



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Tuesday 27 May 2025

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

Juliana Addison, Jordan Crugnale, Daniela De Martino, Paul Edbrooke,
Wayne Farnham, Paul Hamer, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant,
Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Kim O’Keeffe, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor and Iwan Walters

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Jacinta Allan (from 27 September 2023)

Daniel Andrews (to 27 September 2023)

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Ben Carroll (from 28 September 2023)

Jacinta Allan (to 27 September 2023)

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

Brad Battin (from 27 December 2024)

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition

Sam Groth (from 27 December 2024)

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

Leader of the Nationals

Danny O’Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Mary-Anne Thomas

Manager of Opposition Business

Bridget Vallence (from 7 January 2025)

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

Members of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lister, John ⁷	Werribee	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel ¹	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Benham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren ²	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim ⁸	Werribee	ALP
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan ⁹	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden ³	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will ⁴	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam ^{5,6}	Prahran	Ind	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole ¹⁰	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Westaway, Rachel ¹¹	Prahran	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

¹ Resigned 27 September 2023

² ALP until 29 April 2024

³ Sworn in 6 February 2024

⁴ ALP until 5 August 2023

⁵ Greens until 1 November 2024

⁶ Resigned 23 November 2024

⁷ Sworn in 4 March 2025

⁸ Resigned 6 January 2025

⁹ Resigned 7 July 2023

¹⁰ Sworn in 3 October 2023

¹¹ Sworn in 4 March 2025

Party abbreviations

ALP – Australian Labor Party, Greens – Australian Greens,
Ind – Independent, Lib – Liberal Party of Australia, Nat – National Party of Australia

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Tuesday 27 May 2025

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

Bills

Statute Law Revision Bill 2025

Introduction and first reading

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:34): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to revise the statute law of Victoria.

Motion agreed to.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (09:35): I ask the minister for a brief explanation of the bill.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:35): The Statute Law Revision Bill 2025 will amend various acts to correct typographical errors and omissions and update references to repealed legislation and outdated department names.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Announcements

Integrity Oversight Victoria

The SPEAKER (09:36): I wish to advise that on 20 May 2025 I administered to Louise Elizabeth Macleod, the Chief Integrity Inspector of Integrity Oversight Victoria, the affirmation required by section 26 of the Integrity Oversight Victoria Act 2011.

Petitions

Melton electorate police resources

Steve McGHIE (Melton) presented a petition bearing 1 120 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the urgent need for a new police station to serve the rapidly growing communities in the City of Melton. The City of Melton is one of the fastest-growing municipalities in Australia, with thousands of new residents moving into these suburbs each year. Despite this rapid population growth, police services in our area have not kept pace, leading to an increase in crime rates, including break-ins, hooning, and other criminal activities. The existing police stations in Melton and Caroline Springs are struggling to cover the extensive area, leaving many residents without adequate police presence and timely response. This situation has resulted in growing safety concerns within our community, where residents increasingly feel vulnerable, and confidence in local law enforcement's ability to provide protection is diminishing. To address these issues, we urgently need a new police station in Cobblebank, Strathulloh, Thornhill Park, Rockbank, or Mount Atkinson Estate (Truganina), ensuring a strong police presence and improved security for our rapidly expanding community.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the Government to urgently review the City of Melton's policing needs and begin planning and delivering a new police station in any of the aforementioned areas to ensure the safety and security of our communities.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Water safety

Sam GROTH (Nepean) presented a petition bearing 1027 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly community support for greater action on the regulating and policing of jet ski users travelling at speed from the shoreline in a dangerous and careless manner around swimmers and families.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the Victorian Government to urgently implement regulatory reform and increasing police patrols around the usage of jet skis and their impact on the safety of coastal communities.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

*Committees***Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee***Alert Digest No. 7*

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (09:37): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 7 of 2025, on the following acts and bills:

Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025

Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025

Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Act 2025 – house amendments

Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025 – house amendments

Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Act 2025

together with appendices.

Ordered to be published.

*Documents***Documents**

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

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

Brimbank – C241

Greater Geelong – C466

Greater Shepparton – C252

Kingston – C225

Melbourne – C481

Mornington Peninsula – C256

Statutory Rule 30 under the *Magistrates' Court Act 1989*

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 23, 27 and 30

Integrity Oversight Victoria – Report 1 July to 31 December 2023 under s 30Q of the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999*

Wildlife Act 1975:

Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) Notice No 5 (*Gazette S186, 15 April 2025*)

Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) Notice No 6 (*Gazette S235, 19 May 2025*).

PROCLAMATION – Under SO 177A, the Clerk tabled the following proclamation fixing an operative date:

Roads and Road Safety Legislation Amendment Act 2024 – Division 1 of Part 2 and Division 5 of Part 3 – 16 June 2025 (*Gazette S 239, 20 May 2025*).

Bills**Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025***Royal assent*

The SPEAKER (09:39): I inform the house that today the Lieutenant-Governor gave royal assent to the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025.

Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025**Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Bill 2025***Appropriation*

The SPEAKER (09:39): I have received messages from the Lieutenant-Governor recommending appropriations for the purposes of the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 and the Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Bill 2025.

Business of the house**Program**

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:39): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 28 May 2025:

State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025

Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025

Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025.

Members on this side of the house cannot wait to stand up in this place and talk about how our government is focused on what matters most to the people of Victoria. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate our Treasurer, Ms Symes in the other place, for coming down into this chamber last week to deliver her very first budget, one that I note has health very much at the centrepiece, with \$11.1 billion invested in Victoria's world-class healthcare system. I look forward to taking the opportunity when it arises to stand up on my feet in this place to talk about the budget and all that it has to offer the people of Victoria.

When we do the government business program we generally take a bit of a moment to reflect on what we have done between this sitting and the previous time we came together, which of course was only a week ago. I can assure you that during that time members on this side of the house have all been out and about in their communities outlining the various ways in which the Allan Labor government is supporting Victorians every single day. We know that the cost of living is presenting some real challenges right now as a consequence of a whole range of worldwide economic issues, but we are focused on delivering the things that matter most and making life easier for Victorians. I had the pleasure of joining the Deputy Speaker last week at a pharmacy in his electorate to talk about another centrepiece of the budget, and that is our government's commitment to expand the number of conditions for which pharmacists can deliver treatment – we were welcomed with absolute open arms. I know right across the chamber that members on this side of the house are enjoying that opportunity to talk to pharmacists, small businesspeople in their electorates who are an integral part of our

healthcare system and who our government's budget is enabling to deliver more, better care closer to home. Debating this bill will be a very important part of this week's government agenda.

I have talked a little bit about the work that we are doing in health. I am very, very proud of that and very appreciative of it. The massive investments being made in health send a very strong signal to our healthcare workers about how much this government values them and the work that they do every day. It is a really important bill, obviously, to debate in the chamber because come 1 July this money will flow into the health system, into the education system and into the pockets of Victorians, because this bill also includes a record \$2.3 billion in cost-of-living relief.

The Manager of Opposition Business and I – and I thank her very much for that – have agreed that we will debate the appropriation bill and the Parliament appropriation bill cognately. That is important; it is a sensible thing to do. It gives us an opportunity to, in debating the bills, consider the way in which we are each supported every single day by the work of the Parliament teams, both here in the chamber and in our electorate offices. I know that members will welcome the opportunity to get on their feet and talk not only about all the great things that the budget delivers but also about the importance of the Parliament appropriation in order to be able to support the smooth running of the chambers, the Parliament itself, and your good self, Speaker, as well as the important and hard work that our electorate office staff do every single day.

We will also be debating the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025, and we will be guillotining that tomorrow as we have done in previous years. This bill enacts important changes, including the stamp duty off-the-plan concession for yet another year. It will be interesting to talk about stamp duty; many of us will want to outline the ways in which the Liberal Party are copying our policies once again. This is a really good government business program. We have got two busy days ahead of us, and I commend the program to the house.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (09:45): I am here to excite the members of the Labor government and say that we will not be opposing the government business program this week. We know that there are some important pieces of legislation that we will be debating. As the Leader of the House has pointed out, there is the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025, which effectively is the budget, and the Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025. As the Leader of the House mentioned, they will be debated in cognate. And there is the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025.

I note that the Leader of the House in her contribution did say that members of the Labor government – the tired, decade-old Labor government – were out and about in their communities spruiking this budget. But what have they got to work with? \$194 billion of debt and increased taxes. I mean, the Treasurer came in here and had the temerity to say that there were no new taxes in this budget. But we all know that this budget relies on a massive new tax on every single Victorian, and that is the emergency services tax. They say that it is for volunteers, but nothing could be further from the truth. There is no quarantining of the revenue raised from this tax for our CFA and SES volunteers. So when the Leader of the House in her contribution said that Labor members of Parliament were out and about in their communities spruiking the budget, I did wonder if the Leader of the House or any of the members of the Labor government when they were out in their communities went to a CFA fire brigade. How did they receive this? Did they go out to the farms, who are copping a 150 per cent increase in their tax?

This Labor budget is just like all Labor budgets: they cannot control their spending; they are skyrocketing to record levels of debt; and as a result, they are cutting services, they are cutting jobs and they are taxing Victorians more. What is very, very evident in this Labor budget is that it penalises Victorians based on the postcode that they live in. The Leader of the House, again, said that Labor members of Parliament were out in their communities spruiking this budget. Well, it was very hard for me to get out into the Evelyn electorate with the very good people of Evelyn to spruik this budget because, guess what, there was nothing in this budget for the residents and small businesses in the Evelyn electorate – nothing in the budget for them. There was nothing to fix the dangerous and

congested roads in the Evelyn electorate, nothing to fix the Maroondah Highway in Coldstream and nothing to fix the Warburton Highway in Seville East, where there are residents travelling from Woori Yallock from my good friend's electorate of Eildon through to the electorate of Evelyn. Our CFA volunteers, who are also emergency first responders when it comes to road trauma, are sick and tired of turning up to the Warburton Highway in Seville East, which this government back in 2019 did a report on. They have not made it public and have still failed to deliver any safety upgrades to that section of road between Douthie Road and Peters Road on Warburton Highway in Seville East, which repeatedly has traffic accidents. The emergency services volunteers, who I give a shout-out to, do a fantastic job, but unfortunately they have to go to accident after accident after accident because this Labor government neglects our roads in our local community.

Obviously this government does not care about our farmers with that massive new tax – the emergency services tax. Our farmers are really hard-hit at the moment. They are suffering drought. A shout-out to all of the farmers right across many parts of our community, including my own in the Yarra Valley, who are now experiencing the very great toll of drought. They are having to buy water in for their produce. It is a very, very difficult time for our farmers. I also want to give a shout-out to our emergency services workers in the police, who are faced with a rise in crime and machete attacks that have been happening for well over a year now. This government has had the blindfold on and turned a blind eye to repeated increases in youth crime and machete attacks. I want to give a shout-out to our police, particularly the Yarra Ranges police, who do a fantastic job in keeping our community safe. Our emergency services volunteers and our farmers are often the heart of our community, and I give a shout-out to them. We will not be opposing this government business program.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (09:50): I too rise to speak on this week's government business program and talk about just what a wonderful, wonderful business program this truly is. Following the member for Evelyn's contribution, I am sure those opposite will be very happy that it is a shorter week than usual, because I think we have just gotten a preview from the member for Evelyn on what those opposite are going to be talking about this week, and it is going to be about blocking, negativity and the usual things that those opposite carry on with here in this place – but not on this side of the chamber. On this side of the chamber this week we are going to be talking about the incredible things that this budget that was handed down last week delivers for our local community. I for one, along with my colleagues, cannot wait to get up and talk about the incredible things that have been handed down for the Laverton electorate, for Melbourne's west and, most importantly, for the people of Victoria. This budget has really delivered for the people of Victoria. It is making sure that it is helping families with the cost of living, and it is something I for one think every Victorian can receive a little something from.

That means this week the main item of business is debating the pieces of legislation relating to our budget, namely our appropriation bills, which will be debated simultaneously – I think it is a bit early in the day for me to say that word. It is also going to be a great opportunity to highlight the ways our government, like I said, is delivering for communities right across Victoria. There are so many good stories to tell here, and it is so disappointing that the member for Evelyn – and I am sure she is not going to be the only one – cannot find one good thing to talk to her community about in this budget, whether it is the free public transport for seniors on weekends or whether it is the free public transport for folks under the age of 18 anytime, anywhere in Victoria.

I have been down to talk about this at local schools like Bembin Secondary College, which I was at last week. They are absolutely stoked about the free public transport for kids under the age of 18. Do you know who else was – the really young kids there at Dohertys Creek P-9 that I talked about. They had some great things to say. They recognise that it will help their parents with the cost of living. They also said to me, 'It makes Mum and Dad have to worry less about me getting a bus to school.' There are tremendous things that were handed down in this government's state Labor budget last week, and I cannot wait to get on and talk about them further.

