was injured, but after that went back to university to retrain. She is now a high-achieving masters student. After some time, she found a new job that aligned perfectly with her studies and previous work experience. Angelina disclosed her disability during the interview process and formally accepted an internship. At this point she let the company know that she was taking legally prescribed medicinal cannabis to manage her pain. She asked whether this would be an issue and what their policies were. The job did not require any driving, she completed every check required by the company doctor and she showed them her prescription. Then she never heard from them ever again. Communication did not just slow down, it completely stopped. Angelina reached out multiple times and sought an explanation. Only much later was it confirmed, through indirect communication she pursued via the disability employment program, that the outcome related to internal policies about drugs and alcohol. This is blatant discrimination.

Rosemary has a similar story for a different medication. Rosemary lives with severe chronic conditions that require medication. She is a co-leader of an arthritis support group and works for a patient organisation. Many people with various forms of arthritis rely on opiates for pain relief, with or without other medications and interventions. Most of these do so under the regular supervision of their treating doctor. However, many report discrimination from health professionals such as emergency staff because of their need for opiates. Many feel like they are treated like drug addicts. The fastest growing group of medicinal cannabis consumers is older people living with chronic pain. Women in general are the second-largest group and are using it for anything from endometriosis to menopause to insomnia.

Medical discrimination crosses all barriers, but the people most likely to suffer often face multiple layers of compounding discrimination. To be frank, if you are a white, middle-class, able-bodied mum from the suburbs, you are far less likely to show up to emergency and be denied pain relief on the basis that you might look like a drug addict or to be drug tested at work, for instance. From people with disabilities, First Nations people, trans and gender-diverse people and younger men we hear many and varied stories about not being believed in healthcare settings, at work and elsewhere, simply because they fit an outdated stereotype about drugs. I could cite many more examples, and I am sure all of us know someone with or who has experienced chronic illness and/or a disability. These are real people with real lives, and the best possible outcome for them and for society is that they remain vibrant and active in work and in the community.

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission agrees. In its submission to the workplace drug-testing inquiry, VEOHRC, a body known for its measured and fair approach, calls for medication discrimination to be rectified. It recommends that the Equal Opportunity Act be amended to add the following:

> … if a person is taking prescribed medication or receiving treatment for a disability, this is taken to be a characteristic that a person with that disability generally has.

In other words, treatment for a disability cannot be separated from the disability itself.

To be clear, we are currently in an absurd situation where, for example, if someone has ADHD, discriminating against them is unlawful, but if they take their medication for ADHD to allow them to function to do their job, they can be discriminated against – in effect, 'We won't fire you for having ADHD, but we will if we don't like the medication you're on,' which, ironically, enables them to work in the first place. Similarly, a woman trying to conceive cannot be discriminated against for trying to get pregnant, but if she is undergoing IVF treatment, her employer can object to the medication. Someone with a back injury or PTSD or migraines cannot be fired for the condition, but if they use opioids and, yes, medicinal cannabis, they can. As Legalise Cannabis MPs we hear this story time and time again.

Other people are unjustifiably and unfairly discriminated against in all sorts of settings. In the submission mentioned above VEOHRC drew specific attention to the need for prescribed medications to be protected. They said the commission receives multiple complaints of the same nature every year for a range of medications. For this reason, and it is critical, they recommended that the taking of prescribed medication itself be included as a characteristic of the person with a disability. In other words, it is not enough to imply the protection. The status quo is not working. The protection must be spelled out, and the loophole must be closed. VEOHRC went on to say that:

> For the avoidance of doubt the explanatory memorandum could give examples including medical marijuana to support interpretation of the provision.
>
> The advantage of this amendment is that it would clarify that a person who takes prescribed medication or receives treatment for a disability is protected from unlawful discrimination.

The key words here are 'protected' and 'unlawful discrimination'. Medicinal cannabis is lawfully prescribed in Australia to almost 700,000 patients. It provides immense relief to tens of thousands of people, many of whom have not found relief with other medications, and I repeat: it is a medication prescribed by a doctor. We are talking about veterans with PTSD, construction workers with workplace injuries, athletes with chronic pain, women going through menopause and people going through cancer treatment who cannot eat or sleep. They are medicinal cannabis patients and they deserve dignity, not discrimination.

One issue that MPs have raised with me in relation to this bill is impairment. I respectfully say that many people are ignorant on this issue, and they are certainly not more qualified than doctors. For starters, the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 already ensures that no-one is at work while impaired. All the necessary carve-outs are already there for operating heavy machinery or vehicles or for performing any tasks that would in any way be affected by medications. We are not talking about

that. We are talking about a teacher who takes medicinal cannabis for menopause so she can sleep the night before, about a student who takes Ritalin to be able to study and about a job applicant who discloses that they use low-dose opioids for an old knee injury.

I remind the chamber that the Equal Opportunity Act provides a positive duty to end discrimination, and we all have that opportunity today. The best possible outcome for all Victorians is that they can live and work without discrimination. This is doubly important for people with disabilities, including chronic illness, who have been left on the margins for too long. Inclusion is not just a buzzword; it should be practice. To deny the changes we are asking for is to support and uphold discrimination. For those of you who do that today: I beg you, as do people with disabilities, their families and their advocates, to stop talking about 'a fair go' and 'Victorians doing it tough'. There are few people doing it tougher and more in need of fairness than Victorians in pain, with disabilities and who are very unwell. It is our job to protect them and their fundamental human right to access treatments that work for them without fear of discrimination.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (16:52): I rise to speak to Mr Ettershank's bill that he presented to the Parliament in the last sitting week and which we are debating today. I want to thank him for reaching out to the Liberals and Nationals to explain the situation and very genuinely put the case. I have said to him that on a number of occasions I was in here listening to his contribution, and I thank him. I have got his contribution here. I have marked up some of the very relevant points that I think Mr Ettershank made in his contribution. As we were speaking before, I wanted to just clear up one thing, because were talking about the submission made by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) to the inquiry into workplace drug testing in Victoria. I want to clear this up because there were two options that were put. As he said, option 1 was amending the definition of discrimination in section 7 to clarify that where a person uses prescription medication or requires medical treatment for a disability this is a characteristic that a person with that disability generally has. That is what this bill aims to address in terms of amending the act, and I acknowledge that rather than the second option, which I know my colleague spoke of, which was adding a new attribute to section 6, such as prescription medication or medical treatment. That is where that confusion may have occurred. I want to thank him for pointing that out and seeking that clarification. I am very happy to put that out there, what he has described, for any confusion there may have been in the house.

Before I get to that, Ms Payne mentioned Lauren Jackson, and what a magnificent sportswoman she is and what a great ambassador for her sport and for our country. Indeed I have seen her in here; we have had that opportunity many times. Her story is a very powerful one. There is no question about that. She had years of injury from basketball, and as she describes it:

> 'It didn't end the way I wanted it [to] …
>
> 'There were highs and some pretty big lows as well.'
>
> Jackson underwent countless surgeries during her career and often resorted to painkillers.

This is from an article that I am referring to that the ABC published in December 2021.

> Chronic, debilitating pain around her knee, hip and lower back continued to plague her after she retired.

At that elite level you are subject to some pretty significant injuries with a sport like that. I know, having played netball, I am certainly suffering pain in my ankle and fingers, no question, but nothing to the extent of what Lauren Jackson sustained. She was then in that cycle of those painkillers, managing her very real chronic pain. Then she was prescribed medicinal cannabis to assist with that, and it worked – it got her off those painkillers. I think there is a huge benefit in this, and I have said it before. I know that you are very strong advocates on behalf of that, and I do believe there is a very great role to assist people with their chronic pain, cancer treatments and other areas of pain that people might sustain.

When you are talking about this bill, looking at disability and how that can be applied – so having a look at some of those areas – I do note that the inquiry report does say:

> The Committee also considered the question of discrimination against employees using medicinal cannabis. This is a difficult question to answer, as there is some complexity around whether workers being sanctioned for using medicinal cannabis are being discriminated against under the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (EOA) or Disability Act 2006 (DA).

In VEOHRC's submission there is a case study of that very example, and it was hard. The employer dismissed the employee, saying they were using medicinal cannabis, and for whatever reason in terms of their ability to drive or the issue that they had around potentially not being safe – they were driving in the company, and their responsibility was as an employer – I think that is where that complexity is. This Parliament has put in manslaughter laws. This government has said that employers have a responsibility to their employees if they do not provide a safe working environment. I do have some sympathy for both sides here – because of that complexity and the responsibility that employers have, and I equally understand the issue around the discriminatory component that has been highlighted in this. The inquiry report goes on to say:

> Employers can dismiss or discipline employees who don't comply with an AOD policy or whose test results contravene the policy. The complexity arises because, as noted in Chapter 2, legislation provides protection against discrimination on the grounds of disability. A person with a disability may be prescribed medication for that disability, including medicinal cannabis, which the Committee heard provides some level of protection under the EOA and DA.

That is what the committee heard. They also went on to say that they do accept that there are checks and balances under the EOA and DA and unfair dismissal laws – that is the Fair Work Act 2009. The cases included in this chapter of the report, as highlighted, do provide some protections for employees and guidance for employers. I do think those protections are there, and we need to manage this carefully. I know that there was a study that came out just recently on medicinal cannabis, and that was highlighted in various media outlets in the last two weeks. The study by the University of Sydney Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use, published in *The Lancet*, which is the largest ever review of its kind, found no evidence for cannabinoids as an effective treatment of depression, anxiety or PTSD. Now, they are not physical issues like Lauren Jackson had. It is saying that the evidence suggested that it could be beneficial in certain health conditions, but evidence for mental health disorders falls short. Therefore this is one of those contentious areas, I would suggest. But again, you have got to look at what the studies are and what we are being presented with and how therefore these may be assessed and interpreted by people with disability and what form of disability they actually may have. I do think it is a very complex area. I note that in this area, where they were looking at the evidence and saying that it did not have the evidence and that they could not see that there were benefits, they also said:

> We know from research that THC can cause anxiety, may lead to cannabis use disorder, and mental health issues such as psychosis in sensitive people.

We absolutely know that that happens, and we must be very cognisant and aware of those issues with some people that are sensitive. The president of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, in response to this particular study, said:

> In most cases, there are alternative evidence-based therapies which remain more appropriate, effective, and better understood …

As has been said by the peak stakeholder groups like the AMA and the RACGP, they know that medicinal cannabis has a role to play. They are not denying that at all, but there is more evidence coming in through these studies that are being conducted, and we need to be looking at that. I just want to put that on record because I do think there are some areas that need more work. Despite the submission from VEOHRC to the inquiry, there does need to be some more work in relation to this very important area. I did want to put that on record to say that there does need to be more work in this area. I think there is more evidence coming in.