We have also got the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025 this week, which accompanies the budget bills, dealing with the tax settings and changes contained within the budget, and I know there will be many contributions here in this place on that bill. Budget week has always been an important time here in our Parliament, and it is a pretty important part of our job as elected representatives to make those contributions on these bills that are before the house this week, to debate and to pass the annual budget bills. I expect there will be a great deal of debate. I know on this side there will be a whole lot of positivity, and I hope it rubs off on those opposite.

I do also note that some took their opposition a little bit too far last week in their opposition to our government's Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. I am not going to use unparliamentary language here in this place. It does seem to me, though, that whilst those opposite are more interested in going ahead and dumping stuff at the door of the Premier's office, our focus is on getting stuff done here in this place, and that is what this –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, this Labor government has dumped a massive new tax on Victorians. I would ask you to ask the speaker to come back to the narrow procedural debate.

The SPEAKER: That is not the way to raise a point of order. I think there are a number of members who have strayed a bit from the government business program. It is not appropriate in the government business program to go into detail on the bills. The member for Laverton to come back to the government business program.

Sarah CONNOLLY: I am sorry, Speaker. I will try to harness my absolute enthusiasm and excitement about the bills that are before the house this week. I was just contrasting the important stuff that this side of the chamber gets on and does each and every single week we are here in this place and also what we are doing out on the hustings in our local electorates with what those opposite choose to do in theirs during this time instead of talking to people about all the important things that their electorates will benefit from when it comes to this state budget. I am really looking forward to making contributions to the bills before the house this week, and I wholeheartedly commend the government business program to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (09:55): I rise to talk on the government business program. Strange things are afoot in the house. Last week was a different week – we had the budget come in and we had the Treasurer from the other place come into the chamber and stand and deliver the budget. This week we have a short week and we are doing Wednesday's program on a Tuesday – we are all starting to get our heads around that. Then this morning in the party room I had to get my head around the fact that we are not opposing the government business program. We are supporting what the government is bringing forward. As I said, there are strange things happening.

In the government business program we have the appropriation bills coming forward today, which we are all going to get a chance to speak on. As the member for Laverton said, we do get a chance to reply to all the good stuff that is going to be coming into our electorates, and I would like to pause and take stock of what the people of the Latrobe Valley got and give a brief outline of the good stuff that we got.

Annabelle Cleeland: It will be brief.

Martin CAMERON: That will do; we will move on. We have also got the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025. We do get a chance to talk on the tax issues. The member for Laverton spoke about members on the other side – it is great to hear they are out and about in their communities talking to their constituents. I have been out on the streets of the Latrobe Valley and people have spoken about the budget that was released and have spoken about some of the tax that was lumped on the people of Victoria last week. I am sure as we move through our budget replies and we get to our feet and we can talk on the taxation bill, which will come on later this week, it will be a little bit different. People in regional Victoria have been hit pretty hard – and the farmers and our volunteer CFA firefighters – with the tax that was lumped on them. It is pleasing to note that the coalition, when we do get the opportunity

to form government in 2026, will be scrapping this tax, which is absolutely causing great angst amongst regional Victorians.

We do talk about how it is affecting regional Victorians, but it is affecting every single person that is in Victoria, whether they are a landholder, whether they are a property holder, if they have a business, this tax does not meet. It is great that we will get an opportunity later this week to stand and let the government and the people in the chamber know what our constituents – and my constituents – are thinking and feeling every single day.

Last week, with the budget, we had a lot of people on the front steps of Parliament protesting this new tax. In my seat of Morwell we have a Labor minister's office. There was a protest out there: 400 people showed up to let the government know that they are not happy with this tax – and that is what it is, it is a tax. They can roll it up and try and display it and push it forward as a levy or whatever they do, but it does actually say this is a new tax. We will be able to bring into the chamber the concerns of the people of regional Victoria and the people in metropolitan Melbourne.

But as I said at the start, it is a bit of a strange day with us not opposing the program and being all nice and sort of holding hands in the chamber, because we do have some important things that we need to get through this week with the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025 and the Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025. We are here to talk, whether or not it is positive, when we do get the chance to get up and talk. But I want to note once again for *Hansard* that we do not oppose the government business program.

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:00): I am as confused as the member for Morwell that they are not opposing the government business program today. I think some of my throwaway lines about the Shadow Treasurer being Victoria's own Temu Trump are probably unfair in this circumstance; I should not really go into such matters. But the member for Morwell is very confident about winning in November 2026, and best of luck. We wish you well of course. We will take no day between now and November 2026 for granted, because we have got a lot of work to do. The member for Morwell mentioned that he had nothing. He had silence to follow on from what he believed this budget will deliver should it pass this house and the other place.

I might remind the member for Morwell that there are a few things that he might not have engaged with in the street walks that he has been doing in his electorate. There are people who are under the age of 18 in the community that he represents, you would be shocked to hear, and those young people may have a view around what free public transport will mean to them both in terms of getting to school, a really fundamental element –

Members interjecting.

Mathew HILAKARI: There is no public transport; I will take up the member's interjection. I do actually love the train stations in the area. They are quite historical and beautiful, and I hope the member for Morwell would agree with such things. But the interjection was from the member for Evelyn, the opposition –

Bridget Vallence interjected.

Mathew HILAKARI: I think probably the most famous thing that has gone on in Evelyn before is locking the gates on the TAFE there, and I have not heard the member for Evelyn really explaining to her community why they would do anything different if they were so lucky as to form government in November 2026. I would be really interested to hear more about that. I hope that the Shadow Treasurer today has the opportunity to describe –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a very narrow procedural debate, in which he was casting disparaging remarks on the member for Morwell in terms of the lack of public transport services there, and I would ask you to ask him to come back to the procedural debate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member had strayed a little bit, and I am sure he is coming straight back to the government business program.

Mathew HILAKARI: Of course. We will hear from the opposition Treasury spokesperson later today, and I do hope that there is a large conversation piece around TAFE – that would be a really great thing to hear – and the continuation of the very popular and well-supported free TAFE program across the state.

The member for Morwell may be interested, for members of the community that he represents, in free pharmacy care. Pharmacies have been rolled out across the state, making them more accessible. I know there are concerns around access to health care in regional Victoria, and I would have thought that access to free pharmacy care would be something that he would be jumping up and about on. And I hope to hear his statements later in the day around the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025. He might choose to discuss that rather than just keep silent at that moment.

The member for Morwell may well have some people who have seniors cards in the community that he represents, and he may well think about the free weekend transport. Also, for the communities that he represents he may have noticed an uplift in people travelling to and from regional Victoria, because we have lowered the cost of train fares and we have cut them statewide. That has been a boon in both directions, both for Melbourne and for regional Victoria, so I hope the member for Morwell might talk a little bit about that later on. He might even talk about the power saving bonus. They have been very quiet on the opposition benches, but that may be something that many members on this side of the house choose to talk about, as well as food relief, another fundamentally Labor-supported idea – and Labor support it at the moment.

I should just say that I want to congratulate the Treasurer on being in this place to deliver the budget. She is the second Treasurer to deliver a budget in this place and Victoria's first female Treasurer. That is after 101 years of women being able to be elected to this Parliament, and may there be many years ahead of her delivering budgets. I commend the government business program to the house, and I think it will get universal support.

Chris CREWITHER (Mornington) (10:05): I rise today to speak on and debate the government business program, following on from the terrific contributions by my colleagues the member for Evelyn and the member for Morwell, and I might have something to say about the member for Point Cook's contributions later on. But of course we have a bit of a different schedule this week. We have today, Tuesday, the committee reports debate and the grievance debate, which normally occur on a Wednesday, and we will have the Thursday schedule on Wednesday. But it is no surprise that this week's government business program is dominated by the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025 and the appropriation bills, to be debated cognately. These are of course standard pieces of legislation that follow the handing down of the state budget. What may be a surprise is that this is one of the few occasions when we are not opposing the government business program. But not opposing the government business program does not mean that we will not be wholeheartedly debating the content of these pieces of legislation this week in the substantive debate, because there is a lot to take issue with, and indeed in the opposition we welcome the opportunity to scrutinise the government.

Many colleagues will want to talk about the budget this week with the appropriation bills and the state taxation bill. In particular I am looking forward to this being kicked off by the member for Brighton with his budget reply later on this morning. Make no mistake, this is not just a budget response, it is damage control. We already had a week of spin last week, and we have more spin this week, all designed to distract from Labor's failures and in particular their debt, which will rise to \$194 billion in just a few years time. That is \$29 million of taxpayer-funded interest every single day. That is \$1.2 million every single hour in interest payments. That is more than one home every single hour, so across the day you have probably got 25 or 26 homes. Imagine how many that is across the year – how many public houses could be built with that sort of money, which is instead being spent on interest payments.

Many speakers from the opposition this week will want to talk about things like the fact that with such a debt level and with such interest payments we have cuts from the government and also we have more and more taxes. We have seen cuts to things like fisheries officers, which has affected my electorate in particular. Fortunately they have backtracked after much advocacy from me and others in terms of keeping the Mornington office open, but there are many other cuts to fisheries across Victoria. We see cuts to public schools as well, with a \$2.4 billion cut from public schools. And we see more and more taxes. Indeed I think we are at over 60 new or increased taxes under this government, particularly – and we saw major protests last week about this – the new emergency services tax. That is something that will affect so many farmers in particular, CFA volunteers and so many people right across Victoria, from the city to the country. Well before that new tax came into place, which we debated into early in the morning, I had the Victorian Farmers Federation Peninsula branch and many CFA brigades come to me saying that this is not the thing that we should be doing. They came to me with alternative ideas of what the government should be doing, and I presented those ideas, but typically, I received no response.

We saw with the emergency services tax the other week the backroom deals with the crossbench days before the budget to ram through this new tax just in time to protect their wafer-thin surplus and spin their way through budget day, with the Treasurer claiming that there were no new taxes. Victorians are fed up, and Victorians know better. Farmers in particular know better, and anyone who has opened a rates notice knows this government's form when it comes to squeezing every last cent out of households. I know that many speakers this week will speak on the appropriation bills and call out what is being done in the government, but there are many things that we in the opposition will be presenting as well. We are committed to scrapping the emergency services tax as well as the patient tax, the schools tax and the holiday and tourism tax. The member for Brighton will have much more to say in his budget reply about how we will actually do proper economic management in Victoria and how we will actually give hope and opportunity to Victorians instead of more and more taxes.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Howqua Inlet Community Trail

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:10): The first of three stages of the Howqua Inlet Community Trail has been completed. This is an exciting project spearheaded by the Howqua Inlet and Macs Cove community group. Working closely with the Jamieson Community Group and others, including Mansfield Shire Council, they will create a much-desired walking and cycling trail linking Howqua Inlet to the Howqua Valley Holiday Park. The trail is being constructed by local volunteers and members from the community group, backed up by council funding. This is a great example of what movers and shakers in the community can achieve when working together and working hard to make a positive difference. I am sure everyone is eager to see the finished result of this important community project, which will benefit locals and visitors to the area.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:11): If elected, the Liberals will scrap the tax and return to a simpler, fairer property services levy from what has been introduced as the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. We will ensure the SES, CFA and other emergency services are properly funded from the state budget, delivering real support, not via a new land tax. Our policy restores certainty and will cut tax for homes, farms and businesses and will relieve pressure on renters. Labor's emergency services fund is not a genuine investment in emergency services, it is a massive land tax by stealth. Labor's new fund grabs \$3 billion over four years in extra tax on homes, farms and businesses. Farmers are hardest hit and face up to 150 per cent increases.

Budget 2025–26

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (10:12): There were plenty of winners in the state budget in the Ivanhoe electorate just last week. I want to give a shout-out to the Ivanhoe Park Croquet Club, with a quarter of a million dollars for significant upgrades at the Ivanhoe Park Croquet Club. With over 100 years of service to the local community, it is a very well regarded club in my electorate. The James Reserve change rooms upgrade, particularly around the female-friendly change rooms, will be great over there in Heidelberg Heights at the James Street reserve. It is a great program, the female-friendly change rooms, that has been introduced by our government. There will be safer and more accessible stations, with the tactile ground surface indicators at Heidelberg station, which follows on from the advocacy and the work from local constituents in my electorate. We have been able to do that at Ivanhoe station, and that will be extended. A big one here is the \$50 million National TAFE Centre of Excellence in Housing and Construction at the polytechnic campus in West Heidelberg, with a \$25 million contribution from the Allan government and a \$25 million contribution from the Albanese government. That is a very significant development that will occur on the corner of Bell Street and Waterdale Road at the West Heidelberg campus of Melbourne Polytechnic, a TAFE where the only contribution those opposite made was when they tried to charge for car parking for the tradies and the students who were parking in West Heidelberg. I am looking forward to that project and so many others, particularly with my colleague the member for Bundoora the half a million dollars for Streeton Primary School.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (10:13): I want to acknowledge the thousands of people who turned up on the steps of Parliament last Tuesday in protest of the new emergency and fire services and volunteers tax. The rally saw CFA volunteers, farmers, businesspeople and many Victorians all impacted by this cruel tax – all of which are being ignored. This tax is nothing but a cruel cash grab to fill Labor's financial black hole. The Premier continues to turn her back on the regions and spruiks this tax as a positive for the CFA volunteers. Perhaps the Premier needed to look out the window and actually see what was going on at last week's rally or come and talk to the volunteers, farmers and businesses to get a full understanding of how this appalling decision will affect their lives and every Victorian who is going to be impacted. It was incredible to see the sea of CFA volunteers and the line-up of fire trucks on Spring Street. They were there to send a message loud and clear that this is an appalling tax and it is wrong. The farmers are in the middle of a drought and already struggling to make ends meet, yet they took the time out of their busy lives, many travelling hours, to have their voices heard. They are suffering and their mental health is suffering, and instead of taking more from our farmers, this government should be supporting them in their time of need. Many have said they simply cannot afford a 150 per cent increase, and this is the final straw for many who will have to walk away. Farmers Margo and Graeme's exact words were 'The cost of water and delivery takes priority over food some weeks.' At the moment they are also buying household water. Where does the government think they are going to find this extra money that they simply do not have? People are already struggling to pay their bills. A Liberal and Nationals government will scrap this tax.