I do understand the intent of Mr Ettershank, and I want to thank him for the really good engagement that we have had. I understand why he has presented this bill. I understand the reasons why. I understand his strong advocacy for wanting to do this as well. But I do believe that there are some safeguards in place now, and certainly more needs to be done in relation to the research for certain conditions. That includes the many Victorians with a disability, who should understand the reasons for decisions that are being made by a government. With those words I will conclude my contribution, because I know others want to speak on this important bill. It is an important bill. It is an important debate and one that again I want to thank Mr Ettershank for bringing before the Parliament.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (17:02): I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Greens in support the Legalise Cannabis Party's bill today, the Equal Opportunity Amendment (Medical Treatment) Bill 2026. The aim of this bill is simple: to end the discrimination against people with a medical condition who access medical treatments or take prescribed medication to treat a condition. This bill amends the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 to expand the definition of 'a registered health practitioner' and clarify that discrimination includes treating someone unfairly because they use prescription medication or require medical treatment for a disability. This comes after the 2024 inquiry into workplace drug testing in Victoria, with the final report's recommendation 3 calling on the Victorian government to amend the definition of 'discrimination' in the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 to clarify that where a person uses prescription medication or requires medical treatment for a disability this is a characteristic that a person with that disability generally has. This recommendation by the Legal and Social Issues Committee during the inquiry could make a real difference for many people who are currently facing discrimination based on the type of prescription medicine they take.

We know so many never proceed with complaints about their treatment because of time, lack of understanding of processes and systems and many other barriers. The Allan Labor government has sat on this recommendation for nearly two years. In their government response to the inquiry in November 2025 they say that any reforms to the Equal Opportunity Act 2020 would require thorough consideration of the resourcing and economic impacts on Victorians and comprehensive consultation with a range of stakeholders. However, we know from history that when this government is motivated to make change it happens. This amendment put forward in this bill by the Legalise Cannabis Party is sensible and is supported by many stakeholders who engaged through the inquiry process.

It is 11 years since medicinal cannabis was legalised in Victoria, and thousands have been prescribed this treatment. It is the Greens position that someone with a medicinal cannabis prescription should be treated the same as anybody else with any other medical prescription. It is about time our laws kept up with the reality for so many Victorians. No-one should experience discrimination for following doctors orders. People using medicinal cannabis for relief from pain and suffering should be given proper access to this clinically proven treatment. Stigma should not stop people from accessing medicine or penalise those who use it.

If we are serious about drug harm reduction, we must turn our focus to impairment and harm. Any medication that causes impairment should be taken seriously. But when people avoid taking prescribed medicines due to fear of discrimination and judgement, their symptoms worsen, and this can cause greater impairment and further health risks. We must shift to a health-based approach to drug use. This accepts the reality that many in our community use drugs. As the first essential step to reducing drug harm we must stop the discrimination. I commend this bill to the house.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (17:06): President, thank you very much for the opportunity to rise and make a contribution and for confirming just then that I will indeed have an opportunity to do so. I do that following the contributions of Ms Payne and Mr Ettershank, who I on odd occasions just refer to as my neighbours. I know that this is a bill that is enormously important to them and their agenda as members of the Legalise Cannabis Victoria party.

Legalise Cannabis Victoria's Equal Opportunity Amendment (Medical Treatment) Bill 2026 is a bill that is largely born out of the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into workplace drug testing.

I think it is worth putting on the record that whilst I am currently a participating member in the Legal and Social Issues Committee, this inquiry was conducted before I was able to join and so I cannot make a considered contribution about the work of that inquiry, but I say thank you very much to the members that participated in it. I know that the inquiry itself was something championed by my colleagues here. I would also like to take a moment to acknowledge the diverse range of organisations that contributed submissions to that committee inquiry. The breadth of perspectives provided was essential to understanding truly the complexity of this issue from every angle. I acknowledge the Victorian Trades Hall Council, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, the Police Association Victoria, the Penington Institute, AI Group, the Drug Advisory Council of Australia, Harm Reduction Australia and the Australian Medicinal Cannabis Association.

I do understand the position of the Legalise Cannabis Party. However, the chamber will be aware that as a matter of convention the government does not support private members bills and therefore will not be supporting the bill before us today. However, we are always committed to strengthening protections for Victorians with disability and ensuring that the law evolves and keeps pace with people's lived experiences, and this debate truly does give us a sincere opportunity to have a discussion on the issue of medical treatment, because that issue is certainly a worthwhile one. The government is undertaking the work to assess the viability of such reform into the future and has taken deliberate steps to strengthen equal opportunity frameworks over time, including reforming religious exceptions and expanding anti-vilification protections to include disability.

We recently legislated to expand anti-vilification protections to include the attribute of disability through the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Act 2025. This is a crucial and critical piece of legislation that the Liberal Party and their partners One Nation shamefully opposed. The Equal Opportunity (Religious Exceptions) Amendment Act 2021, which commenced in 2022, narrowed the scope of religious exemptions introduced back in 2011. This means that religious bodies and schools can no longer discriminate on a wide range of attributes in key settings and discrimination in government-funded services is now significantly restricted. These reforms demonstrate this government's commitment to strengthening protections in a considered and targeted way. We recognise that people with disability should not face discrimination because they are accessing prescribed medication or medical treatment. It was the Victorian Labor government who delivered stronger protections under the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 to prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability, including characteristics associated with that disability. These protections provide an important foundation, and the definition of 'discrimination' in section 7(2) makes it clear that the act extends to characteristics that a person with a disability generally has. It is arguable that this already captures circumstances where a person requires a prescribed medication or medical treatment. At the same time we recognise that the law must continue to keep pace, and we certainly are considering how best to ensure it reflects the reality of prescribed medication and treatment. There are a range of existing legal pathways available to support people with disability who experience discrimination, including under the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 and the Fair Work Act 2009. Employers also have a positive duty to eliminate, as far as possible, discrimination in their workplaces.

As we said in the government response to the inquiry into workplace drug testing in Victoria:

> Expanding the definition of discrimination in the Equal Opportunity Act to expressly capture the use of prescription medication or medical treatment for a disability requires further analysis and … consideration of the resourcing and economic impacts on Victorians …

This is certainly not a question of whether protections should exist, it is about ensuring any changes are clear, workable and do not create unintended consequences. I am mindful that some industries require robust alcohol and drug policies to ensure the safety of employees and the broader community, and our government is committed to ensuring that workplace drug testing treats all workers fairly, respectfully and with dignity.

Whether it is through nation-leading wage theft laws, the introduction of industrial manslaughter laws – laws that were introduced before I entered this place but certainly I was able to watch from afar and show my considered support for – the implementation of the vital nurse-to-patient ratios or the guarantee of free TAFE, which only passed yesterday in this chamber, this government has always placed the focus and interests of workers at the very forefront of our agenda. This bill encompasses the broader scope of medical treatment. It is important to reflect on Victoria's role as a pioneer in medical cannabis reform, as these progressive shifts are a landmark of Labor governments. In 2016 Victoria made history as the first Australian state or territory to legalise medicinal cannabis under prescription for therapeutic uses. This was not an overnight decision. It was a core commitment that we took to the 2014 election, one that we proudly delivered for the community. It is one that I have spoken about a number of times in this place. That landmark reform followed the 2015 release of a comprehensive report by the Victorian Law Reform Commission which carefully detailed how a law could be amended to allow people in exceptional circumstances to safely access medicinal cannabis. Since then this reform has been a genuine game changer for Victorians seeking therapeutic relief.

We recognise that people with a disability should not face discrimination simply because they are accessing these prescribed medications or other necessary medical treatments. And as we look to the future, we remain committed to ensuring our laws continue to evolve to reflect the lived realities of all Victorians. In other areas we believe in equal opportunity for Victorians with disability across the places in which they live, work and play. We provide for disability inclusion support in our schools, a reform delivered by this government to provide practical infrastructure support to kindergartens through the Building Blocks inclusion grants. We also support Victorians with disability with transport assistance through the multipurpose taxi program. When it comes to the NDIS, our state provides a $3.2 billion contribution each year to ensure Victorians get the support they deserve.

We are also taking the lead in housing, where our government is currently the largest provider of specialist disability accommodation in the entire state – and I think that was a contribution made by earlier speakers to this debate. I will also just perhaps take a moment to reflect on the disability inclusion in school settings. It certainly is something that I was able to examine as part of the school funding inquiry, which is currently underway through the Legal and Social Issues Committee. Can I just thank Mr McCracken for his work in chairing that inquiry; through it we have been able to hear from a range of witnesses – which is publicly available. I do look forward to that report being tabled in this place rather soon. We are not just providing beds in our state as part of that work I spoke about earlier with the specialist disability accommodation; we are also ensuring that buildings are fit for purpose through the construction of new homes. In fact there are 27 new homes, with 19 already completed and a further eight under construction. This level of commitment is what real progress looks like. It is about building a state where disability is not a barrier to a full life, whether it is in the classroom, it is in the workplace or it is in your home.

I have got to say, at the midway point that we are at of the current state disability plan, the vast majority of actions outlined in the plan are either completed or on track. Some of these achievements include the appointment of the chief accessibility advocate within the Department of Transport and Planning and the endorsement of the national principles for the regulation of assistant animals. There is Sport and Recreation Victoria's Together More Active program, investing $1.74 million to support 15 inclusion, participation or workforce development projects; there are disability liaison officers in schools responding to 37,500 referrals from people with disability seeking support to access health care; and I had the good fortune as part of the earlier testing with Metro Tunnel in fact to work with the disability inclusion folks to make sure that the Metro Tunnel is world-class in disability inclusion. It is certainly something that has been strongly fed back from disability advocates since taking on the Metro Tunnel and seeing those five new stations.

I want to perhaps, with the benefit of having the Minister for Mental Health here, also talk about the government's funding of the mental health interface program, which strengthens the interface between consumers, mental health inpatient services and the NDIS. There is also Homes Victoria, which is

using best-practice universal design principles in social housing, and there are 34 specialist disability practitioners that are supporting families with disability to access the NDIS and further supports. Something dear to my heart is Emergency Management Victoria's new position of senior adviser for accessible communication, which ensures that accessible public communications are available in our emergency preparation, response and recovery. Only yesterday was I speaking to representatives from autism organisations here in Victoria who were presenting and meeting with members in Queen's Hall about the importance of accessible communications for people with autism in emergency settings. I will say that work around advocating for people with disability never stops, and the Victorian disability advocacy program continues to fund agencies that support systemic and self advocacy for people with disability.