Dorrington Child and Family Hub

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (10:15): There has been a lot happening down in the Ashwood district. I will not get through it all, but we will give it a go to do some. I am proud to share a few highlights. Earlier this month I had the honour of representing Minister Blandthorn from the other place to officially open the Dorrigton Child and Family Hub in Mount Waverley, down at Syndal, alongside mayor Paul Klisaris from Monash. \$4.5 million of support from the Victorian government and Monash went into this fantastic centre, which is going to be a hub for our littlest ones. The Building Blocks program, again, is a wonderful initiative that is also continued in this budget I believe. At the opening, given that it is reconciliation week, I would like to give a big shout-out to Simone Thomson, a talented Wurundjeri, Woiwurrung and Yorta Yorta artist whose two stunning artworks are now

proudly displayed at the hub. I thank Simone for her contribution and for enriching the space with her culture and creativity.

Koreatown, Melbourne

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (10:16): What some people may not know is that the Ashwood district has a very vibrant and strong Korean Victorian community. Annyeonghaseyo to all of my Korean constituents. I am going to run out of time. The other week I had the honour of opening, with the Minister for Small Business and Employment and the Lord Mayor, our first Koreatown up in Melbourne, and the kimchi was going very well, thank you very much. There will be more to say next week.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (10:16): The new emergency services tax introduced by this Allan Labor government will see Victorian households paying an extra \$3 billion in tax. It will hurt every single Victorian in a cost-of-living crisis. Households will pay double under this new tax. It will increase the cost of rent for renters. Businesses like cafes, hairdressers and gyms – all businesses – will pay double under this new tax. It will increase the cost for manufacturers, which will drive up the cost of locally made products. Our farmers will be hardest hit, with a 150 per cent increase in the tax – a massive tax increase on our farmers at the worst possible time, when they are dealing with drought. And all it will do is force up the price of fresh produce – meat, veggies and fruit – at the shops for all Victorians. Labor calls it a volunteers fund, but that is misleading. The government has confirmed the tax revenue raised is no longer quarantined for our CFA and SES volunteers, which is wrong and unfair, and will pay for back office jobs. Many of our farmers are our first responders to fires and storms. The Victorian Liberals will scrap this tax if elected next year. I have repeatedly called for more funding for our SES and CFA and will continue to do so.

Vietnamese community

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (10:18): I rise today to acknowledge the Vietnamese flag-raising ceremony recently held in Greater Dandenong, marking 50 years of Vietnamese settlement in Australia. It was an honour to join President Dat Van Dang, the Victorian chapter of the Vietnamese Community in Australia and local leaders in celebrating this milestone. The Vietnamese community has shaped Mulgrave, especially Springvale, through decades of enterprise, civic leadership and cultural pride. Their story is one of resilience and hope, from refugee journeys to building thriving businesses and community organisations. The flag raising is more than a symbol of heritage and freedom; it is a declaration of belonging and of a shared future. I thank the Vietnamese community for enriching Mulgrave's vibrant and inclusive spirit.

Mazenod Panthers Football Club

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (10:19): I also wish to celebrate the Mazenod Panthers, who last week secured their 14th consecutive win over the Mazenod Collegians in a spirited match in Mulgrave. Founded in 2005, the Panthers were created to give people with intellectual disabilities the chance to play footy in an inclusive, welcoming environment. Proudly part of the AFLVic feeder league and the Mazenod College community, the Panthers embody the values of inclusion, participation and belonging. This match was played for the Sharp/Johnson Shield, honouring Andrew Sharp and Matt Johnson, who helped establish the team. Congratulations to the players, coaches and families.

Sacred Heart Parish School, Sandringham

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:19): Last week I visited Sacred Heart primary school in Sandringham to visit their newly upgraded facilities and speak with their grade 3–4 class. I first made a commitment to funding these necessary upgrades at Sacred Heart in the lead-up to the 2022 state election. Together we have been able to achieve a great result for the school and for the greater community, and I congratulate especially principal Simon Collis. It was special being able to see the

students making the most of the upgrades, and it reiterates just how important investing in our schools really is for our community.

Memory Walk & Jog

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:20): Last week I was proud to take part in the 2025 Dementia Australia Memory Walk & Jog together with the member for Melton, an event that brings people together to raise awareness and vital funds for those impacted by dementia. I was joined by passionate Dementia Australia ambassadors, including Amy Jackson, Takaya Honda, Woody Whitelaw and Geraldine Hickey. It was a powerful reminder that many of us know someone who is affected by dementia or is supporting individuals affected by dementia and just how important that cause is.

Bayside Youth Awards

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:20): Recently Bayside council held the Bayside Youth Awards, which are an opportunity to recognise excellence in the young members of our community. I congratulate all the participants, the nominees and the winners, Zaina Amro, Michael Friedli, Abby Pham, Natasha Kons and Will Taylor.

Budget 2025–26

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:21): There is an opportunity in the budget to scrap taxes, and all Labor has done is increase taxes – 61 and counting.

Wellsprings for Women

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (10:21): It was wonderful to recently attend Wellsprings for Women's Chai Time fundraiser in my old stomping ground of Springvale. I attended alongside the member for Mulgrave, Mr Tarlamis from the other place and the deputy mayor of the City of Greater Dandenong Sophie Tan. Wellsprings for Women undertake such important work throughout the south-east, including in my electorate, as they support and advocate for women, particularly those from migrant and refugee backgrounds. I have been a long-time supporter of Wellsprings and the work that they do to support so many, from raising awareness on important issues to helping women build their skill sets and advance their social, economic and emotional standing. They also provide programs such as language lessons, computer literacy, settlement, housing and employment support. The fundraiser had a fantastic turnout, with many community members and leaders supporting the organisation whilst also enjoying a delicious afternoon tea. The event was ably hosted by comedian and radio presenter, now podcast presenter, Jo Stanley, who is also a Wellsprings patron. Chai Time raised awareness and funding for Wellsprings' emergency relief program, which provides case management to women impacted by issues including mental health, domestic violence and homelessness. A really big thankyou to Dalal Smiley, CEO of Wellsprings for Women, and her team for hosting this fundraiser and for their continued support of women in my community.

Gippsland East roads

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (10:22): Our roads are still a mess, and there was no good news in this state budget. Only 1.6 per cent of our roads will be fixed. That is not enough on a rolling basis to get on top of the problem that this government has created. They will never catch up in fixing our road network, which is falling to bits, without a higher level of investment – highways like the Monaro Highway. There was work done up there on the Monaro Highway. The government carted all this machinery up there. The contractors fixed a kilometre when 25 kilometres need fixing. Why wouldn't you do the work when you are there? Clearly it is a lack of funds that is causing that. Ten million dollars was given for the Mallacoota road four years ago from the federal government, and there is still no action there. Get on with the job.

Firewood collection

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (10:23): Power bills are skyrocketing. The government announced a paltry \$100 power saving bonus. Why wouldn't they address the firewood issue, which is going to cause so much hardship to people in our communities of East Gippsland? There is one month left of collection, and the government needs to fix that problem.

Camping regulation

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (10:23): I will finish off by saying it was a pleasure to see in the budget the end of camping fees. We told you pre-Christmas that would not work. We told you pre-Easter that would not work. Finally that has been scrapped, and that will see an end to ghost camping in our region. Finally the government has listened to one thing.

Connective Tissue Disorders Network Australia

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (10:24): I have had a series of firsts over the last couple of weeks. Two weeks ago in the southern library in Parliament the Connective Tissue Disorders Network Australia held their first ever public forum. I would like to thank the member for Northcote for organising and hosting this event. This meeting was the first time doctors, clinicians, advocates, ministers, members of Parliament and people with lived experience joined together to share their stories of this terrible condition and advocate for support, awareness, acknowledgement and a commitment to working together to help those that have these conditions. It was the beginning of a very important discussion.

Cerebral palsy

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (10:24): In another first, I joined the Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas at the Monash Children's Hospital to announce an Australian-first medical treatment using autologous umbilical cord blood stem cells for the treatment of cerebral palsy in a paediatric patient. Zara is six years old and has cerebral palsy. Her mother Michelle, a constituent, purely by chance saved her cord blood. This cord blood was treated and then was given to Zara in an infusion to treat her cerebral palsy. I am happy to say that there were strong early signs of significant improvement in Zara's physical capabilities. Zara is the first child to have this treatment and I hope the first of many.

Mornington Peninsula bus services

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (10:25): In another first, this time for my electorate, something that people have been calling for for over 20 years is a bus that crosses from one side of the peninsula to the other. I have spoken about my support for this, and thanks to the Allan Labor government we are finally getting it.

Budget 2025–26

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (10:25): This statement condemns the Allan Labor government for its 2025–26 state budget, which is built on nothing more than lies, fantasy forecasts and spiralling debt. Labor not only is running a cash deficit but has blown the credit card, with Victoria's net debt now set to blow out to \$194 billion by 2028–29, within a whisker of exceeding \$200 billion. That is \$27,700 in net debt per man, woman and child in our state – a net debt which incurs \$28.9 million in interest payments every single day, paid for by all Victorians, \$1.2 million every single hour or \$10 billion per year. No wonder Victorians are fed up with crumbling roads, an increasing crime crisis, record hospital waitlists and Labor cutting \$2.4 billion from our government schools. These local issues are affecting Rowville, because there are still unfunded projects, including the important Dorset Road extension, the duplication of Napoleon and Wellington roads, major upgrades to facilities at both Rowville and Scoresby secondary colleges. The Allan Labor government state budget, mired in debt and deceit, again proves they cannot money.

Northland shopping centre

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (10:27): I would like to acknowledge the events that took place at Northland shopping centre on Sunday and in particular thank the retail workers who did such a great job of implementing the centre's initial emergency plan, closing up shutters and supporting the customers in their stores, which of course included customers who had young children, customers who had disability, customers with language barriers, and many, many customers for whom the situation was very difficult. Of course many of those workers were up very early to clean up and to reopen for their normal shift on Monday. I would also like to thank the police officers, paramedics and emergency personnel who responded so quickly and effectively. There are investigations and reviews underway, and I suppose we do welcome the new-found interest from members of the Liberal Party in Northland. I would just encourage them to look up some of the previous issues in that part of the world that they have ignored.

Northern Choir Fest

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (10:28): I would like to thank Amelia van Lint, Vanta Jameson, Andrew Jameson, Sara Lacey and all the team at Amateur Repertory Company for organising another great Northern Choir Fest at the Darebin Arts Centre last weekend. The audience was treated to performances from 11 different choirs. I will acknowledge Evan Mulholland in the other place, who has a close association with ARC. It was good to join him and Greens councillors in a tripartisan support of the choral arts in the north.

Preston Football Club

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (10:28): Finally, members might have seen that the Northern Bullants are renaming themselves back to the Preston Football Club. We welcome that change and thank outgoing president Whitlam Malkoun for all his work and his ongoing contribution to the club and community.

Middle East conflict

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (10:28): These are the names of nine children Israel killed bombing a residential building in Gaza last week: Eve, Ruslan, Sidra, Luqman, Sayden, Revan, Jubran, Rakan and Yahya. They had been at home when their mum Alaa al-Najjar was working as a paediatrician at a hospital in Khan Yunis. Now nine of her 10 children are dead. I cannot imagine the depths of Alaa's grief – few of us can – yet 19 months into Israel's genocide, her trauma is not unique. Israel is still killing dozens of people every single day. Since March Israel has blocked all aid and food from entering Gaza. Children are being starved to death. The UN warned last week that 14,000 babies had just 48 hours to live, unless the blockade was ended. Israel has since let in a small amount of aid but, according to government ministers, only as a control tour to conquer and cleanse Gaza. This is just abhorrent, and yet the Australian government has still not placed sanctions on Israel or stopped sending weapons parts to Israel. I ask everyone in the Labor government: what will it take to put sanctions on this Israeli government? If bombing tens of thousands of children to death is not enough, if deliberate starvation of a whole people is not enough, if open plans for ethnic cleansing are not enough for the Labor government to do something more than words, then what the hell is?