There is Family Safety Victoria and their embedded universal design of disability-confident and inclusive workforces in their policy and programs and planning for people with disability and their families, making sure that they are centred around considering the needs of victim-survivors of family and sexual violence. As I mentioned earlier, Victorian government schools are using disability inclusion funding to recruit and train staff and purchase and upgrade resources; there are1240 schools that have transitioned to new funding and that model. And of course across the entirety of the Victorian public sector the Victorian Public Sector Commission is leading work co-designing a neurodiverse employment toolkit to support the recruitment of and include workplace adjustments for neurodivergent employees, something that has come up, again, with some of the representatives that are here all week with the autism organisations here at the Parliament.

There are state-owned creative organisations, including the National Gallery of Victoria, the State Library Victoria, Museums Victoria and the Arts Centre Melbourne, that continue to be guided by disability plans and routinely host accessibility events. These are just some of the examples of the progress that this government is making towards a more inclusive and accessible state. As I have just outlined, there is work that continues, whether that is through the Legal and Social Issues Committee and our inquiry right now into school funding or the many, many advocacy meetings and efforts that are continuing to take place with disability organisations. Whilst I know that this is a very worthy bill, I reiterate my earlier position.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (17:21): I too rise to speak on the private members bill, the Equal Opportunity Amendment (Medical Treatment) Bill 2026, which seeks to amend the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 to provide for the protection of persons with disability from discrimination on the basis of using prescribed medication or receiving other medical treatment for that disability. The bill substantively seeks to insert some additional provisions in the 'Meaning of discrimination' section of the Equal Opportunity Act that effectively attempt to mirror an existing section in the act that describes what is meant by disability. The structure of the act, after describing what attributes are protected by the act, follows on in section 7 talking about what discrimination means and about direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of an attribute or a contravention of other sections and further that discrimination on the basis of an attribute includes discrimination on the basis of a range of other characteristics. There is that existing provision in section 7(3) that states that:

> For the purposes of –

the meaning of what discrimination is –

> … if a person with an impairment is accompanied by or possesses an assistance aid, being accompanied by or the possession of that assistance aid is taken to be a characteristic that a person with that attribute generally has.

Essentially, using that structure, the proposals put forward in this private members bill seek to add further clarification on the use of medications. The analogy being drawn is between aids or assistance equipment and medication being prescribed to the person by a registered health practitioner for the medical treatment of that disability, and the use of that medication is taken to be a characteristic that the person with that attribute generally has, and therefore the construction of the preceding sections of

the act would render the use of that medication properly prescribed to be one of the elements that is brought into the calculation of what is meant by discrimination against the attributes defined earlier in section 6 of the act.

The genesis of this private members bill from our colleagues Mr Ettershank and Ms Payne is a range of sources. There has been a lot of advocacy here. We considered some of these issues, and some of these issues were raised during the Legal and Social Issues Committee's inquiry into workplace drug testing, which I think was in 2023 or 2024 – the years and committees seem to blend into one at this point of the term. But there was some really interesting evidence given to that committee about how particularly workplace drug testing arrangements occur. Many witnesses came forward to that committee and described how their experience of being at work and using prescribed medication was being impacted by actions of their employer. Certainly on the face of it, what this private members bill seeks to do is to ameliorate and provide action with respect to that purported discrimination in protection of the attribute of a person with disability using medication.

Obviously there are a range of matters in terms of the operation of the Equal Opportunity Act that apply here. There is a fundamental commitment from the government to making sure that Victorians with disability have their legal rights protected. The range of matters that evolve and change in the broader community with respect to the discrimination and issues that people with disability face are ever-changing over time. We as a government are always cognisant of those issues, monitoring them and making sure that we strengthen those protections. The way that the government is seeking to progress these issues is not by way of a private members bill. As other speakers have articulated, whilst there may be some good reasons why some of the issues that this bill is seeking to deal with need to be addressed, the government is not of the view that this bill is the vehicle to address them.

What we have done is strengthen a range of matters with the equal opportunity framework here in Victoria. It was a year ago that we made some pretty significant changes to a range of anti-vilification laws that have changed and strengthened the protections that particularly people with disability need and brought stronger protections in those anti-vilification laws to include attributes of disability into the broader protections that exist within the anti-vilification framework. I think those laws that passed in this Parliament a year ago this week is just one example, a very concrete real and recent example. They come into effect some time later. They sought to and indeed have now included disability as an attribute that is protected by that anti-vilification framework.

I made a members statement earlier highlighting that of course the laws we passed last year that included disability as a protected attribute under the anti-vilification laws were opposed by the Liberal Party and by the National Party. As I mentioned in my members statement earlier today, we still have not been told by them why they voted against those laws last year. Earlier today I was talking about it in the context of religious and multicultural groups being the beneficiaries of the protection that that legislation introduced – the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Act 2025 that was put forward and passed by the Parliament last year. Earlier I was talking about the other provisions, but it is equally relevant now to remind the Parliament that the anti-vilification and social cohesion act we passed last year also includes the protection of disability as a protected attribute.

What I am trying to say with that is that it is very clear that the government takes the protection of people with disability and strengthening the rights of people with disability very seriously. We have made substantial improvements to the protective framework that exists in a range of laws. The issues that this bill seeks to address through the amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act are ones for which we have received considerable evidence, and we have received some quite heartfelt witness testimony as to what the benefits would be. It is just that the government does not view this private members bill as being the vehicle to achieve them.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:30): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned until the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until next day of meeting.

Statements on tabled papers and petitions

Department of Treasury and Finance

Budget papers 2025–26

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:30): I rise tonight to speak on budget paper 3 of the 2025–26 budget. When it comes to cost-of-living relief this is a government that is committed to ensuring that we are giving Victorians every support that they need. One of the great encapsulations of that is the power saving bonus, the latest round of which closed just a few hours ago, late last night. I have spoken to many constituents of mine in the south-east who availed themselves of this initiative, and it was great to see such a high take-up across the state, including from my electorate. Another measure is free public transport for the month of April. This is another important initiative. It is not going to fix everything, but it is an important shot in the arm for people who are doing it tough. I spoke to someone – not a constituent but from just outside my electorate – earlier today, who said what a difference that $200 was going to make for him, being able to put some more fuel in the car, to get groceries and have that extra bit of a buffer to sustain him through what could still be a very challenging time.

It is obviously a very difficult situation that we potentially find ourselves in as a state, as a nation and as a global economy right now, and with issues that are far beyond the control of any state or federal government in Australia it is important that we do what we can. Free public transport for a month is not going to fix everything, but it is something that we can do in the short term to provide cost-of-living relief for Victorians that need it. From early reports we know that the take-up of the initiative has been very strong. We have seen an uplift in, for example, train patronage across different parts of metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. With the new Metro Tunnel connecting the south-east and with the Frankston line, as a result, going back into the city loop, there has never been a better time to check out the train. My constituents in the south-east have the benefit of recently upgraded bus services such as the 798 and the 831 going deeper into the new estates in Clyde North, connecting these new communities to the rail network at Berwick or at Merinda Park or at Cranbourne. Free public transport is a very important initiative. Whilst we see continuing global conflicts and instability, it is good to see that Labor governments in Australia are focused on providing support, not at some theoretical future point but now.

I acknowledge the federal government this week, as a result of those national cabinet discussions, for that halving of the fuel excise that has come in from today. It will take a few days still for us to see the benefit at the pump, but a reduction of 26 cents per litre will make a very big difference, especially for those who for whatever reason are not able to use public transport during this month of free public transport, especially our farming communities. The Victorian Farmers Federation has come out welcoming the free public transport pledge because of the impact it can have in potentially keeping demand down on petrol and keeping reserves of fuel for those that need it most – for farmers and for those who do not have other forms of transport available to them. It is really critical that they can continue to do what they do best: putting food on our tables, exporting food and providing very, very important services and goods for us all.

As we navigate the waters of the next few weeks and months, however long this may take, this is not Australia's conflict. Whilst we are happy to see the fall of hideous despotic terrorists, it is not in Australia's interest to see global shipping channels shut down. Nor is it in anyone's interest to see anybody lifting sanctions on equally evil terrorist regimes such as those based in Moscow, and I would hope to see that our federal politicians continue to hold their nerve and their spine in not looking to release sanctions on those countries which seek to profit from death and destruction and from the victimisation of millions of people. We do have, as I understand, sufficient supplies in the interim and in the near future, and with legislation that will be in this place tomorrow I hope to see a bit more surety and stability in the ongoing fuel supply situation, which will give the state government better oversight of an accurate day-to-day picture of fuel levels that will help us to manage this very difficult

period for Victorians. But as we navigate the period, we will continue to do what we need to do to provide meaningful cost-of-living relief.

Department of Transport and Planning

Report 2024–25

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:35): I rise to speak on the Department of Transport and Planning annual report for 2024–25. Particularly I want to speak about public transport opportunities in Greater Shepparton, or should I say the lack of public transport opportunities in Greater Shepparton. Last Sunday we woke to the news of the government's big fanfare announcement that there would be free public transport for all Victorians on trains and buses in Victoria as a cost-of-living relief measure. That is all very well if you actually have trains and buses, but we do not have very much in the way of a service of trains or a bus network in Greater Shepparton. In fact what trains we do have going between Shepparton and Melbourne are often overcrowded. Constituents are reporting to me and to the member for Shepparton Kim O'Keeffe that they are being forced to stand on trains – all the way from Melbourne to Shepparton – or sit on the floor of the carriage, and this is just not good enough.

It is particularly not good enough because this government promised Shepparton that they would have nine return weekday services Monday to Friday and they would have five return services on a Saturday. Those additional services have not been forthcoming. They were supposed to have been delivered by 2023. We know this government fell behind with the track work and signalling work that needed to be done in order to deliver those additional services, but the government put out a press release last year to say that the track work and signalling work would be completed by 14 December. They then issued a new train timetable, in February. There are dozens of extra services for other regional lines, but not a single extra service on the Shepparton line. The nine return services Monday to Friday and the five on the weekend that were promised have not been included in their new timetable, despite them claiming that they have now finished the work on the tracks and the signals.

The government have also now changed their rhetoric from that we would get the nine services and the five on the weekend to 'The work creates the capacity for that number of trains', rather than actually delivering those services to the people of Greater Shepparton. They could solve some of the overcrowding by putting some extra carriages on the trains. There are only three carriages on most of the trains, and that causes a lot of the overcrowding. The people of Shepparton are demanding those additional services that they were promised by the Premier. The Swan Hill train on the weekend was also overcrowded. People were standing on that. They were actually packed in like sardines – and it is a very long way from Melbourne to Swan Hill. That was a huge concern, and I know that Jacqui Felgate raised that particular issue.