Wattle View Primary School

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:30): It was a very exciting day to head out to a fantastic local primary school, Wattle View Primary, in Ferntree Gully – a beautiful part of the world – and to say g'day to their wonderful principal Tracy Wright and a lot of their fantastic student leaders to announce that we are getting on with a very important upgrade to some amenities – their student toilets. It is not always the big things that get the most amount of attention, but it is critically important that we continue to invest in important amenities like student toilets, and of course the principal was absolutely stoked and the kids were very happy and had lots of great questions for me – lots of things I will have

to come back on. So thank you to the team and to the principal for having me out there, and I am very excited to see work starting soon.

Radio Eastern FM

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:30): Also, a huge thankyou to Robert Arthur at Radio Eastern FM, 98.1. It was great to join him yesterday on the radio to talk all things state budget. It was a really positive, warm discussion talking about all the things that the state budget is delivering a bit locally but also more so about things we are getting on with across the state, whether it is the \$100 power saving bonus, whether it is the roads blitz or whether it is the work we are doing with free public transport. Thank you very much to Robert and the team for having me.

Knox infrastructure

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:31): And of course it is great as well that we are getting on with safety upgrades, working with Knox council to deliver safety upgrades and help them in the implementation of the Basin Triangle master plan as well as safety upgrades at the Mountain Gate shopping centre. I really appreciate the support of the minister, and I look forward to working with council on delivering these outcomes.

Drought

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (10:31): Our farmers are on their knees – no rain, no food, no water, dwindling cash reserves and increasing debt to the banks – and the support they get from the city-centric government is next to nothing. In fact it is now a six-week wait for a rural financial counsellor for financial support and mental health support, and this is the only mental health support in many areas of the state. There are a lot of areas that are in drought at the moment across the state that are not even eligible for this. It is time for the Labor government to stand up for the people who grow our food and grow our fibre and inject so much into the economy when times are good. The first thing the government can do is to scrap the tax, but if not that, then let us see an expanded drought support package. Victoria pays more in interest to the big banks than it has put aside to support farmers during drought. It is a shameful reflection of the priorities of the Labor government, and I urge them to reconsider. The bushfire recovery support for businesses is absolutely appalling, with barely any businesses eligible. You are only eligible for \$5000; this is treated as income, so therefore it is taxed at about 50 per cent, so they are only going to get 2½ grand out of it. For that you need to provide an audited statement of your finances for a period which includes Anzac Day, Easter and public holidays; for about \$1800 it is not worth it. Labor must step up.

Beaufort Scouts and Girl Guides hall

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (10:33): The state budget last week included a lot of great wins, including free public transport for under-18-year-olds on the Maryborough and Ararat train lines, a \$100 power saving bonus for Victorians in need, continuing the fox bounty program and more money for the East Grampians rural water pipeline. But there is one particular local win I want to shine a spotlight on today, and that is the \$50,000 delivered for the Beaufort Scouts and Girl Guides hall. The hall has been through the wringer in recent years, with flood damage and termites, and despite this it is still being used by the Scouts, the Girl Guides and other community groups in Beaufort as a place to come together, connect and have fun. The \$50,000 that we secured in last week's budget will help repair the floor in the hall and better the whole building. I want to thank Sandra Watkins, who has put in the hard yards applying for grants and fundraising to get this project done. A big thanks also to the committee for the Beaufort youth hub as well as Mark Harris, Jodie Harris and everyone at the 1st Beaufort Scout Group. Our rural communities deserve more places for young people to come together, and that is exactly what the hall is all about. Now it will be better and safer for even more young locals to enjoy it for years to come. Congratulations to everyone involved.

Altona Meadows road infrastructure

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:34): Thank you to the more than 600 members of the community who signed the petition to see the Newland Street exit improved and cleaned up, and I am glad to say the recent budget delivered. It delivered a modest amount of money, and that is a great start. In Altona Meadows we know how to do a lot with a little, and I will, with the community's support, fight for more. The Newland Street exit is the gateway to the Altona Meadows community, and having pride in where we live is a big deal, so this money will be well used. I know the residents want to see the exit renamed as well to the Altona Meadows exit. The funds we have today will not do everything we want to see happen, and I know there is more work to do, but I thank the petitioners who gave their support, and I will keep coming back to you for this support to demonstrate within government the needs of our community, and this government will keep delivering for our community.

Laverton Bowling Club

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:35): On another matter, I want to thank the Laverton bowls club and congratulate them because this week they turned 50 and had their 50th anniversary. I want to thank all the committee but in particular Doreen Keane, the driving force for the club. I want to thank the other executive members and team there – Brian, Marie, Richard, Doug, Mo, Mick behind the bar – and all the life members, in particular former presidents Kathy and Frank, who spoke accurately of the warmth and welcoming nature of the Laverton bowls club. Thanks to all those who were able to celebrate on Sunday. I look forward to the next 50 years.

Melbourne Locals badminton tournament

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:35): On another matter, I want to mention Arthur and the team for their big day of badminton, which supports the Royal Children's Hospital. Congratulations.

Budget 2025–26

Katie HALL (Footscray) (10:36): State schools are great schools, and with this budget I am proud to have delivered new funding for schools in my electorate. Yarraville West Primary School will receive \$493,000 to deliver a new secure entry for the school and foyer upgrades. This will enhance student safety and bring peace of mind to parents and teachers, which is as good a cause as any. Maribyrnong College has also been funded to undertake planning to improve their learning spaces, supporting kids to get the best education possible. Maribyrnong College has an elite sports program, and with this investment – they are planning for upgrades for their academic buildings – they are on the path to being one of the best in the west when it comes to education. I would like to thank the parents, school councils and principals of both Yarraville West Primary and Maribyrnong College for working with me on these projects and bids for the budget. Working collaboratively, especially with a local member with a seat at the table, is so important to making positive change in our community. I am proud to be a local member that fights for the things that matter most to my electorate, with the future of our children and our government schools being number one.

National Reconciliation Week

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (10:37): This week is reconciliation week, and the theme is 'Bridging now to next'. Reconciliation week is an opportunity for all of us to learn our shared histories, cultures and achievements and to look at how we can contribute to reconciliation with First Peoples. It is about understanding and a commitment to building a more just and respectful future. I want to acknowledge and thank the Geelong One Fire Reconciliation Group, who held their annual Rec in the Park event on Sunday, attracting hundreds of people. Wadawurrung woman Corrina Eccles gave a powerful welcome to country that included speaking up about the harm and trauma caused to First Peoples by the hateful racist comments, particularly on social media, directed at First Peoples about them and their culture. Corrina's message is a reminder to all of us to stand up against racist behaviour, to call it out and to support First Peoples. We saw the theme 'Bridging now to next' in action watching the

children that day, both young and older. These young people are the future leaders who will help to bring that bridge.

Yoorrook Justice Commission

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (10:38): This week includes a number of significant events for First Peoples. On Sunday there was the commencement of the Yoorrook Justice Commission Walk for Truth – 25 days of walking, starting in Portland and arriving in Melbourne on 18 June, led by Yoorrook deputy chair Travis Lovett. The walk aims to bring everyone together to walk towards truth and celebrate the strength and resistance of First Peoples.

Northcote electorate kindergartens

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (10:38): In 2023 I fought alongside our community to protect our not-for-profit kinders from the privatisation and closure imposed on them by the Greens councillors at Darebin. Thankfully, we won that battle. The centres are safe, and I am pleased to report that they are stronger than ever. With the backing of our Labor government, local kinders across the Northcote electorate have seen wonderful upgrades to improve facilities and make room for more families. At Alfred Nuttall there is new natural play equipment with water play and a garden for little green thumbs. Thank you, Susie and Gemma, for showing me around. Merri kinder has expanded its three-year-olds room, and soon they will have a refreshed play space too. Helen is an amazing advocate for that centre. At Raleigh I will be joining Justine and the team next week to celebrate their expanded capacity, with 22 new places for local kids. Yarralea has just been awarded a major refurb to expand places while keeping its natural charm. Thank you, Steph and the team, for working with me to get that over the line. We are also backing the extraordinary First Nations led Yappera, which supports learning and wellbeing for Aboriginal children. Yappera will get a major expansion with a second level – huge news for Stacey and the team. In Thornbury we have opened the new Darebin Creek kinder, with 99 new spots. Labor's free kinder is also making a huge difference, saving families money and giving parents flexibility and kids the benefit of play-based learning, because when we invest in kinder, we invest in every child's future – and that is a future worth building.

Caesia Gardens

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (10:40): I had the great pleasure of recently visiting Caesia Gardens, one of the many retirement villages in Kororoit. I want to give a special thankyou to Kumar, Tom and Kaye for facilitating this opportunity to not only do a tour but speak to the seniors about the opportunities that they have got in front of them and also the difficulties they find within the community. I look forward to continuing to work with them and other seniors.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I do not like interrupting members statements, as they are short expressions and important. However, I remind the house of the use of correct titles, to avoid unparliamentary words and to acknowledge the Chair when you pass the mace. I remind you that 'you' and 'your' refer to the Chair and to please put your comments through the Chair.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (10:41): I rise to speak on the report on the 2023–24 budget estimates. On page 246 it notes that:

The Sustainably Managed Fish and Boating Resources output has been moved out of the former Department of Transport to DJSIR and has been renamed Fishing, Boating and Game Management.

I wonder if this was a way of trying to hide some of the changes that were about to be announced. We heard earlier this year that the Allan Labor government were going to sneakily attempt to cut the Victorian Fisheries Authority. At that time it was revealed that 33 frontline fisheries officers would be

cut and five enforcement stations would close. This move horrified Victorians – people who fish, people who run fishing operations and seafood operations and people who care about the environment right across Victoria. Consequently a petition was raised by my colleagues in the Liberal–Nationals, a petition of 21,000 signatures demanding that the government scrap its plan, and a protest occurred on the steps of Parliament. When communities speak up, it is always good to see that we get a result. We did see the government back down somewhat – not completely – and now, instead of the cutting of 33 frontline fisheries officers, we will see 35 Victorians working at the authority lose their jobs, including 15 fisheries officers, and two enforcement stations will be closed.

We also see, we are led to believe, that this role will now have a focus on education, not enforcement. In the 1990s my dad was a magistrate in the Portland and Warrnambool magistrates courts, and often in the paper there were stories about poachers. We have since seen a lot less of that, and the reason for that, I was reminded at the protest, was we introduced legislation that made poaching an indictable offence. Consequently, because there was a consequence to the poaching, there was a lot less of it going on. With this reduction in fisheries officers and a focus on education, not enforcement, what will we see? We will more than likely see poaching explode again, and the environment, the very delicate marine ecology, will be at risk.

The government say the reason for this is they are now operating in a different budgetary and strategic environment. You know what, I reckon that is code for ‘broke’. They are just trying to find ways to cut costs, and the loss of frontline jobs will mean fewer inspections, less oversight, more illegal fishing and more environmental damage. Without enough fisheries officers, illegal fishing operations will be able to undercut and legitimate operators will be put at risk, endangering more jobs and businesses but also, and most importantly, endangering the environment that Victorians very much care about.

This leaves just 54 fisheries officers to patrol Victoria’s 2500 kilometres of coastline and 250,000 kilometres of inland waterfrontage, rivers and creeks. It really is a slap in the face to responsible fishers, who do the right thing and expect rules to be enforced fairly. Poachers once again will be rampant and be able to deplete fish stocks, which ruins the ability of Victorians to enjoy recreational fishing. The poachers will quickly get the message that there are not enough fishing officers and so the risk is worth the reward. We will see once again, like we used to see in the 1990s, poachers getting away with unchecked and unrealised wealth from the oceans, which will deplete the environment. This unchecked overfishing and habitat destruction can cause irreversible damage to our marine ecosystems. Without enough fisheries officers, reckless boating activity, speeding and noncompliance with safety rules will increase, endangering lives.

I have had so many people ringing me in my office. I have had the CEO of the Western Abalone Divers Association. We have had seafood companies that employ an enormous amount of people in my part of the world who will be affected by this, and they make the point: they pay the government fees, and they expect to get the environment cared for and fisheries management happening. There are many people from the fishing clubs at Portland, Port Fairy, Warrnambool and right across Victoria concerned about this. This is a government who are shameful in their cuts and destroying of the environment.

Legal and Social Issues Committee

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

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (10:46): I am pleased to rise to speak on the report by the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into capturing data on people who use family violence in Victoria. I want to thank and acknowledge the secretariat for their work on this important inquiry: Jess Strout, committee manager; Katherine Murtagh, research officer; Caitlin Connally, research officer; Danielle Broadhurst, admin and research assistant; and Fred Toll, a graduate recruit. Their research skills, guidance and support for the committee members has been exceptional.

I also thank and acknowledge the members of the committee: the member for Lara, the member for Clarinda, the member for Bayswater, the member for Eildon, the member for Mornington and the member for Euroa. I particularly want to thank the chair of the committee, the member for Lara, who put an extraordinary amount of work and knowledge into this inquiry.