What we also need in Greater Shepparton is a review of our bus services. We have not had a bus service review for at least 15 years. We have a lot of new estates in Shepparton that were not even existent 15 years ago and are not connected to the public transport service via a bus service. You cannot get a bus in Shepparton that takes you to the industrial estate for work. So if you work in the industrial estate, forget getting public transport to work, because there is not a bus that goes there. It is not part of the bus network. If you live in Mooroopna, you could get a bus that would drop you in the CBD of Shepparton, right in the heart of the shopping centre, if you happened to work there. But if you work at the Marketplace, you could not possibly get a bus that would get you there any earlier than 10:38, or if you work at the Riverside Plaza it would be 10:20. These bus services are not friendly for people who are travelling to and from work, and they are not servicing our community adequately.

There are no buses to Mooroopna or to Tatura on a Saturday afternoon or a Sunday. People cannot get around our city without a better bus network. The Tatura bus – every day, Monday to Friday – actually leaves Tatura at 9:30, so there is no hope of it getting you to Shepparton in time for work. I think it takes about 40 minutes to get to Shepparton; it is a trip that should take 20. There are no bus connections to areas like Congupna and Nathalia or Tallygaroopna. Our public transport system in regional Victoria is almost non-existent and needs to be upgraded.

Alfred Health

Report 2024–25

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (17:40): I rise tonight to make a statement on the *Alfred Health Annual Report 2024–25*, which was tabled in October last year, because Alfred Health, as it was then known, runs some truly great and really important public healthcare facilities in the Southern Metropolitan Region. Obviously we have got the Alfred, home to Australia's largest intensive care unit, a major tertiary and trauma hospital that serves both our community and the broader Victorian community with distinction. We have got Caulfield Hospital, which runs a range of services but has a particular emphasis on rehabilitation and outpatient services, and we have Sandringham Hospital, which is busy and has a range of services that it runs, including a range of clinics, some important maternity services and also emergency and urgent care services.

These hospitals provide crucial services to the local community. I want to thank everyone who is part of providing health care to the local community: the doctors, the nurses, the administrative staff, the orderlies, the assistants – everyone who keeps these hospitals running to deliver the services and the health care that members of the community so rightly deserve and expect. They do a great job day in, day out, and I want to pay tribute to their efforts here today.

The wonderful hospitals that I have mentioned have been backed by Labor. Right across our state this Labor government has been investing in our public health system, has been investing in public hospitals. We have been providing those who work there with the support that they need but also investing in the infrastructure that is part of these great facilities to ensure that they have the world-class facilities that the community expects. Things like the medical equipment replacement program, the engineering infrastructure replacement program and the Metropolitan Health Infrastructure Fund have resulted in new and upgraded equipment and facilities being installed across the Alfred, Caulfield and Sandringham hospitals.

There has been a $292 million investment into the Alfred's trauma centre, a nation-leading trauma centre. We have upgraded the Alfred recently to deliver two major pieces of equipment: an MRI scanner for faster scans for more patients and a new stereotactic navigation system to support the neurosurgery team. In 2024 there was $4 million in funding to the Alfred to upgrade operating room equipment, including anaesthetic machines, operating tables and cardiac monitoring equipment. In 2024–25 the Alfred received $118 million to maintain its operating theatres, intensive care and inpatient units. In Caulfield, the Caulfield Hospital had a refurbished inpatient unit in 2018, and at Sandringham we saw the completion last year of a brand new outpatient facility, which is delivering shorter patient wait times and better service infrastructure. When you look at the range of services that are being provided in these hospitals, from acute emergency to inpatient and outpatient services, Labor has been investing in these facilities over our time in government.

We have been supporting the workforce in these hospitals, most recently obviously with a significant increase in pay to our hardworking nurses. Places like Sandringham Hospital are also benefiting from the investments that the Commonwealth is making into better primary health care through the provision of urgent care clinics. There is a partnership urgent care clinic at the Alfred, the Prahran urgent care clinic, that is delivering urgent care services, bulk-billed at no cost to anyone who walks through the door on the grounds of the Alfred Hospital, really changing the way that locals are able to access urgent and critical care in the community.

That is accompanied by the investments that the Labor government has made to things like the virtual emergency department, free to those who need it, with funding being tripled over the next three years. And there is a brand new women's health clinic opening up in Prahran. Add that to the Chemist Care Now program, which is providing more timely and cheaper access to medicines and prescriptions at more convenient locations in our community, you can see how Victorian Labor is building a modern

healthcare system that is responding to the needs of Victorians, delivering record numbers of surgeries and making it easier for Victorians to get the health care that they need when they need it.

Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Results of 2024–25 Audits: Local Government

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:45): This week the Victorian Auditor-General's Office tabled its report into the latest round of local government financial audits. While VAGO, the Victorian Auditor-General's Office, issued 179 clear audit opinions, the detailed findings of the report are deeply concerning. They are in fact a total indictment of the Allan Labor government, a government that loves to interfere with the internal politics of council chambers but abandons the sector when it comes to their finances. For anyone who cares to read this report, you will observe deteriorating financial performance, you will see mounting audit risks and you will notice concerning reporting practices by some councils. The minister will no doubt point out the headline result, a combined sector surplus of $2.9 billion, but strip out the federal assistance grants paid in advance and nearly 20 per cent would have reported a loss this year. Even more shockingly, only 13 per cent of councils can generate a surplus from their ordinary operations.

For those who are not particularly interested in the accounting, I can tell you that this has a tangible impact on ratepayers. Without strong revenue, our councils cannot fund the infrastructure they rely on. In 2024–25 the sector underspent its capital budget by $820 million, nearly 20 per cent below what councils themselves committed to spend. This is a five-year pattern. That means roads and bridges deteriorate. That means sporting facilities and libraries close down. VAGO has again recommended that councils review their capital budgeting processes, but ultimately the government needs to address the root cause: chronic underinvestment. Rural councils are bearing the sharpest end of these pressures. For some small shires, government grants represent a significant proportion of total revenue. Their ratepayer base is simply too small to carry their cost base. Expenses across the sector have grown faster than the rate cap every single year for the past five years. That gap between what councils can raise and what they must spend does not close itself. It requires serious reform. I always call on councils to ensure that the services they provide deliver measurable, specific and positive outcomes, but without sustained support from the state, small councils face genuine questions about long-term financial sustainability.

On governance and reporting quality, the report again raises serious concerns. More than half of all councils failed to submit their draft financial reports on time. Fourteen councils did not meet their legal obligation to present a compliant annual report at an open public meeting. Audit adjustments increased by 37 per cent compared to the prior year, and errors in performance statements more than doubled. Perhaps most troubling is the persistence of unresolved audit findings. High- and moderate-risk issues raised in previous years remain open across dozens of councils. Left unaddressed, these risks could become major problems in the future, problems that could cost councils both financially and reputationally. When it comes to the financial sustainability of the sector, when it comes to the growing gap between council revenues and costs and to the guidance and support that councils need to meet their obligations, the government has been totally absent. Ratepayers deserve better, and this Parliament demands better. This is an indictment on the Allan Labor government. This report into council sustainability by VAGO is a very telling piece of work.

Department of Transport and Planning

Report 2024–25

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:50): I rise to make a contribution on the Department of Transport and Planning annual report for 2024–25. This report is an important vista into the road map for Victoria's future. The 2024–25 annual report from the Department of Transport and Planning is not just a collection of financial tables but a blueprint for how we move, how we work and how we stay safe in Victoria. Victoria is officially the fastest growing state in Australia, with our

population set to hit 10 million people by 2051. Our roads are the arteries of our economy. This year's report marks a pivotal shift from just building more to building smarter and maintaining what we have with unprecedented discipline.

The headline for 2024–25 is the commencement of a landmark $6.6 billion 10-year road maintenance strategy. For the first time, the Department of Transport and Planning has moved away from short-term fixes towards a decade-long funding model and strategy. This provides the certainty needed to manage over 23,000 kilometres of arterial roads; it is not just about fixing potholes but it is about a risk-based, data-driven approach. By using advanced telematics and structural analytics, the Department of Transport and Planning is now prioritising repairs before they become costly failures, ensuring that the $400 billion of state-owned infrastructure we share is managed with maximum efficiency.

We cannot talk about Victorian roads without talking about our regions of course. Our regional economy is now worth $118 billion, and the 2024–25 report highlights significant milestones in regional infrastructure. From the completion of major stages in the Princes Highway east duplication to critical intersection upgrades in Shepparton and Portland, the focus has been on freight productivity. The department is ensuring that Victorian farmers and manufacturers can get their goods to port faster and safer. Furthermore, through the regional growth initiative, we are unlocking land for new housing by investing in the trunk infrastructure, which is the essential roads and services that make new communities possible.

Safety remains the department's north star, and this year the Department of Transport and Planning, in partnership with Safe Transport Victoria, launched the Ride Smart, Ride Safe campaign and expanded the use of AI and data to identify high-risk road segments. The Department of Transport and Planning is also embracing the 30-kilometre-per-hour standard speed zone policy for local streets near schools and high pedestrian areas. This is a direct response to Infrastructure Victoria's recommendations to make our streets more livable.

On the technology front, we are rolling out modern contactless ticketing and smarter traffic signalling to reduce the stop-start congestion that costs our businesses millions of dollars in lost time. And finally, this report integrates road investment with the broader *Plan for Victoria*, so the Department of Transport and Planning is no longer looking at roads in isolation. The 2024–25 period saw the alignment of transport with housing, for example, specifically with the train and tram zone reforms, which aim to build 300,000 new homes near existing transport corridors. By focusing on activity centres, we are reducing the burden on the road network, encouraging active transport and ensuring that as we grow we do so sustainably.

In conclusion, the 2024–25 Department of Transport and Planning annual report shows that the department is meeting the challenge of growth head-on. With a $6.6 billion secured investment for maintenance, a renewed focus on regional freight and a smarter data-led approach to safety, we are ensuring that every Victorian, whether in the heart of the CBD in Melbourne or in the furthest corner of Gippsland, enjoys a journey that is safe, reliable and efficient.

Petitions

Firearms regulation

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:54): I move:

> That the petition be taken into consideration.

I rise this evening on behalf of law-abiding firearm owners and the more than 12,500 people who contributed their signatures – a voice in Parliament. To everyone who took the time to sign the petition and to those present in the gallery tonight, your commitment to fairness, to evidence and to common sense deserves to be heard. Those behind this petition represent a broad cross-section of our community, from farmers to pest controllers to sporting shooters to hunter conservationists to

volunteers and to families, both in regional Victoria and in Melbourne, who comply with some of the strictest rules and regulations in the world. They are not asking for special treatment. They are not asking for anything out of the ordinary. They are asking to be treated fairly and not as suspects. They have told me this is the truth. They are concerned about the direction the Allan Labor government is taking with firearms in Victoria, not because they are opposed to public safety – far from it – but because they are worried that so-called reform may drift into overreach and they are being targeted when the wrong people are not being addressed.

Every Victorian supports community safety. Licensed firearm owners, who are arguably some of the most scrutinised in this state, support it strongly. I acknowledge former police chief commissioner Ken Lay, who said to me that he is committed to evidence-based reform. That has to be the fact; it must be evidence based. This is the pillar, because genuine public safety is not achieved through symbolism, it is achieved by targeting criminals, targeting criminal access, strengthening enforcement and disrupting traffic. The evidence is clear: illegal firearms are overwhelmingly sourced through theft, through trafficking and through importation, not through licensed, compliant owners.

When proposals emerge, such as what we have seen New South Wales adopt, such as arbitrary ownership caps, shorter licence terms or restrictions unrelated to actual risk, people rightly ask, 'How does this stop criminals?' Well, it does not. The wrong approach risks placing additional burden on those who already do the right thing, while diverting attention away from resources and the criminal market that is the issue here. This is where principles of proportionality matter. In a free and democratic society regulation should be based on risk, not on assumption. It should respect the rights of law-abiding Victorians who demonstrate time and again their compliance and their responsibility. As one stakeholder said, 'One firearm in the wrong hands is one too many, but multiple firearms in the hands of safe, compliant Victorians do not create a risk.' That is a commonsense principle.

The petition does not call for weaker laws, it calls for smarter ones. It calls for real-time, effective national registration systems that support policing, stronger enforcement against traffickers and organised crime, continuous monitoring of licence eligibility so risks can be addressed as they emerge and proportionate security requirements based on actual risk, not arbitrary limits. These are practical and responsible measures that enhance our safety and do not undermine the rights of those who follow the law. This is because the petition is not just about regulation, it is about rights and responsibility.

The government should not and cannot default to overreach. The lawful Victorians should not be treated as a problem. Policy should be guided by evidence, not assumption. Law-abiding firearm owners are part of our communities – the very fabric of our good communities. They contribute to regional economies. They contribute to conservation. They contribute to food security and hunting and sporting tradition. We on this side of Parliament respect them enormously, and they deserve our respect. They deserve a government that distinguishes clearly between them and those that operate outside the law.

I say to the Allan government: do not take the easy path of symbolism. Focus on what actually works: intelligence, enforcement, targeting criminal access and protecting community safety without eroding the rights of those who are really doing the right thing already, because the imbalance is not about good policy, it is about maintaining public trust. These people are part of our community. They deserve our trust. The Liberals and Nationals support our law-abiding firearm owners.

Interjections from gallery.

The PRESIDENT: Can I indicate to the gallery that that is your one round of applause – good for you. The gallery does not contribute to the debate, so if you do it again or you yell out something, I will just leave and the day will be finished, but thank you. It is great that you are here and it is great that you are interested, so you are welcome.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (18:00): I want to start by saying thank you to my colleague Ms Bath for tabling this petition and thank you to all of the people who signed the petition. In keeping with the President's comments but also the rules of this chamber, I am, as a member of this chamber, not meant to interact with the gallery, but I thank you for being here. It gives a good opportunity for the government to provide some clarity about where we are at with this process and some context as well.

The first thing I want to say is no decisions have been made. There has been no decision made on anything in relation to firearms at all at this point. Just to give you some information firstly, I am a Western District, Warrnambool resident who grew up on a farm. There were plenty of firearms at our place, although none of us had much faith in my father's shot – this is going to sound un-PC – so we used to prefer him to kill a snake with a stick rather than a gun, because we were worried about where the shot would go. So I know the importance of the use of firearms in farming, and I would also be incredibly supportive, as most of us here would be supportive, of the retention of responsible use and possession of firearms for agricultural and other professional purposes and for sporting and recreational activities.

Just to give you a bit of background on this matter, after leading the world for three decades, Australia cannot become complacent on guns. We are backing the work of the national cabinet and further strengthening our gun laws in partnership with the federal government. Ken Lay undertook an important review of how we can do that, and we will share our next steps once his recommendations have been considered by the government. Mr Lay looked at Victoria's current laws and New South Wales's recent legislation and consulted with Victorian police and community groups to support the national approach and develop recommendations to bring our gun laws up to date to reflect the risks today. The government will release the final report into Victoria's firearm laws alongside our response.

First, ministers agreed to strengthen gun laws across the nation and have commissioned their police ministers and attorneys-general to develop options, including some of the things mentioned in the petition, so there is some alignment with what is expressed in the petition: accelerating work on the national firearms register; making sure administrations can be aligned; ensuring that criminal intelligence to underpin firearms licensing can be used – and that is consistent I think with the petition's mention of that; limiting the number of firearms to be held by one individual; limiting open-ended firearms licences; and making it a condition of a firearm licence that someone must be an Australian citizen.

As I am closing in on my time limit, the important issue here is that the act of terror that prompted this review shows us that regular review and a check that our gun laws are fit for purpose is the responsible thing to do, and that does not mean that any babies are going to be thrown out with the bathwater. We are continuing to work with the Commonwealth and our state and territory colleagues to strengthen the National Firearms Agreement and deliver, where possible, nationally consistent approaches to firearms reform. This act of terror reinforces the need for a consistency of approach on who has access to firearms in that context. That is really the focus and the trigger point, pardon the pun, for the review that Mr Lay conducted for us; that is what sits behind the whole process. In closing I would just like to say a big thankyou for asking the question and raising it in this chamber. I was very pleased to give an update.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (18:05): In the short time I have got available to me I will talk about Ms Bath's petition, signed by 12,570 people. It says to 'reject changes without consultation'. I might mention a little thing that I would have changed it to: 'reject changes'. There is absolutely no reason to be changing any laws at the moment. They would have worked if the government in New South Wales and the federal government had done their job. There are 220,000 or so licensed shooters in Victoria and nearly a million Australia-wide. One licensed person did that, and that person should not have had a licence. The events of Bondi were a failure of government, both the New South Wales government and the federal government. A firearms prohibition order would have gone a long way to fixing this, if not fixing it, but we do not know, and we may never know who forgot and who did not

tell who or whatever. But the punishing of New South Wales shooters within eight days of that event was morally corrupt. It was an absolute demonstration of the inability to discern right from wrong by the government, and it was copied from Roger the cabin boy in WA, who just decided one day he was going to put all these laws on WA shooters with no reason.

We are moving down to some of the stuff that they wanted to do. My favourite will always be, until the day I die, that belt-fed magazines would suddenly become belt-fed shotguns. They do not exist. There are belt-fed firearms, but there is no such thing as a belt-fed magazine. And belt-fed shotguns? I am not aware of one, though you could probably make one. Perpetual licences – absolutely. Can I have one of them before they grandfather them so that I do not have to do that pesky paperwork every three to five years, depending on which licence I have got? Because at the moment Victoria Police every few years goes through everything I have got. I have got to have a genuine reason. I have got to do all this. I have got to do all that. They check to make sure I am a fit and proper person. As far as I am aware, there is no state in this country that gives a perpetual licence. It was more just rubbish designed to get people to think what they were doing was legitimate.

The national firearms register – we already had CrimTrac, which did not work properly. If they want to waste $150 million to God knows what – it will actually end up being millions of dollars on a national firearms register, which still will not fix the problem – then happy days, but it is our tax money they are wasting. Real-time monitoring: every time you run what I believe is still the LEAP – law enforcement assistance program – database and every time you have an interaction with the police, they should run it through and give you an MNI number, a master name index number. This is stuff I remember from 26 years ago. That is connected to everything you have. It is like a key for a database. Anyway, the long and the short of it is that as you put it in there it asks if you have got a firearms interest. So you go and have a look, and that interest may be a criminal or a law-abiding person. They go in and they check, and if you have got a shooters licence and you have done something bad, I am going to be getting the idea that the first call will be to the licensing and regulation division – on Wednesday when they answer the phones – to have someone go out there and take your licence from you.

There is nothing new under the sun with what they want. We already have it. We already do what they want. Every time I want a firearm, Victoria Police check that I have a reason for it. It is part of my genuine reason and genuine need and all those sorts of things. They already control how many firearms I have. Nothing which has been proposed by or done in New South Wales and WA and may end up being done here – we still do not know – is new. But as Ms Ermacora said, the report has not been published, and the reply will be published with it, come what may. I do not accept any changes. There is absolutely no reason for them.

For those that feel I am feathering my own nest out there – for the five people that may be watching – tonight is the first night of Passover. I am giving up time with my family for a celebration, and it was my family's people that were targeted by this. If I thought for one second that there was a public safety outcome in any of the stuff that happened in WA and New South Wales, I would be all over it, but there is not. I am going to finish this off with a saying that I am getting fond of now: 'We didn't do it. We aren't the problem. Leave us alone.'

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (18:10): I do want to thank the over 12,500 people that signed this petition sponsored by my colleague Melina Bath, because this petition does raise serious concerns about rushed reform. It is a petition that seeks fairness rather than rushed decisions that are not based on evidence. The Nationals at both the state and federal level have highlighted that Australia already has some of the toughest gun laws in the world, and we need to ensure that law-abiding firearm owners are not penalised unnecessarily. We are open to sensible and proportionate changes like a national firearms register and ensuring firearm licences are limited to Australian citizens, but not legal changes that will impact law-abiding firearm owners without making any difference to terrorists and criminals. I am not a gun owner. I am not a shooter. I have attended days where you can participate, and I really enjoyed it. I can see that people do enjoy participating as a sport, and we are fortunate in Australia to

have people that are competing on the world stage who do us proud because of their skills and abilities in shooting.

The attack at Bondi was absolutely horrific, and the federal government in response flagged legislative reforms, and that triggered a number of emails to my office. I think it is important to reflect the sentiments that I received from people. One was just referring to it being like golf for them – you need different clubs for different purposes, and they were pointing out that it is the same with shooting. They also mentioned guns owned by their ancestors and the heritage value of that and how important it is, and they talked about all the restrictions and requirements that are on them as a responsible firearm shooter. There was another letter that I received, from a resident near Bendigo, that talked about the different purposes that guns are used for; using the appropriate tool for the intended purpose improves safety. In some contexts higher capacity reduces the need for repeated reloading, lowers the risk of mishandling under stress and supports humane outcomes in pest control and animal welfare. Arbitrary limits do not improve safety and may create unintended risks. I received another email that highlighted the extreme ideology that we have seen, and they referred to the government permitting weekly pro-Palestine protests in Melbourne's CBD – despite creating fear and loss of business, nothing was done. I received another email from a former Australian Defence Force member with over two decades of service, and he talked about the existing firearm laws that are already highly restrictive and the failures that have occurred in laws that already exist. I received another that referred to the importance of controlling feral animal populations and the impact of that. They have been a responsible firearm owner for 60 years.