The committee received 72 submissions and seven additional documents. We also held seven days of public hearings with 75 witnesses. The report's recommendations support the Victorian government to adopt a systematic and strategic approach to improving data collection, sharing, use and analysis about people using family violence. Inquiry stakeholders identified many benefits to the government adopting this approach, including:

- informing big picture decision-making – including guiding the Victorian and Australian Governments' evidence-based, effective and targeted approach to ending family violence.
- tracking outcomes and measuring efficacy – tracking progress against the Victorian Government's family violence reforms to understand what works, and measuring efficacy of interventions to better inform support for people using family violence leading to behaviour change.
- understanding and providing support and services across the system – better assessing, managing and developing strategies on risk for victim survivors, providing them with programs and keeping them safe.
- enabling nuanced and normalised discussion – challenging stereotypes and myths, and normalising work preventing further violence and research and data collection on perpetration of family violence.
- understanding trends – including common characteristics and risk factors for people using family violence, engagement with services and systems, re-occurring offending, high-risk individuals and referral pathways. This can hold people who use violence accountable, keep them in view and identify people who use family violence which are currently undetected. Understanding trends can also inform the development of rehabilitation and education programs.
- understanding and managing demand for services – inform regional and statewide understanding of current and future service demand (and required resource allocation), identify service gaps and opportunities for innovation. This can be used to plan, design and evaluate services, improve client outcomes and reduce the administrative burden on frontline services.
- tailoring services for different communities – better understand community need and prevalence to plan and deliver programs, tailor interventions, programs and systems, and develop more effective interventions and nuanced responses that disrupt family violence trajectories.
- empowering First Nations communities – data on family violence in First Nations communities can be used to prioritise prevention and early intervention by addressing drivers such as racism and intergenerational trauma. The Government should support the development and implementation of Indigenous Data Sovereignty.

Addressing family violence is a collective responsibility. The intersections of family violence with different aspects of people's lives mean that policy strategies, plans, frameworks and ongoing reform activity must align across different sectors. The report's recommendations aim to increase understanding about people using family violence and strengthen the Victorian government's response to family violence in our communities.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into Workplace Surveillance

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (10:50): I rise to speak on the final report of the inquiry into workplace surveillance undertaken by the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee, of which I am deputy chair. The committee investigated the extent to which surveillance data is being collected, shared, stored, disclosed, sold, disposed of and otherwise utilised in Victorian workplaces. In the final report my colleagues and fellow committee members the member for South-West Coast and the member for Warrandyte joined me in producing a minority report to address the concerns that were raised during the inquiry. Whilst we support the underlying intention to ensure fairness and respect for individual privacy, we strongly oppose the proposed regulatory approach that the majority report recommends. As members of the committee we respectfully dissented from the majority report and associated recommendations on workplace surveillance.

Before I go further into the details of this committee report I do wish to thank the organisations and many individuals who made submissions and attended public hearings to provide their experience and expertise. I also wish to acknowledge my fellow committee members as well as the secretariat: Kerry, Marianna and Abbey. During the committee's inquiry we received a total of 44 submissions, 12 of which were made by individuals. In addition the committee held four public hearings and meetings over Zoom, which included representatives from industry groups, legal experts, academics and government bodies such as the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner, Industrial Relations Victoria and WorkSafe Victoria. It was disappointing that few employers engaged in the inquiry.

The majority report fails to adequately address stakeholders' concerns. It overreaches in its scope and risks creating an unnecessary and inconsistent legal burden on employers, especially small businesses. The recommendations in the majority report risk fragmenting the national regulatory landscape by seeking to introduce state-specific laws at a time when there are significant federal privacy reforms currently underway. In its submission to the committee's inquiry the Business Council of Australia explicitly recommended that legislative reform be postponed until after the Commonwealth government finalises its reforms to the Privacy Act 1988, particularly in relation to employee records exemptions and small business exemptions. Pushing ahead with any reforms could lead to conflicting interpretations of key concepts such as what constitutes or defines a workplace or reasonable surveillance, which in effect could lead to a situation that burdens employers with overlapping obligations under state and federal law.

In addition to this concern raised in the minority report, multiple employer groups, including the Australia Industrial Group and the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, recommended a non-legislative approach to workplace surveillance reform. In their submissions both industry groups advocated for the development of best practice guidelines or model policies rather than new statutory obligations. These industry groups argued that flexible industry-informed guidance would provide more practical and less disruptive solutions to privacy concerns than the rigid one-size-fits-all proposed in the majority report. Specifically, the Business Council of Australia stated that best practice guidelines co-designed with employers, unions and relevant government agencies would be more effective and less burdensome than broad new laws. WorkSafe Victoria in its evidence to the committee cautioned that the privacy of co-workers or third parties inadvertently captured in surveillance data could be compromised. Also of concern was the administrative burden of processing requests, particularly for small business employers.

Rather than introducing complex new laws, we are calling on the government to consult further with employer groups, prioritise national consistency and adopt a more balanced education-led approach that recognises the legitimate interests of both employers and employees. The minority report has five recommendations, and we urge that be considered.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into Workplace Surveillance

John LISTER (Werribee) (10:54): As a newly minted member of a committee, it gives me great pleasure to speak to the committee reports that are before the house. In particular I would like to focus on the report by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee on the inquiry into workplace surveillance. Many people during the pandemic developed a habit of moving their mouse side to side every now and then as they were working from home. That little innocuous action I always found quite strange. Talking to a lot of my friends – because in teaching we were still face to face in many circumstances – in those professions, they said that it was quite a strange feeling being at home and feeling like they were being monitored.

The committee's inquiry into what the surveillance driving this monitoring means for our workforce is a particularly important thing to explore. Surveillance can take many forms, as the inquiry went into, but of particular interest to my community is the way monitoring and data collection can be done remotely while employees are working from home. That personal and private space has very much

become merged in those last few years. It is no secret that work from home is more common and is a feature of the way people work in Wyndham. In the by-election I knocked on a lot of doors, and I found even at lunchtime there were people who were working from home. Despite threats from different political parties around working from home and this arrangement, I think it is particularly important for our community. What concerns me, though, is the boundaries being blurred between accepted workplace practices over the last century and what we are facing now. While data on a local level is hard to glean when it comes to the number of people working from home, ABS data from 2021 shows around 21 per cent of the population work from home, which is up from 4.7 per cent in 2016, so I think it is particularly important to reflect on this inquiry in that context.

I want to particularly reflect on finding 1 and finding 3 of the inquiry, looking at the idea of workplace surveillance having a long history, whether that be your punch cards going in and out of a factory or even having supervisors on the factory floor. This emerged out of the industrial revolution as a way for workplaces to monitor the output and productivity of their workers. There is a lot to be said for the importance of this, but the report does go into a little bit of some of the more modern concerns around this. It was not that long ago that I was teaching *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and some of the reflections by the committee around the way that workplace technologies can be used to monitor employees' thoughts, feelings and behaviours and make that personal data more visible to employers were quite disturbing. The other thing that I think is quite counterproductive, particularly for industry, is how this contributes to something called productivity paranoia, which Microsoft explored in 2022, where leaders in companies said that they had trouble believing workers were productive when working remotely. I think these are important things to reflect on as work from home becomes more of a feature of our economy, so I welcome that finding from the committee.

The other finding, finding 3, which I found particularly interesting in this context, looks at the fact that employers are not particularly transparent about their surveillance practices and employees are unaware of the extent of that surveillance. To be brief on this, I would say it is particularly important for employers to be open about this. I was disappointed to see that there were very few employer groups that contributed to what is quite an important inquiry when it comes to their work and the increasing expectations that that home space becomes part of their business.

Not wanting to pre-empt the government's response to this inquiry report, I would, however, encourage workers across Victoria and particularly my community to engage with their unions – particularly those people who work in professional services – and ask that question of their employer around privacy and the use of those monitoring systems and how that data is kept. I would like to thank those unions and union bodies that contributed to the inquiry and also those employer groups, particularly the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, as I am particularly happy to see that one of our biggest employers contributed as well.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! As it is reconciliation week, I will suspend the house to enable all members to attend the welcome to country in the gardens.

Sitting suspended 10:59 am until 11:28 am.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply

Tim READ (Brunswick) (11:28): I rise to speak on the Legislative Assembly's Environment and Planning Committee's November 2024 report into securing the Victorian food supply. This committee was asked last year to inquire into securing the Victorian food supply in the context of urban sprawl and the impact of population growth on the farming industry and arable land. It is well understood that human settlement for many centuries has been on river deltas, where rivers flow into the sea. These are areas with the best water supply and, due to repeated flooding, the most fertile land. And Australia of course is famous for its urban sprawl. Over the past century we have seen Melbourne grow and some of Victoria's most fertile land put under bitumen and concrete and turned into suburbia. This is

a phenomenon that is occurring around the world and has been written about for at least half a century. Some of our most fertile peri-urban farmland has been subdivided and developed, and I am not just talking about around Melbourne now but around Geelong, the Surf Coast, Bendigo and Ballarat.

I want to read to you a couple of findings from this inquiry. Finding 13 says farmland next to Melbourne's urban growth boundary:

... is being marketed, purchased and 'banked' for its possible increased value if the land is rezoned for development. Local governments may experience pressure to rezone land.

That is a masterpiece of understatement. Finding 14 says:

Land banking may result in agricultural land being left idle, reducing the productivity of Melbourne's green wedges and creating pest issues for neighbouring properties. Uncertainty about the future of agricultural land in these areas also discourages farmers from investing in their businesses.

For a long time – for decades, in fact – the most profitable crop a peri-urban farmer could grow was houses. That is, if you could sell your dairy farm or whatever it was to a developer and turn it into suburbia, you were made. You had made your fortune, and no-one really questioned that. But we understand now that this is an ongoing threat to food production and to food security in the state. While most of our food is exported, which is a comforting observation and people often assume that they need look no further, we found out – for example, during COVID – that we have narrow and few supply chains getting food into our shops.

I should also point out that peri-urban development and suburban sprawl are not the only threats to farming, but it was a narrowly focused inquiry and that was what this inquiry was looking into in particular. It is good news, then, that the *Planning for Melbourne's Green Wedges and Agricultural Land* project is strengthening the planning controls for green wedge areas and peri-urban agricultural land within 100 kilometres of metropolitan Melbourne. This report contains a raft of recommendations to prevent further subdivision of lot sizes in peri-urban farmland, and I strongly endorse these. I call upon the government to make necessary changes to planning legislation to ensure that Melbourne's urban boundary is finally fixed and fixed for good – and not just Melbourne but Geelong, the Surf Coast, Bendigo and Ballarat as well. It is important to point out that the failure of government to limit urban sprawl does not just threaten agriculture, but it will also condemn our lowest income residents to living in remote dormitory suburbs that are only reachable by private transport. I recommend that members look at these recommendations and study the government's response, which is overdue, to ensure that these recommendations are acted upon.

I should also point out that there are different types of agriculture that do not all necessarily need the same level of protection. I would not, for example, regard horse breeding and hobby farms as things that need the protection of, say, market gardens and other food production. And not even all food production is equal. Let us face it, we get a lot more calories or kilograms of food from a hectare of vegetables or fruit than we do from a hectare of livestock grazing. The other point to make is that climate change is a major threat to agricultural security and to food security, and I urge the government to urgently model current and potential shocks to the food system as a result of our rapidly changing climate and to integrate this modelling into any actions undertaken through the Victorian food security strategy. I will leave it there.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Inquiry into Vaping and Tobacco Controls

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (11:33): It is a pleasure to rise today and speak on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's recent report into vaping and tobacco controls. I would like to thank the entire committee – including the chair, the member for Laverton – and the secretariat for their important work in investigating how the Victorian government can better regulate the use of vapes and tobacco, minimise tobacco and e-cigarette harm in the community and control the illicit industry in Victoria. This inquiry was initiated in February 2024 because of the health concerns and economic impacts of

such products and due to the growing illicit trade in both cigarettes and vapes. The Allan Labor government then subsequently announced the introduction of a tobacco licensing scheme after the legislation to amend the Tobacco Act 1987 was passed in November. This demonstrates that our government is committed to prioritising the health and safety of Victorians, and this committee report helps to inform us on how we can show our ongoing commitment.

I understand that the committee received 115 submissions into this inquiry, which demonstrates the community's high interest in understanding the extent of vaping and tobacco use in Victoria and effective control options for the illicit e-cigarette and tobacco industry in the state. The committee's priority recommendation is to establish a Victorian nicotine licensing scheme, an active regulatory authority to sit within the Department of Justice and Community Safety. Every year we lose 4000 people to smoking, and it remains the leading cause of premature death and disease in Victoria, which displays how necessary this inquiry's report and recommendations are. The chair describes in her foreword that vaping, a different way of ingesting nicotine, has become increasingly common in this state but amongst a different group: younger Victorians, including children. As the committee heard throughout the inquiry, considerable data gaps exist for tobacco and vape users under the age of 14, and while tobacco use has declined over the past 20 years in Victoria, there has been a rapid growth in vape usage, particularly within these younger age groups. The committee also found that tobacco users are more likely to be from regional areas and have a lower socio-economic status than those who use vapes.