I could go on, but I will keep my comments short. I think it is important for the Premier and the Prime Minister to consider all the facts that contributed to the horrific attack at Bondi instead of targeting responsible firearm owners. Strong leadership is needed to keep our community safe and to honour the 15 innocent victims who lost their lives at Bondi. We need to stop the spread of hateful ideology and hold fast to Australian values that ensure freedom for all.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:14): I am also pleased to rise, on behalf of the Libertarian Party, to talk about this petition. Firstly I would like to congratulate all of the petitioners for putting this forward and thank Ms Bath for sponsoring this petition. The Libertarian Party has a long history of supporting law-abiding firearms owners. In fact our previous senator Senator Leyonhjelm literally wrote the book on Australian firearm laws. Also the Libertarian Party recently put in a submission to the Lay review, and I take the government's point that no decisions have been made yet.

I think law-abiding firearms owners in Australia have been demonised for far too long. Every time that there is some sort of incident like the terrible tragedy that happened at Bondi, people are looking at the tool rather than the ideology – the ideas, which are actually the problem, not firearms owners. Law-abiding firearms owners are model citizens. You have to be in order to have a firearms licence. You do the slightest thing – you raise your voice too loud in a pub – and you can get into trouble. I remember during the pandemic my office was contacted by many firearms owners who were concerned about exercising their right to peaceful assembly, to protest, because they were concerned about losing their firearms licences. They are treated so badly by many in the community, and I just think it is wrong. They have legitimate uses, and the way that they have these irrational laws all the time restricting their rights and trying to take their rights away is wrong. I concur with Mr Bourman: we should not be looking at more restrictions. There probably are changes that should be made to the laws, things like looking at allowing suppressors and getting rid of appearance laws and other things that are part of our policy. I am open-minded about the idea of better sharing intelligence between federal and state agencies to identify people that should not have a firearm, because they are criminals or potentially terrorists, but I do not think that we should be putting more restrictions on law-abiding firearms owners.

If the government did do a buyback, they would not have the money for it. We are broke anyway. It is going to cost billions if they do something like this. It is not financially feasible, it is not right and it

is not protecting the rights of Victorians. Similarly to Mr Bourman's point, if I believed that it would prevent another Bondi or if I believed it would prevent harm to the Jewish community, who were targeted in this particular attack, I would be very open-minded about it. But it will not. It will not protect anyone from anything. All it will do is take away Victorians' rights, which is the last thing that we want to do. When we are confronted by hateful ideologies that hate the West, that hate everything about us, the thing that we need to do is double down on defending our rights, not give them away.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (18:17): By the standards of parliamentary petitions Ms Bath's petition today has been signed by a huge number of Victorians – 12,570 to be precise. I thank all those petitioners, and I also thank Ms Bath for being the supporter of the petition, the sponsor. Those 12,570 people and many more are sick of being treated as though they are the problem when they are not. They are sick of governments that cannot tell the difference between a law-abiding farmer, hunter or sporting shooter and a violent criminal or extremist. I am not saying firearms laws do not matter; of course they do. But Victoria already has some of the strictest firearms laws in the country, and the overwhelming majority of licensed shooters comply with them. They comply because they understand the seriousness of firearms ownership and believe in doing the right thing.

The petition is about something simpler. It asks: will the government consult honestly with those affected before making changes, or will it once again arrive at a predetermined conclusion and then dress it up as consultation? It is a reasonable worry. Too often in this state, reviews begin with the answers already written. Country Victorians are summoned for so-called consultation only to find the decision has already been made by people inside the tram tracks of Melbourne who do not understand their lives, their work or their communities. The truth is that lawful firearms users are not the threat. The failures of recent years prove this. It was not some farmer in Western Victoria with a registered firearm locked in a safe. It was not a licensed duck hunter complying with the law. It was not a legitimate gun owner following every rule and renewing every permit on time. When governments fail it is always easier to make a scapegoat of the people who do the right thing – the people who are visible, licensed, compliant and easy to regulate. For many in my electorate, outside the political bubble, firearms are not some abstract, alien, scary item. They are the tools of trade and part of everyday life. Farmers use them for pest control and stock protection. Professional kangaroo harvesters use them as part of humane and necessary wildlife management.

Recreational hunters contribute to local economies, regional tourism and conservation outcomes. Duck hunters in particular have every right to be angry at the way they have been smeared in recent years, despite the enormous work groups like Field & Game have done in wetland protection, habitat restoration and research. This government too often ignores those realities. It ignores the economic contribution, the conservation contribution and the cultural tradition. Above all it ignores the basic fact that those involved are overwhelmingly decent, responsible citizens. There is no gun bill before the Parliament at this stage. We do not know what the Labor government is planning, but our starting position is crystal clear: any changes to firearm laws must be practical, proportionate and based on genuine consultation, not ideology. They must recognise the legitimate needs of lawful firearms users, especially in regional Victoria, and not impose one-size-fits-all rules designed by people with no idea how firearms are actually used outside the tram tracks.

The biggest failure of government in this space, state and federal, has been its inability to confront the cancer in our society: the growth and importation of hate, extremism and radical ideology. That is the real driver of terror and violence, not lawful gun ownership. Those 12,570 petitioners are asking for something very reasonable. They are asking to be heard. They are asking this government not to make them pay for failures that are not theirs. We need a government with the courage to go after the real problem in our society: the hatred, extremism and radicalisation that fester while ministers chase headlines at the expense of people who have done nothing wrong. These 12,570 petitioners are not asking for special treatment, they are asking to be heard. I commend the petition to the house.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:22): I thank Ms Ermacora, Mr Bourman, Mrs Broad, Mr Limbrick and Mrs McArthur for contributing to this very important debate. I want to hold

Ms Ermacora to her word when she said, 'We're not going to throw the baby out with the bathwater.' Let us see that that is the case, because any change to gun laws by this government will be seen as an indictment of the government. There are far more than 12,000 people; I just kept it short to get the debate in so that we could debate this before the review came back to government and government brought laws into this house and into this Parliament. So no changes, and the baby and the bathwater had better be still in the bath in a month or two's time.

I want to thank Ryan Weeratunge. He is a most amazing person. He is a Field & Game person. He is the actual writer of this petition today. He lives in Brunswick. He lives in Melbourne. He is a Melbournite. He hunts. He harvests his food. He hunts for his food. He hunts for deer. He hunts for duck. He is like very many other people – thousands and thousands of people. He cares about his community, he cares about feeding his family and he cares about being law-abiding while being there but also enjoying the harvest that is millennia old – as long as we have had humans in this world. I want to thank the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia, I want to thank the Australian Deer Association and the Victorian Deer Association, and I particularly want to thank Field & Game because I have been out with these hunter conservationists and I have seen the work that they do out in our communities restoring habitat like you have not seen for all wildlife – all flora and all fauna. We should be thanking these people for their conservation, not ridiculing them or creating uncertainty. Let this be a strong message to government: no changes. Respect our law-abiding firearm owners.

Motion agreed to.

Adjournment

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (18:24): I move:

> That the house do now adjourn.

Wilson Botanic Park

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:24): (2461) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Local Government, and the action that I am seeking is for the minister to update me on the obligations of local governments under the Local Government Act 2020 to consult with, reflect on and act in the interests of residents and ratepayers. Residents in Casey have raised concerns with my office and me regarding the project to deliver an overflow car park at Wilson Botanic Park in Berwick. I understand that as part of the community consultation process undertaken by council, respondents had some concerns regarding this project. These include the traffic impact on Kramer Drive as a comparatively narrow residential street, safety concerns both on Kramer Drive and at the site of the overflow car park and the impact on vegetation. It would go a very long way towards ameliorating the situation if residents had an explanation for why the council did not proceed with alternative sites at Wilson Botanic Park and with details of the program, including gate access, lighting and safety factors relating to this project. Whilst I have no reason to believe that the council has acted improperly or outside its purview, I do have concerns and have written to council to express them on behalf of residents of Kramer Drive and surrounds. I would like to thank Sophie Kuzakov and other residents for bringing this issue to my attention and for making their voices heard.

Ballarat train station

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (18:26): (2462) The new Ballarat railway station overpass opened this week to much fanfare. Let me be clear: I will always support accessibility, and I will always support disability inclusion – that is not the issue for me. The issue for this project was the cost, because what should have been a sensible, practical project has turned into a case study of government excess: $51 million of excess, for an overpass that local experts, engineers and common sense advocates tell us could have been done for much, much less – $6 million or thereabouts, and frankly, that is being generous. That leaves at least $45 million not invested, not allocated, but wasted.

When governments waste money like this there is always a cost, because $45 million could have done a lot. It could have funded 330 teachers – teachers that our schools desperately need – or 300 police officers, fully equipped and ready to serve. It could have delivered 375 nurses, easing pressure on our hospital system, which is already stretched to breaking point. It could have provided 50 new trucks to the CFA, resources that our volunteers desperately need, or 125 ambulances, instead of people waiting for too long. It could have delivered 75 new classrooms or 2500 kinder places, giving kids the best possible start. It could have delivered 100 homes that families desperately need or 45 kilometres of resurfacing on our roads – roads in western Victoria that I know my constituents go on every single day. It could have funded 345 mental health clinicians or cleared 9000 surgeries off the waiting list. It could have repaired country bridges, built mobile towers or finally fixed the black spots that my constituents experience every day. That is what $45 million looks like. No ribbon cutting, no press release – real services, real outcomes and real priorities.

When a government spends $51 million on something that should really cost $6 million, that is not just bad budgeting, that is a choice – a choice to waste, a choice to ignore what really matters, a choice to put headlines ahead of people. Victorians pay more and get less. And while we on this side are busy backing Victorians, those opposite are busy backing bikies, backing cover-ups and backing con artists. The action that I seek from the Minister for Transport Infrastructure is to conduct a review into the Ballarat railway station redevelopment and release those findings publicly. Locals deserve answers, and we will be fighting to get them.

Hemp industry

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:29): (2463) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Agriculture, and the action I seek is for the minister to commit to introducing standalone industrial hemp legislation and support greater investment in the hemp industry, including into its potential use as a biofuel and building material alternative. In 2024 I tabled a bill calling for a standalone hemp act in Victoria. Following this the government responded to the inquiry into the industrial hemp industry in Victoria and supported almost all of its recommendations. In their response they acknowledged the need to develop the hemp industry in Victoria, the barriers that exist in the planning system and an openness to reform. However, it is now 2026 and we continue to hear from hemp producers that significant barriers still exist to licensing. The industry is also very frustrated that Victoria is lagging in hemp infrastructure and processing capabilities. In short, while hemp has a global value of many billions of dollars, Victoria is missing out. Hemp has a myriad of benefits. It is incredibly versatile, resilient and a sustainable crop. Hemp is a miracle biofuel. It can be used to feed livestock, in textiles, paper and beauty products and as an alternative to plastic and much less sustainable building materials. We are currently in a fuel crisis. Moreover, building materials are very expensive, and even if you can afford them, they are in short supply. The multiple crises Victorians face of oil shortages, cost-of-living pressures and lack of affordable housing can all be solved by hemp.

Is there a dirtier building material than concrete? Consider hempcrete, a sustainable carbon-negative alternative. It is made from industrial hemp. It is lightweight, fire resistant, mould resistant and a brilliant insulator for both weather and noise. Dr Ernesto Valenzuela is a senior lecturer in agricultural economics at La Trobe University and says that hempcrete panels combine very low embodied carbon with strong insulation, fire resistance and moisture regulation. They suit prefabrication, reduce onsite emissions and use plant-based inputs that can be grown regionally in Australia, supporting rural jobs while helping the construction sector meet long-term climate and housing challenges.

Despite the known benefits of industrial hemp, we continue to hear about problems of social licence. We know of Victorian farmers who, despite council approval, have faced neighbour and other objections to their hemp applications, forcing them to go through onerous and lengthy appeals processes. We have Victorian arable land ready to go. Hemp can replace native logging. The Victorian government has committed to ending native timber harvesting on public land. This affects over a thousand timber workers and 200 businesses, and hemp is the answer. I ask: will the minister commit to introducing standalone industrial hemp legislation as a matter of priority and support greater

investment in the hemp industry, including its potential use as a biofuel and building material alternative?

Smile Squad

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (18:32): (2464) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas. Free dental care for kids is expanding. The Smile Squad is now rolling out to low-fee non-government schools across Victoria. The action I seek is an update on how the Smile Squad expansion is ensuring no child misses out on free dental care.

Protective services officers

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (18:32): (2465) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police. The action that I seek is for the minister to ensure that protective services officers start their patrols at Mernda train station earlier in the afternoon. My constituents in Yan Yean district are seriously concerned for their safety while riding the train and walking through the Mernda train station, because crime is out of control under the Labor government. Crime in general has gone up by 56 per cent in the City of Whittlesea police service area since the Labor government was re-elected in 2022. The growing number of crimes carried out specifically on public transport or around train stations and bus stops is even more alarming. The latest data from the Crime Statistics Agency shows that criminal incidents on public transport in the City of Whittlesea, which includes Mernda station, have gone up by 137 per cent in the last two years. It is clear that public spaces like trains and train stations are hotspots for crime, as thugs brazenly carry knives or weapons and use them to rob or assault members of the public.

I was recently contacted by a resident of Epping who regularly commutes on the Mernda line. He told me how fights often break out on the train, causing mayhem and forcing bystanders to fear for their own safety. Just the other day he was inspired by the example of Aidan Becker and tried to step in and help someone who was being attacked. Thankfully only a few punches were thrown and no-one sustained any serious injuries. The fight ended when the train arrived at the station and the doors opened. The PSOs eventually helped the victim off the train. But my constituent was rightly worried about a breakdown in communication that meant that the PSOs were not alerted to the fact that a criminal assault was in progress on the train as it was pulling up to the platform that they were patrolling. Parents in particular are deeply worried that there is no protection for their kids at train stations in the dangerous hours after school has finished and before the PSOs start their shifts. Currently PSOs start their shift at Mernda station at 6 pm, but this is 2 hours after students have started travelling home from school. When winter arrives and the days shorten it will start getting darker even earlier, making members of the public feel uneasy at stations that have a reputation for crime. It was revealed late last year that the Allan Labor government were planning to strip PSOs from 120 train stations, but they refuse to reveal which stations. Victorians deserve to feel safe when they are travelling on public transport, walking through train stations or waiting at bus stops. Under this Labor government they are often gripped with fear. I urge the minister to ensure that PSO patrols start their shifts earlier in the afternoon at Mernda train station.

Goulburn Valley Health women's health services

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (18:35): (2466) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for a fully funded specialist endometriosis nurse to be made available at Goulburn Valley Health in Shepparton. March was Endometriosis Awareness Month, a time to increase understanding of this chronic and often debilitating condition. Endometriosis affects one in nine women in Australia, yet it remains widely misunderstood and often takes years to diagnose. A constituent by the name of Emily reached out to me with her personal experience, which truly highlighted the need for greater awareness, support and resources within our regional community. Emily's journey has involved ongoing pain and challenges in being heard and navigating a system that can be difficult to access outside of major cities. Sufferers of endometriosis often have their pain and symptoms dismissed by the medical fraternity as just period pain or women's problems.

If this were an illness men suffered, they would not be ignored and told to 'suck it up', like many women have reported. Endometriosis can significantly impact a woman's quality of life, including her ability to study, work and have healthy relationships, and even everyday activities, with many having to travel long distances to attend specialist appointments for diagnosis and ongoing treatment, putting a heavy burden on them financially, physically and emotionally. Last year the Victorian government conducted an inquiry into women's pain, with 13,000 women and girls responding. Of those respondents, 90 per cent of women said they had suffered pain for over 12 months, with many experiencing pain daily. A specialist nurse in the Goulburn Valley would provide care, support and education for many women dealing with the condition. Ideally I would like to see specialist endometriosis nurses in all regional health areas, because women in the regions deserve the same care as their metro counterparts. The action I seek is for a fully funded specialist endometriosis nurse to be made available at Goulburn Valley Health in Shepparton.

Suburban Rail Loop

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:38): (2467) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me on one of the SRL East sites to show the progress as major construction is steaming ahead. Last week some exciting news was shared for Box Hill locals, as new open spaces that are being delivered as part of SRL East were released. Two permanent parks will be built at Ellingworth Parade and Watts and Court streets, creating spaces for Box Hill locals to gather and play throughout construction of SRL East. These green and accessible spaces will feature places to sit, relax and exercise within walking distance of the future SRL East station in the heart of Box Hill. When the SRL East in Box Hill is delivered this will give locals even more quality green open space within walking distance to world-class public transport, homes, jobs, schools, universities and health care. We are committed to ensuring the neighbourhoods around each of the six SRL East stations are thriving so these communities, like at Box Hill, can continue to grow stronger in years to come. This is a once-in-a-generation project that will only be delivered under the Allan Labor government. We have only ever had one position on this city-shaping project, and we are not wasting a second in getting on and getting it done. While those opposite have no credible answers for the big challenges facing Victorians, we are on the side of Victorians with a clear plan for our future. Under the Liberals Victorians are on their own. A Liberal–One Nation coalition will sack 3000 workers, slash 70,000 homes and let tunnel-boring machines sink into the ground. The Allan Labor government is steaming ahead with major construction as TBMs are onsite, gearing up with the tunnelling to kick off this year with over 3000 workers currently on our SRL sites.

Hobsons Bay City Council

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (18:39): (2468) My adjournment is for the Minister for Local Government, and the action I seek is that the minister clarify his government's position on the gag orders passed at Hobsons Bay City Council last week. Councillors are now prohibited from speaking to the media without the mayor's express approval. All agendas, papers from officers and presentations for councillor briefing meetings are now secret. As the council's own deputy mayor said, these are Big Brother tactics, tactics that belong in an Orwell novel. I cannot help but point out that monitors are in place at Hobsons Bay, monitors appointed by the minister, who report to the minister and who quite frankly work for the minister. The policies in question appeared on the council agenda with no authorship attributed to them, so where did they come from?

It is often said that local government is the closest to the people and councillors are the ratepayers' first line of representation. I have great respect for council officers, but they are not in charge. They are paid bureaucrats who should execute the collective decisions of councillors, not suppress them. Mayors are first among equals. They should not have a veto over their colleagues on such matters. Councillors are chosen by the community to represent its interests, to ask hard questions and to speak publicly when those interests are at risk. Instead, under these rules, councillors who speak out could face sanctions and loss of pay. The minister needs to answer some straightforward questions. Did his

monitors initiate, encourage or endorse these policies? Does he believe it is appropriate for elected councillors to be required to obtain mayoral approval before speaking to the media? And does he stand behind a confidentiality regime that would keep working documents hidden from the very public that funds this council? If the minister cannot answer these simple questions, ratepayers should assume the worst.

Youth justice system

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (18:42): (2469) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Youth Justice, and the action I seek is for the minister to meet with the Village Response Collective and the United Pasifika Council of Victoria as soon as possible to discuss youth justice reform in Victoria from Pacific Island lived and living experiences. Minister, the Village Response Collective has contacted your office about the One Moana community action plan, with a petition signed by the community here in Victoria calling on you and your government for practical engagement, and it has yet to hear back from your office.

Victoria is home to a significant Pasifika population. Census data indicates that just over 76,000 people in Victoria report Pacific ancestry, including just over 28,000 people born in Pacific Island countries, including me. People from Pasifika countries are also one of the youngest populations in Australia; around 28.1 per cent of Pasifika people are aged 0 to 14, and 18.1 per cent are aged 25 to 34. The Pacific community – my community – contributes strongly to the economic, cultural and social fabric of Victoria. Despite these contributions, available justice data shows that Pasifika young people experience disproportionate contact with youth justice systems. National data indicates that Pasifika youth make up around 8.5 per cent of youth detention populations. Earlier justice data showed Pasifika youth accounted for approximately 12 per cent of young people on remand, despite representing around 2 per cent of the population. Pacific community-led organisations are rarely invited to government decision-making tables in a way that is meaningful or reflective of their experiences and community-led early intervention solutions that work and are culturally responsive – instead they are just invited as a box-ticking exercise. Both Village Response Collective and the United Pasifika Council of Victoria are Pacific-led organisations that are equally committed to safer communities and stronger outcomes for young people and the broader Pacific community in Victoria. Minister, they would value the opportunity to meet with you to contribute their leadership and community infrastructure so that youth justice reforms are implemented in a way that strengthens both community safety and the wellbeing of our young Pacific people across Victoria. Minister, the Pacific communities are asking for transparent engagement when it concerns young Pacific people, and I welcome your meeting with Village Response Collective and the United Pasifika Council of Victoria. It will be a meeting you will not regret.

Energy policy

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:45): (2470) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Energy and Resources in the other place. From 1 October this year Victorians will benefit from this Labor government's plan for 3 hours of free power in the middle of the day, every day. Under the Victorian Midday Power Saver, retailers will be required to offer 3-hour free power periods to households during the day. About 2.6 million households across Victoria will be eligible to opt into this program. More than 850,000 Victorians already generate solar power themselves, enjoying cheap or free electricity during the day. This program will now extend the benefits of this to the broader community, giving more Victorian households access to cheaper energy. The action that I seek is that the Minister for Energy and Resources in the other place, Minister D'Ambrosio, inform me how much households in my constituency of Southern Metro could expect to save per year if they opt into the midday power saver.