I chose to speak on this committee report today as I believe it is of significant importance to the Lara electorate due to the impacts that the vape and tobacco industry have on the community of the electorate and the broader Geelong region, especially among children and young people. Greater Geelong has a notably higher smoking rate – 12.1 per cent of adults smoke – in comparison to the state average of 10.9 per cent, and these statistics align with finding 3 of the report, which in part states:

... smokers are more likely to live in disadvantaged areas, in regional and remote areas rather than major cities ...

In the year 2022–23, 30 per cent of secondary school students used or had used vapes in Victoria, and there are many schools within the Lara electorate in particular that have had reports of vaping, which is why recommendation 3 of this report was of great interest to me. The recommendation suggests:

The Department of Education, in collaboration with the Department of Health, examine the barriers school children face in accessing support for nicotine use and addiction, including whether current programs are sufficient to determine if a dedicated counselling and support program for primary and secondary school children ... needs to be set up and rolled out across Victoria.

I know that people in my electorate would be very supportive of this work taking place, as vaping is a prevalent issue in the Lara electorate and the broader Geelong region. I look forward to seeing the government work in this space over the years to come to do everything it can to support younger students and their health. Furthermore, finding 47 of the report states:

The majority of parents see preventing children from vaping as a ... public health priority.

I believe that this is an accurate finding based on what I have heard from many constituents, including parents at local schools, and teachers.

With this report's 27 recommendations and 47 findings, it is great to see that there are so many recommendations around addressing tobacco and e-cigarette use, in particular in regional and low socio-economic communities and around young people's use of vapes, that directly relate to the Lara electorate. Once again, I would like to thank the entire committee for putting together this important report, which addresses this important topic of smoking and e-cigarette use and the illicit trade industry of these products. I commend their work, and I commend this report.

Bills**State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025***Statement of compatibility*

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (11:39): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (**Charter**), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025.

In my opinion, the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025 (**Bill**), as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this Statement.

Overview

The Bill makes a number of amendments to the *Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Act 2024* (**CIPT Reform Act**), the *Duties Act 2000* (**Duties Act**), the *First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000* (**FHOHBS Act**), the *Land Tax Act 2005* (**Land Tax Act**), the *Payroll Tax Act 2007* (**Payroll Tax Act**), the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* (**TAA**), the *Unclaimed Money Act 2008* (**UMA**) and the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972*.

Many provisions of the Bill do not engage the human rights listed in the Charter because they either do not affect natural persons, or they operate beneficially in relation to natural persons.

Human rights issues

The rights under the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are the right to property, the right to privacy and the right to protection from retrospective criminal laws.

Right to property: section 20

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of his or her property other than in accordance with law. This right is not limited where there is a law that authorises a deprivation of property, and that law is adequately accessible, clear and certain, and sufficiently precise to enable a person to regulate their conduct.

CIPT and Duties Acts amendments – commercial and industrial property

Clause 5 of the Bill amends the CIPT Reform Act to authorise the Commissioner of State Revenue (**Commissioner**) to determine whether land has a qualifying use to ensure that land that should be in the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax (**CIPT**) reform scheme but for lacking an Australian Valuation Property Classification Code (**AVPCC**) or for being valued more than 12 months prior to the transaction is appropriately assessed for the CIPT in accordance with the intended policy outcomes of the CIPT reform scheme. This may engage the right to property as natural person owners of land may become liable for CIPT as a result of the Commissioner's provisional determination.

Clause 5 of the Bill also amends the CIPT Reform Act to authorise the Commissioner to assess or reassess CIPT or land transfer duty payable under the Duties Act when the Commissioner's provisional determination is not consistent with the AVPCC allocated to the land in the subsequent valuation by the Valuer-General Victoria (**VGV**). This may engage the right to property as natural person owners of land may become liable to pay CIPT or duty as a result of the amendments.

Where only a partial interest in land has entered the CIPT reform scheme, duty consequences can apply to subsequent CIPT reform scheme transactions that occur within 3 years for the remaining interest in the land. Clauses 16 to 18 of the Bill amend the Duties Act to ensure that the same land transfer duty consequences will apply to CIPT reform scheme transactions involving child lots resulting from the subdivisions of this remaining interest in land. This may engage the right to property as natural person owners of land may become liable to pay duty as a result of the amendments.

However, to the extent that natural persons' property rights are affected by these amendments to the CIPT Reform Act and Duties Act, any limit is in accordance with the law, which is clearly articulated, not arbitrary, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural persons to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly. Furthermore, natural persons who are issued with assessments or reassessments as a result of the amendments will have the protections provided by the TAA including rights of objection, review, appeal and refund of overpaid tax.

Land Tax Act amendments – build to rent requirements

Clauses 29 and 30 of the Bill amend the Land Tax Act to specify that the rental requirement of build to rent (BTR) dwellings is that the property be ‘genuinely offered for rent’ rather than ‘available for rent’.

This may affect the right to property to the extent that natural person landowners of BTR developments may become ineligible for BTR land tax benefits if their BTR dwelling is only available for rent but not genuinely offered for rent.

However, to the extent that natural persons’ property rights are affected by the amendments, any limit is in accordance with the law, which is clearly articulated, not arbitrary, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural persons to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly. Furthermore, natural persons who are issued with assessments or reassessments as a result of the amendments will have the protections provided by the TAA including rights of objection, review, appeal and refund of overpaid tax.

TAA amendments – 50% penalty tax rate for recklessness

Clause 35 of the Bill amends the TAA to introduce a new 50% base penalty tax rate targeting the behaviour of taxpayers and their representatives which amount to recklessness in relation to tax and/or notification defaults.

This may affect the right to property to the extent that natural person taxpayers who are reckless with respect to their state taxation obligations may be liable for increased rates of penalty tax. However, to the extent that natural persons’ property rights are affected by the amendments, any limit is in accordance with the law, which is clearly articulated, not arbitrary, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person taxpayers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and regulate their conduct in relation to tax and notification defaults accordingly. Further any deprivation of property as a result of these amendments is justified as the amendments are intended to deter non-compliance with Victorian taxation laws and promote voluntary compliance. Natural persons who are issued with assessments or reassessments as a result of the amendments will have the protections provided by the TAA including rights of objection, review, appeal and refund of overpaid tax.

UMA amendments – notices of repayment

Clause 40 of the Bill amends the UMA to empower the Registrar of Unclaimed Money (**Registrar**) to issue a notice of repayment of unclaimed money and impose interest on any unpaid amounts, when a payment of unclaimed money has been made to a person that the Registrar is no longer satisfied is the true owner of the unclaimed money. It also empowers the Registrar to recover unpaid amounts specified in the repayment notice as well as accrued interest on any unpaid amounts as a debt owed to the State of Victoria.

This may affect the right to property as natural persons who have received amounts of money from the Registrar to which they were not genuinely entitled may be liable to repay unclaimed money and interest on any unpaid amounts to the Registrar of unclaimed money. However, these amendments are in accordance with the law, which is clearly articulated, not arbitrary, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person taxpayers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly. Further, objection and appeal rights under the UMA will be available to these natural persons. Any deprivation of property as a result of these amendments is justifiable as the amendments are intended to help promote the policy objectives of the unclaimed money scheme which is to return amounts of unclaimed money only to genuine owners.

Right to privacy: section 13

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to enjoy their private life, free from interference. This right applies to the collection of personal information by public authorities. Any unlawful or arbitrary interference with an individual’s privacy will limit this right.

Clause 25 of the Bill amends section 46K of the Land Tax Act to impose written notification requirements on a trustee where land held by the trustee for one trust is transferred to that same person acting as trustee for a different trust. It also imposes notification requirements on trustees that cease holding the trust land in their capacity as trustee and commence holding the land in their own right. These changes to the trust notification provisions are required to ensure that the appropriate rate of land tax is applied as a result of changes in trust land ownership.

Clause 30 of the Bill amends the Land Tax Act to impose the requirement upon the landowner of BTR dwellings to provide the Commissioner with a written declaration in relation to BTR dwelling rental periods upon request by the Commissioner. These declarations are required to ensure that only eligible properties are receiving BTR land tax concessions.

To the extent that the collection of any personal information from a natural person in relation to these provisions may result in interference with a natural person's privacy, any such interference will be lawful and not arbitrary as these provisions do not require that a person's personal information be published. Further, these provisions only require the provision of necessary information exclusively in the taxpayer's possession to achieve the purpose of determining a person's tax liability or eligibility for certain tax concessions. There are no other reasonable means available to achieve these purposes.

Retrospectivity: section 27

Section 27 of the Charter is concerned with the retrospective operation of criminal laws. It provides that a person has the right not to be prosecuted or punished for things that were not criminal offences at the time they were committed.

CIPT Act amendments – provisional determination of AVPCCs

Clause 5 of the Bill amends the CIPT Reform Act to authorise the Commissioner to determine whether land has a qualifying use to ensure that land that should be in the CIPT reform scheme but for lacking an AVPCC or for being valued more than 12 months prior to the transaction is appropriately assessed for the CIPT in accordance with the intended policy outcomes of the CIPT reform scheme. A provisional determination may be made in relation to land as at the date of a transaction that occurred before the commencement of the provision.

The provisions being inserted into the CIPT Reform Act do not amend any criminal laws and therefore section 27 of the Charter is not engaged. In any event, the Commissioner's ability to make a provisional determination regarding land at the time of a transaction that occurred prior to the commencement of the provision is necessary to overcome the unintended outcome that land otherwise eligible to enter the CIPT reform has been excluded from doing so as no AVPCC was available at the time of the transaction.

Conclusion

For these reasons, in my opinion, the provisions of the Bill are compatible with the rights contained in sections 13, 20 and 27 of the Charter.

Danny Pearson MP
Minister for Finance

Second reading

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance)
(11:39): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

Incorporated speech as follows:

The Bill will deliver a key 2025–26 Budget measure. The Bill will also amend several state taxation laws to support fair and effective revenue management for all Victorians.

The Bill contains amendments to the *Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Act 2024* (CIPT Reform Act), *Duties Act 2000*, *First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000*, *Land Tax Act 2005*, *Payroll Tax Act 2007*, *Taxation Administration Act 1997*, *Unclaimed Money Act 2008* and the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972*.

Budget measures

Expansion of off-the-plan duty concession

As announced in the 2025–26 Budget, the eligibility period for the temporary off-the-plan land transfer duty concession for purchases of eligible apartments and townhouses will be extended for a further twelve months to 21 October 2026. The concession was announced on 21 October 2024 and is available to off-the-plan purchasers of dwellings including apartments and townhouses. It reduces the amount of duty imposed on land transfers by allowing purchasers to exclude construction costs incurred on or after the contract date from the dutiable value of the land. The extension of the concession for a further twelve months will support homebuyers and the construction industry by encouraging more off-the-plan purchases of apartment and townhouses.

Family violence tax relief measures

The Bill amends the *Land Tax Act 2005*, the *Duties Act 2000* and the *First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000* to enable victim-survivors of family violence to access tax relief. Currently, victim-

survivors of family violence are unable to access a land tax exemption when they leave their principal place of residence (PPR) due to family violence with no intention to return. Victim-survivors are also unable to access first home buyer benefits on the purchase of a new home where they've been part of an earlier application or because of their or their partner's prior relevant interest in a property.

Consistent with its long-standing commitment to addressing family violence, until now the government has offered ex gratia tax relief to victim-survivors fleeing family violence. To give victim-survivors the certainty of legislative protection, the Bill amends the *Land Tax Act 2005* to introduce an exemption from land tax for victim-survivors for up to 6 years where they have left their PPR due to family violence and have not received income from the land. The Bill also amends the *Duties Act 2000* and the *First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000* to allow victim-survivors to requalify for first home buyer benefits, subject to similar requirements. These measures take effect from the day after Royal Assent.

Build-to-Rent (BTR) amendments

The government is committed to ensuring that renters can access long-term housing. BTR developments offer long-term alternative housing options to home ownership for Victorians.

Under the *Land Tax Act 2005*, eligible BTR developments can receive a 50% reduction in the taxable value of land for land tax purposes and, where applicable, an exemption from the absentee owner surcharge for a period of up to 30 years ('BTR benefits'). To reflect that these benefits should only be available to developers who genuinely offer long-term rental housing, the Bill amends the *Land Tax Act 2005* to clarify that a minimum 3-year rental lease must be genuinely offered to a renter in a BTR development to obtain BTR benefits. To show that a lease term of at least 3 years was genuinely offered, the Bill requires the BTR provider and renter to jointly sign a declaration if the renter elects a lease term shorter than 3 years. The Bill also amends the *Land Tax Act 2005* to prohibit rental terms of less than 12 months being used in eligible BTR developments, except in limited cases, such as the extension of a long-term lease. These amendments will apply to rental agreements that are signed on or after 1 January 2026 in recognition that some developers may need time to alter their practices.