Albert Park grand prix precinct

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:46): (2471) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. It is in relation to the Albert Park grand prix

precinct, and the action I seek is information on when full public access will be restored to the area. At the moment we have still got fences surrounding parts of Albert Park Lake, roads closed and grandstands in place, and it is a complete mess, with overgrown grass and all sorts of rubbish there. I note that when I was debating this piece of legislation after the government brought it in last year – on 14 October in fact – I said this bill allowed for the closure of Albert Park for up to 21 days, which is a significant impost on local residents and park users. For many in the community Albert Park is their backyard. I was talking about how there has got to be a real balance between obviously the grand prix itself, which is a great event – we all love that and we understand it is fantastic for Melbourne and has a huge following – and the residents that live there and those that access the Albert Park precinct. But I did not realise just how hopeless this government is, that it cannot even get this right. This is weeks later. I was down there on Monday talking with residents because the period that we are talking about – that full 21-day lockout under the Australian Grands Prix Act 1994 – expired on 15 March. Yet to the residents' frustration, which is now at fever pitch although they have just been so tolerant, they see these fences and all this go-slow that is going on with these people that are packing up the grand prix. They are really just going, 'Well, what is going on?'

On Monday, two weeks after the deadline, I visited the site. You would have thought that the grand prix caravan would have moved on. We have had two international grands prix since then – one in Japan, the Suzuka grand prix, and one in Shanghai. They have already banked their cheques; they are moving on to the next one. Yet we are still packing up the grand prix from weeks ago. This is an absolute joke – well, it is not for these residents. They are saying, 'We are tolerant, we understand the grand prix, but we expect better from government.' Why are they still locked out of these areas, having been restricted for eight weeks? In some areas where they are trying to pick up their kids from school, there are road restrictions where the lockout is. It is rarely opened at 3:30 pm, as promised. On Monday a week ago it was still closed at 4:20 pm; on Friday it was 5 pm. Families are facing long detours, extra tolls and fuel costs, while the park itself remains in a state of disrepair. This is completely unacceptable. Why did the government approve tripling the lockout if it has not drastically improved the set-up or pack down? Surely these workers, one of whom told me that it would be going on for another two weeks – it sounds like they are all on the government teat – *(Time expired)*

Rising festival

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:49): (2472) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Creative Industries. Cheng Lei is a journalist and a remarkable woman who endured more than three years of torture and confinement in China on trumped-up charges. Despite growing up in this state and having family here, she received no advocacy from the Victorian government during their visits to China. On her return Lei wrote a harrowing account of her experience, *Cheng Lei: A Memoir of Freedom*. She also co-created a play, *1154 Days*, which is based on her book. The play was in development for many months and was to be shown at the Rising festival, which is funded and supported by the Victorian government, but a few months out *1154 Days* was dropped from the program. However, another display that was supported by the Chinese government in Beijing has been included. According to a spokesperson for Rising quoted in the *Australian* newspaper, the decision was not an artistic one but came after a risk and audit review for budget reasons. Can the minister please provide any data to reassure us this was about the budget and was not a political decision?

Disability services

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:50): (2473) It is with a somewhat heavy heart that I raise this issue, and I think really it is for the Premier's attention. I guess, in truth, it is over some years now that any number of local residents right across the electorate of Ringwood – whether it be in Blackburn, Ringwood, Mitcham, Nunawading, Heathmont or Heatherdale – but again, most recently in just the last week, have expressed concern to me with regard to the NDIS, and they are not the first to do so, concerningly. It is clear, I think, to perhaps every member of Parliament here in Victoria that the NDIS has very significant flaws. It is not the intent of the NDIS, but it is the implementation and certainly the experience I see when I am dealing with parents and when I am

dealing with recipients, clients, of the NDIS. Perhaps time will prove this one way or the other, but it may well be the next great big corruption scandal, because providers in the NDIS do not have to be registered. We know from copious amounts of reports – both publicly and in the media, and all over social media for that matter – that there are no end of private providers who are unregulated and who are taking advantage of Victorians who need support the most and that that taking advantage of represents a very significant rorting, if not outright corruption, of the entire NDIS scheme. I raise the matter for the Premier's attention because I actually think this needs urgent and immediate intervention by this government. This government, the Victorian government, on behalf of all people in Victoria, make a contribution of $3 billion to the NDIS scheme – $3 billion of our taxpayer dollars. Yet we know that it is being routinely rorted, that people are being routinely taken advantage of and that there seems to be no end in sight.

While I am talking about the NDIS, I think it is time – it is a personal view, but it is one that I think is probably widely shared, potentially even across the benches – that once and for all we have to means test it. We have so many people who are now on the NDIS – and rightly so. Sadly, this federal government's approach to this problem is to cut people off – children in particular. Those children need it and those children have a proven ability constraint, yet the answer here has been to cut them off and stop their support. That is not the answer. The answer is to provide support to those who need it most and cannot afford that support. It is a no-brainer. It is one that should attract political support from right across every part of this Parliament. Yet for some reason we fail to do so. I ask the Premier to take urgent action to cease the corruption in the NDIS and take action to actually ensure there is means testing of the scheme.

The PRESIDENT: It is federally administered, so the action could be, if it is to the Premier, for her to advocate to the Prime Minister about looking into it. Are you okay with that?

Nick McGOWAN: Yes, that is fine.

The PRESIDENT: We will change that action.

Architects Registration Board of Victoria

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (18:54): (2474) My matter for the adjournment tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Housing and Building. It concerns the issue of the Architects Registration Board of Victoria, which the government, following the material that came forward from Helen Silver's review, has said is to be abolished and rolled into some generic board. I hasten to add that architects are a very important part of our community. They are an ancient and respected profession that is self-governed, and the board is a board that does not cost the government, the taxpayer, directly any money. Architects are levied fees which they have to pay to have that registration. But the government's plan is to get rid of that board and roll the architects in with some generic unknown model. I am very concerned about the decisions that are being made here. I believe that architects should be registered separately and in their own specialist registration board, as we have in Victoria at the moment. The government had a go at this before the last election. They tried to get rid of the architects board. There was a really strong push, and now they are back at it again and trying to do this. I hasten to add there is no evidence that removing the architects registration board will see better quality buildings, safer buildings or buildings where there are less problems for the public. None of that has been shown by anyone; in fact in my view the opposite is likely to be true.

Nick McGowan: They are relying upon them for the new schemes.

David DAVIS: Mr McGowan, you are probably right. This is the kind of concern that I am drawing attention to. What I want to hear from the minister is for her to explain publicly why the government is going after the architects registration board in the way it is. I have read what is in the Silver review, but the case has not been made. The government has not made the case for deregistering architects in this way, for stripping their registration board out and for preventing a profession from self-governing in this proper way. There is no evidence that a better outcome can be achieved. A superboard of some

type is intended; there is no evidence that that will lead to a better outcome. This at the end of the day is about quality regulation, ensuring that buildings and design are done to a high standard and ensuring that consumers are protected. None of that is going to be advanced by gutting the architecture profession and its registration board.

Maternity services

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (18:56): (2475) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health regarding the rising number of unsafe freebirths occurring across Victoria. The action I seek is for the minister to outline the steps that the government will take to improve oversight in the sector of freebirthing practice, increase transparency of data and ensure that potential mothers have access to safe and regulated maternity care. Recent reporting has revealed at least 13 babies have died in Victoria over the past five months due to births that are occurring without the assistance of qualified medical or midwife professionals. One life lost is one life too many. Furthermore, 11 babies have suffered potential lifelong brain injuries due to this method of birthing. It is the government's job to prioritise the safety of both mothers and babies. It has been made clear by health experts that these incidents were preventable and could have been avoided if the mothers had proper medical care during labour. It is quite alarming that there has been no clear regulatory response to address the risks posed by these unregulated birth workers.

Additionally, there is an issue of a lack of transparency. Reports of freebirth-related deaths and injuries have been emerging through investigative journalism rather than clear government reporting. Why has the data been so difficult to access, one needs to ask? Without accurate and timely information how can expectant mothers be equipped to make fully informed decisions about their care? However, it is not only the lack of transparency for expectant mothers that is the issue but broader systemic issues like a shortage of private midwives, limited access to homebirth programs and a growing distrust of the healthcare system. These are the issues that have pushed some women towards unsafe alternatives. That is not to say every woman does not have the right to choose how she gives birth, but that choice must be supported by accurate information and safe alternative options. No family should suffer losses due to gaps in regulations or access to care. I ask the minister to provide a clear plan, improve transparency in reporting, strengthen oversight of unregulated birth practices and expand access to safe maternity care so that incidents like these can be prevented in the future.

Donnybrook Road level crossing

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (18:59): (2476) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and it is once again about my favourite topic: Donnybrook Road. Specifically I would like to raise with the minister the boom gates at Donnybrook railway station, which add even more delays to the commute times of my residents on the two-lane farm track that her government stubbornly refuses to urgently upgrade. To make matters worse, I am regularly contacted by local residents and commuters who tell me that the boom gates are jammed and are stuck closed for extended periods of time. To quote one of my constituents:

> … this is like every other week now, and traffic is backed up. A 5 min supermarket run is now taking 90 minutes bcs of this.
>
> Feels like they are just patching it up instead of fixing this.

I could not have chosen a better metaphor for how Labor treats the northern suburbs when it comes to infrastructure – patching it up. This is something that my colleague Wendy Lovell has spoken about as well. Labor continues to neglect the northern suburbs with piecemeal projects while taking their hard-earned tax dollars, including all the stamp duty revenue from the Donnybrook, Kalkallo and Mickleham area, and spending it on things like the $50 billion Cheltenham to Box Hill rail line in the Suburban Rail Loop or giving it to their mates in the CFMEU to rort $15 billion of taxpayers money. As a result, serious infrastructure needs like upgrading Donnybrook Road or removing this level crossing are ignored, and it is my community that continues to suffer from Labor neglect.

Just last year the federal and state governments announced another delaying tactic: that they would duplicate the bridge over Kalkallo Creek and blow up a roundabout at Mitchell Street where they only in 2023 upgraded and completed construction of a slip lane for $125 million, of which the state probably only contributed about 10 to 15 per cent. I will continue to raise this issue of the need to properly duplicate Donnybrook Road and to remove this level crossing with relevant ministers, and I seek the action of the Minister for Public and Active Transport to urgently investigate faults with the level crossing on Donnybrook Road so that my constituents are no longer condemned to even more of Labor's traffic chaos. Enough is enough. Donnybrook Road is a disgrace. It is a two-lane farm track, and my constituents keep getting stuck at the level crossings. It is almost every day or every second day that the boom gates are stuck and everything is shut down.

Responses

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (19:02): There were 16 matters today. I will make sure they are all directed to the appropriate ministers for response in line with the standing orders.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 7:03 pm.