Lastly, the Bill gives the Commissioner of State Revenue (Commissioner) the power to disregard periods where an eligible property is temporarily uninhabitable and it is reasonable to do so, when determining whether developments remain eligible for BTR benefits. A property may be temporarily uninhabitable due to unforeseen circumstances such as natural disasters or other reasonable circumstances such as planned refurbishments. In these circumstances, it is not fair that BTR developments lose access to BTR benefits because the property was temporarily unsuitable for occupancy.

Trust for Nature amendments

The Bill amends the VCTA to expand the Vacant Land Conservation Covenant Account (VLCCA) criteria to allow funds to be allocated to a broader range of conservation covenants across Victoria.

Under the VCTA, private landowners may enter into conservation covenants with the Trust for Nature (TfN) for land that the TfN considers to be ecologically significant, of natural interest or beauty, of historic interest or of importance in relation to the conservation of wildlife or native plants. Land protected by a conservation covenant entered into with the TfN is exempt from land tax.

The VLCCA was established to support the Trust for Nature (TfN) conservation covenants on unimproved land within residential planning zones of metropolitan Melbourne. Initial funding of \$2 million was allocated to the VLCCA to fund conservation covenants in respect of up to 50 properties in metropolitan Melbourne that may be impacted as part of the expansion of the Vacant Residential Land Tax to unimproved residential land in metropolitan Melbourne that has remained undeveloped for at least five years and is capable of residential development. Greater opportunities exist to protect Victoria's unique biodiversity outside metropolitan Melbourne. The strict criteria for the use of the funds within the VLCCA has limited the use of the funds. The expanded criteria of the VLCCA will enable money standing to the credit of the VLCCA to be used in relation to land that contains a dwelling, land that has been zoned for non-residential purposes, or land in Victoria that is outside metropolitan Melbourne. The amendments are proposed to take effect from the day after Royal Assent.

Commercial and Industrial Property Tax (CIPT) Reform amendments

The Bill amends the CIPT Reform Act and *Duties Act 2000* to enable the Commissioner to provisionally determine if land has a qualifying use where no Australian Valuation Property Classification Code (AVPCC) has been allocated to the land, and to request a valuation of any non-rateable non-leviable land from the Valuer-General Victoria (VGV) for the purposes of the CIPT Reform Act. Under the CIPT Reform Act, land qualifies to enter the CIPT Reform if it has been allocated a commercial or industrial-related AVPCC by the VGV under the annual valuation process. On occasions however, where land has not been valued by the VGV and therefore does not have an AVPCC allocated to it, a transaction of that land does not qualify to enter the

CIPT Reform, regardless of whether the land is actually commercial or industrial land. The amendments will enable the Commissioner to provisionally determine if land has a qualifying use, ensuring that land that is otherwise eligible to enter the CIPT Reform is not excluded where no AVPCC is yet available.

The Bill also ensures duty under the *Duties Act 2000* applies to the purchase of a child lot following a subdivision within three years after the parent lot enters the CIPT Reform as a partial transaction. This amendment aligns the dutiable treatment of a child lot with that of the parent lot after a subdivision.

These amendments will take effect from the day after Royal Assent.

Payroll tax amendments

The Bill amends the *Payroll Tax Act 2007* to clarify the definition of regional employees. Since July 2017, regional employers have been entitled to a reduced rate of payroll tax in order to support businesses and employment growth in regional areas. Under the *Payroll Tax Act 2007*, a regional employee is defined as one who performs services 'mainly in regional Victoria'. The Bill amends the *Payroll Tax Act 2007* to clarify that only services performed in Victoria are considered in determining whether a person is a regional employee. This amendment ensures that regional employers whose employees sometimes work outside Victoria are not disadvantaged by the definition of a regional employee. These amendments will come into effect from 1 July 2025.

Other land tax amendments

The Bill amends the *Land Tax Act 2005* to support families of landowners in difficult circumstances, where the landowner is unable to live independently or has passed away. The *Land Tax Act 2005* currently provides that a PPR is exempt from land tax in limited concessionary circumstances where an owner no longer uses and occupies the land, including where they have lost the ability to live independently for an indefinite period, or where they have passed away and their estate is under administration. The exemption is only available if no income was derived from the land in the preceding tax year. If part of the land is being used to derive income from a substantial business activity or a separately rented residence such as a granny flat, the exemption does not apply, resulting in the land becoming fully taxable. The amendments remove this unfairness by allowing the exemptions for owners unable to live independently or who have passed away to apply to that part of the land used as the person's residence. This means tax will only be assessed on the value of that portion of the land used to derive income from a substantial business activity or a separately rented residence.

Separately, the Bill amends the *Land Tax Act 2005* to make certain notification obligations imposed on trustees operate more effectively, reducing red tape. Trustees will now only be required to notify the Commissioner of a disposal or acquisition of land where a trustee ceases holding trust land in their capacity as trustee and acquires that land in their own right or where a trustee ceases holding land subject to one trust and commences holding the same land subject to a second (different) trust.

These amendments will take effect from 1 January 2026.

Unclaimed money amendments

The Bill amends the *Unclaimed Money Act 2008* to empower the Registrar of Unclaimed Money (the Registrar) to recover an amount of unclaimed money paid to a person who is not the owner by issuing a notice of repayment. The Bill also empowers the Registrar to pay an amount of unclaimed money to a subsequent genuine claimant, even if the entitlement has already been paid to an earlier claimant. The amendment to empower the Registrar to pay a subsequent claimant will take effect from the day after Royal Assent. The amendment empowering the Registrar to issue notices of repayment will commence in relation to amounts that were paid to a claimant on or after the day after the Bill receives Royal Assent.

Taxation Administration amendments

The Bill amends the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* to introduce a 50% penalty tax for recklessness by a taxpayer or a person acting on their behalf in respect of the taxpayer's obligations. Under the Taxation Administration Act, the Commissioner may impose penalty tax when a taxpayer does not comply with an obligation to pay tax or make certain notifications required under taxation legislation. The Act currently provides that the Commissioner may impose a 25% penalty tax, as the standard penalty rate, or a 75% penalty tax where a taxpayer shows intentional disregard of the law. This framework limits the Commissioner's ability to respond proportionately to non-compliance across a range of severity. The Bill addresses this issue by introducing a 50% penalty tax for recklessness. The new penalty is modelled on the penalty tax framework under the *Taxation Administration Act 1953* (Cth). The amendment will come into effect from the day after Royal Assent.

I commend the Bill to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:40): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until tomorrow.

Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Statement of compatibility

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (11:42): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act (Vic) 2006*, (the **Charter**), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025.

In my opinion, the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (the Bill), as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of the Bill

The purpose of the Bill is to amend the *Financial Management Act 1994* (the FMA) to:

- a) update financial management principles to better reflect the expectations of government and the public sector
- b) embed notification processes when there is a risk that a department or public body's budget may be exceeded
- c) include the power to include or exclude certain agencies from the operation of certain provisions of the FMA
- d) remove the requirement for warrants
- e) clarify Accountable Officer, Board, and Chief Finance Officer responsibilities
- f) adjust requirements relating to the Budget Update in an election year
- g) adjust transmission requirements for the September Quarterly
- h) strengthen the requirements around the creation or cessation of agencies
- i) update the Regulations and direction making powers.

To fully remove the requirement for warrants to access public funds in Victoria, the Bill also amends the *Constitution Act 1975*.

To adjust the requirements relating to the Budget Update in an election year, the Bill also amends the *Local Government Act 1989*.

Human Rights Issues

Clauses 17 and 18 of the Bill insert new sections into the FMA that create new reporting requirements for financial information, including where a department or public body is at risk of exceeding its budget.

This financial information is principally expected to include documents like balance sheets and records of expenditures. As such, the information provided under these provisions is unlikely to include any personal information.

Accordingly, no person's privacy is unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with because of any of the provisions in the Bill and in my opinion the right to privacy in section 13 of the Charter is not infringed.

As no Charter rights are limited by the Bill, I consider that this Bill is compatible with the Charter.

The Hon. Danny Pearson MP
Minister for Finance

Second reading

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance)
(11:42): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

Incorporated speech as follows:

This Bill is another example of this Government's commitment to sound financial management.

As a Government we have always invested in the services that Victorians need, and the productivity-enhancing infrastructure to keep our economy strong.

And despite the challenges of a once in one hundred year pandemic, disruptions to the supply of key resources driven by international conflict, a spike in inflation, and global uncertainty, our Government has been deliberate in charting a course through this difficult period protecting jobs and growing our economy.

We continue to demonstrate targeted and disciplined financial management through the fiscal strategy we put in place to aid our recovery. This represents a prudent and systematic approach to strengthening the long-term sustainability of the State's finances.

The first step of our fiscal strategy was creating jobs, reducing unemployment and restoring economic growth. The second was to return to an operating cash surplus. Both these have now been achieved. The budget shows that we remain on track to deliver on the third step – return to an operating surplus – in 2025–26. It also shows that we remain on track over the forward estimates to deliver on the fourth step – stabilising net debt as a percentage of Gross State Product – and the fifth step – beginning to reduce net debt as a percentage of GSP.

This Bill is another important step towards delivering on that fiscal strategy. It will make changes that will improve accountability and transparency across the public sector and its entities, removing outdated aspects of existing legislation and ultimately better reflecting the needs of an increasingly dynamic financial and economic environment.

The *Financial Management Act 1994* is the principal legislative instrument underpinning the financial management framework of the Victorian public sector. The Act was written in the wake of the global economic downturn of the early 1990s. But the world has moved on. Our public sector has become more complex and sophisticated in the 30 years since the Act was introduced. And we need our legislative framework to align with contemporary approaches to governance, performance and risk management.

As was committed to as part of the 2024–25 *Victorian Budget*, the Government has reviewed the Financial Management Act to ensure it remains fit for purpose. The review found that the majority of the Act is fundamentally sound.

But given the Government's focus on strengthening Victoria's economy and guarding against future financial challenges, we have identified legislative improvements which will better assist Government to plan for, and deliver, the services that matter most to Victorians.

These amendments are an opportunity to reset expectations and strengthen accountability for every dollar that is given to agencies, supporting us to deliver on our fiscal strategy. It is a signpost for the public sector about the importance of maintaining, and continually improving, sound and sustainable financial management.

The amendments will create the settings for a more risk-based approach to financial management by enabling smaller agencies to be more agile, while holding the larger ones to a higher benchmark. And we will do away with some of the more arcane elements of the Act.

Turning to the specific provisions of the Bill:

The Bill introduces a requirement for agencies to stick to their set budgets and report any financial risks through an 'early warning system'. This will allow government to better manage financial risks as they are identified, putting in place the interventions needed before risks manifest into more significant challenges.

The *Financial Management Act of 1994* did not require departments and agencies to set a budget and to stick to it. We will embed Government's expectations that sound financial management includes establishing, adhering to and monitoring set budgets put in place at the start of the year.

The legislated accountabilities for Accountable Officers and Chief Finance Officers will be explicitly updated and clarified. For example, the Act only specifies the requirement for there to be an Accountable Officer, but is silent on their responsibilities. While for Chief Finance Officers (CFOs), the Act currently specifies only that CFOs are to receive money, make payments and ensure proper accounting records and systems are

maintained. Times have moved on significantly since these were the sole, or even prime duties, of both the Accountable Officer and Chief Finance Officer. These responsibilities will be updated to include, among other things, responsibility for the financial management, financial performance and financial sustainability of the relevant department or agency.

The Bill also strengthens the financial management obligations associated with the creation or cessation of agencies to ensure accountability for these agencies is well defined.

There will be greater clarity on how to correctly establish new entities, and in the right structure, so that consistent and appropriate financial management requirements are applied to those entities.

Finally, the Bill is being modernised by removing the antiquated cash accounting system of warrants. While cash and the cashflow statement are still an important financial measure for Victoria's finances, warrants originated in the days when public servants would seek to take cash from the vaults below Old Treasury Building to fund the activities of departments. In those days the warrant confirmed departments were legally allowed to take and spend that money, because once it was taken, there was no practical way to track it. Since those days, modern controls and checks have been introduced. We now have modern banking and IT systems, and strong requirements to provide annual reports demonstrating how funds are spent, making warrants redundant in the 21st Century. The requirement for warrants consumes considerable administrative effort. This reform will bring Victoria into line with most Australian jurisdictions that have abolished the system of warrants.

This Bill delivers on the Government's commitment to review the *Financial Management Act* to ensure it remains fit for purpose while allowing us to build on the solid foundations in the Act, and will support the Government's fiscal strategy to deliver surpluses and support economic growth.

I commend the Bill to the House.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:42): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Tuesday 10 June.

State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025

Appropriation

The SPEAKER (11:42): I need to inform the house that I have received a message from the Lieutenant-Governor recommending an appropriation for the purposes of the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025.

Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025

Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motions of Danny Pearson and Mary-Anne Thomas:

That this bill be now read a second time.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:43): Victoria needs change. Our state has slipped. We were once the place to be. We had the most livable city. Now we are the highest taxed state with the biggest level of debt. We have become the run-down state. Businesses are closing, and the only sure thing is that when you put your hand into your pocket Premier Jacinta Allan's hand will already be in there. For the first time since Federation, we are now a welfare state. Government now relies not only on taxing Victorians but on holding out our begging bowl and taking a share of tax from other states. And we might pay more than everywhere else, but we get less for it.

It is time to fix this state. Today, in response to the budget, we will be announcing our economic plan to fix it. Our 'Go for growth' economic plan will get Victoria moving again. We have already committed to scrapping four taxes: the emergency services tax, the schools tax on non-government and religious schools, the health tax on GPs and allied health professionals, and the tax on holiday and

tourism. And today we will announce a commitment to scrap a fifth tax. Our four-stage plan will scrap taxes, drive growth and open a pathway to pay down debt. Our plan will deliver the fresh start this state deserves. It is time to stop Victoria's slide. As the chief executive officer of the National Australia Bank Andrew Irvine recently said:

On every measure ... Victoria does a little bit worse.

He is right. Last year inflation in Melbourne was above the national average, and so too was unemployment. The recent state budget confirmed that slide would continue with no plan to fix it. At the same time as our economy slides the government keeps spending too much and remains addicted to tax. Total expenses in last year's budget update were expected to grow by just 0.2 per cent in the coming year, but they have blown out by \$8.2 billion. That is 41 times the growth forecast.

State Labor's addiction to tax is well above any other state. Next year the government will claw in \$41.7 billion and then expand that by an average of 4.75 per cent per year over the forward estimates. Tax is up by 183 per cent since Labor was elected, but our incomes have only gone up by 38.5 per cent over the same time, whilst inflation has hit us by 32 per cent. Costs are going up, but the government keeps taking. That is why our wallets are hurting. That is why the Liberal-National coalition has announced we will put \$3 billion back into the pockets of Victorians. Costs are too high and taxes are too high, and we are committed to making things easier.

The emergency services tax is unfair and a direct assault on Victorians – a tax the Treasurer said Victorians can afford to pay. Well, the Treasurer and her Labor mates are wrong. As Garth Head, an emergency volunteer awareness campaigner, said:

... it's really just a sneaky new tax sold on the backs –

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: And they are laughing. He said:

... it's really just a sneaky new tax sold on the backs of the reputation of our dedicated volunteer and career fire and emergency workers.

Since Labor rammed the tax through the Parliament, we have seen the unprecedented step of hundreds of Country Fire Authority volunteers going off line. Their message is simple: they are at breaking point and this tax will push them over the edge. As Cara, a brigade captain, recently said to me:

... even the strongest communities have limits. The mental and emotional toll this is taking – especially on our farmers who already face so much – is quietly devastating.

So on behalf of the Liberal-National coalition we have a message for you, Cara, and we have a message for every hardworking volunteer, every home owner and commercial property owner hit by this tax and every Victorian: we will scrap Labor's unfair tax, and we will put \$3 billion back into Victorians' pockets. We have a plan to do more than just deliver cost-of-living relief; we have a plan to get Victoria moving again: the Liberal-National coalition economic 'Go for growth' plan – a plan that delivers tax cuts, because tax cuts will drive growth.

In assessing the state budget, the credit rating agencies' sharp assessment was that our state lacks budget integrity. Moody's rating agency has called on the government to improve financial transparency and accountability and strengthen financial oversight. Recent analysis of the last 10 years of budgeting has exposed Labor's deception. The budget has blown out by \$129 billion between the amount they budgeted for and the amount that was spent. On average that represents a \$14 billion blowout each and every year. On top of that, capital spending has ballooned out by 18 per cent each year, and operating expense growth has averaged around 7.2 per cent. Labor has simply forgotten that every dollar taxed by this government was first earned through the hard work and sweat of a Victorian. No-one should believe that a Labor government can deliver their promised \$600 million surplus; it is

phoney. The only thing that Labor can deliver for \$600 million is to not host the Commonwealth Games. Labor cannot manage money. As Moody's also said:

Moderating expenditure growth may prove difficult, given expenses grew at an estimated 5.5 per cent per annum ...

With no control of spending and a budget full of figures that cannot be believed, our credit rating is at further risk. We have already been downgraded to the lowest rating of any state, but unless we better manage our budget it will get worse. Any worsened rating will immediately wipe away any promise of a surplus. As Standard & Poor's recently warned:

If Victoria pushes ahead with the Suburban Rail Loop without additional federal government funding, the state's fiscal outlook may weaken, further eroding its credit standing ...

The best pathway to a strong Victorian economy is to responsibly manage the state budget, and the best way to safeguard our credit rating is to budget with integrity. Instead we have a Treasurer who had no real depth in her first budget and who is now forced to head on a taxpayer-funded trip to New York to personally beg the credit rating agencies not to downgrade us again.

In contrast to this government, our 'Go for growth' four-stage economic plan will start with a commitment to restoring financial integrity. That commitment to financial integrity will be based on the principles of integrity, certainty and confidence – integrity in budgeting, certainty in future policy and confidence for the world at large that we want you to be part of the future of our state. With those principles underpinning a commitment to financial integrity, the pathway to economic prosperity will follow – economic prosperity where a sustainable operating surplus is real and economic prosperity that delivers a pathway to pay down Labor's ticking debt bomb, because when our debt hits almost \$200 billion, our interest payments will reach \$1.2 million per hour. That interest will represent almost 10 per cent of the cost of our entire state budget. That level of debt is just not sustainable.

Integrity with our budget will mean stopping Labor's waste. Under a Liberal–National coalition government we will not accept the \$48 billion in blowouts to major projects that have occurred under Labor's watch – \$48 billion – or the \$216.7 billion Suburban Rail Loop project that we cannot afford, which is why we repeat our calls to stop it, down tools and shut down the project. We will also stop the Treasurer's slush fund, which following the pandemic, has funnelled \$39.9 billion off book into Treasurer's advances to partly pay for infrastructure costs. As government integrity expert Gabrielle Appleby said, Treasurer's advances are 'just a slush fund for the government to use as it will'.

It is time for financial integrity, and it is time for the state's accounts to be reconciled. That is why the coalition has committed to auditing the books, because Labor's financial irregularities will be uncovered. In the private sector the law stops decision-makers from financial recklessness. In this Labor government it is on every minister's CV, and there are no repercussions. No-one is ever held accountable, and fair-minded Victorians do scratch their heads and ask why ministers can be knowingly financially reckless with our taxpayer dollars. And the worst offender is the Premier, who oversaw major project blowouts and chose to ignore what was happening on government worksites. The real irony is that when the Premier leaves Parliament she will be paid a pension, paid for in perpetuity by the taxpayer.

To protect our state's financial integrity forever, we have committed to bringing Victoria into line with the Commonwealth and legislating a charter of budget honesty. The charter will make budget honesty legally binding. It will require future governments to deliver clear, accurate financial reports. Integrity in reporting will be the best defence to protect taxpayers money. Integrity in reporting is not enough, though. Victorians deserve to know how their money is being spent. That is why we will also publish a real-time online public expenditure tracker. The website will show settled spending decisions in real time.

Restoring financial integrity will also mean certainty of policy. No-one has forgotten the then Treasurer Tim Pallas announcing a surprise new property tax at last year's budget breakfast. The

impact of that surprise tax has been real. As AMP's chief economist Shane Oliver recently said, some of the things they have done have harmed the state. There were tax levies put on a year ago now, which has seen a lot of property investor activity leave the state. As the Property Council of Australia has estimated, Victoria continues to scare away much-needed foreign investment with extensive levies that see investors looking to less punitive states. Property council research shows that these taxes have cost us 81,000 homes, \$93 billion in economic growth and nearly 90,000 local jobs. Let me say that again: 81,000 homes lost, \$93 billion in economic growth turned away and 90,000 local jobs denied.

The Liberal–National coalition knows that investment will come back if there is certainty. We will make clear that businesses can make decisions with confidence. The rules will be clear, taxes will be lower and we want your investment in our state. By contrast, since promising there would be no new taxes, Labor has introduced or increased taxes and charges 61 times. Those 61 increases are in addition to the 33 base taxes charged by the state. Our view as the alternate government is that there are too many taxes, tax is too high and tax is stopping growth. Labor are addicted to tax, and their addiction is hurting Victoria.

We have a loud message for the Premier: you cannot tax your way to growth. Next year the government will bring in just short of \$41.7 billion in tax revenue. In the budget out years it will be almost \$48 billion. Without a resource sector, Labor has decided that Victorians are the cash cows. On a state comparison, Victoria leads the nation in tax collection. Victorians are paying more in property taxes than any other state. As the Commonwealth Grants Commission has found, land tax accounts for 13.4 per cent of Victoria's revenue but 11.4 per cent in New South Wales and stamp duty accounts for 22.5 per cent of revenue here but 18.5 per cent for our neighbours. Labor has demonised property owners through tax. We will break Labor's cycle of addiction and reduce the tax burden, and we guarantee no new taxes or charges under a Liberal–National coalition. That is what certainty looks like. But we need to do more than guarantee not to make things worse; we need to bring confidence back to Victoria too, because confidence has been lost. That is why we have already committed to scrapping four taxes. Under a future Liberal–National coalition government the emergency services tax will be scrapped, the schools tax on non-government and religious schools will be scrapped, the health tax on GPs and allied health professionals will be scrapped, and the holiday and tourism tax will be scrapped.

Today we announce a commitment to scrap a fifth tax. The Australian dream is a defining feature of this country's ethos. For Australians, owning your own home is more than a dream. Whether you are new to this country or not, every Australian has a dream to own their own home and be part of our sprawling suburbs and towns. Home ownership data shows home ownership rates of 67 per cent, down from 70 per cent 20 years ago, but the home ownership rates amongst young people have fallen fast. Amongst 30- to 40-year-olds it has decreased from 64 per cent in the 1970s to 50 per cent in the most recent census data, and for those who are aged 25 to 29 it has fallen from 50 per cent to 36 per cent. For many young people the dream of home ownership is dead, and it has been Labor who has helped kill it – kill it with tax, kill it with red tape and kill it because they have no interest in fixing it. No-one should ever forget that it was the former Premier who said:

I've talked to my kids and their friends ... They are happy to rent ...

On behalf of the Liberal–National coalition I say to every Victorian with a dream of owning their first home: we want to help you. We know it is harder than ever to buy a home. We know that a property costs five times more than the purchasing power of the average salary 50 years ago, and we know that at the centre of these significant costs are greedy governments. Of the 61 taxes and charges introduced by this government 30 have been on property, which explains why up to 43 per cent of the cost of a home is made up of taxes and charges. Governments have gone from clipping the ticket on property to being the biggest impediment to affordable home ownership, and no government wants to talk about it because they are all in on the racket. Despite the housing crisis, we saw no answers from the government in this budget, just like we saw no solution to the crisis in the government's housing statement, a housing statement that was nothing more than a masked tax grab – a statement which

promised to build 80,000 homes every year over 10 years. Instead, there was a broken promise in year one, with 60,220 homes built, 25 per cent less than what was promised. As Linda Allison, the Victorian chief executive of the Urban Development Institute of Australia, said:

Industry can't "magic" homes out of thin air; the conditions have to be right and the numbers have to add up.

We know the conditions are wrong: red tape is stifling, and taxes drown the sector. The foreign purchaser surcharge, windfall gains tax – it goes on. Even the government's poorly targeted stamp duty concession has missed the mark. As Max Shifman, the immediate past president of the institute, has said, the policy has 'made no difference on the entry level'. And as Richard Temlett, the executive director of property advisory firm Charter Keck Cramer, has said:

We're in a bad hole. The new-housing market has broken down ...

We believe in home ownership. We believe in home ownership as strongly as we believe in lower taxes. We believe in helping first home buyers with their dream of home ownership. Victorians who work hard should be able to aspire to buy their own home. That is why we are announcing a game-changing commitment to first home buyers. Under an elected Liberal–National coalition government we will scrap stamp duty for first home buyers who purchase their first home property valued up to \$1 million – no conditions, no catches, any property, anywhere. The policy will deliver more than 17,000 exemptions in its first full year, helping young Victorians into a home while injecting confidence back into the property sector. Home ownership is about the power of aspiration, and we are the parties of home ownership. These commitments underpin our message that we will bring confidence back to Victoria again.

Despite our natural advantages, Labor has let Victoria slip behind. We were once the economic powerhouse. We were once on the move. We once held the Economist Intelligence Unit's most liveable city title for six years running. That has all slipped. It has slipped because our private sector cannot thrive. As the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry said:

Our fiscal position is problematic. This creates a heavy burden of taxation and means Victoria is at risk of losing its competitiveness and attractiveness as a place to do business.

Not only are we not the place to do business anymore, but businesses are closing their doors. Recent data from the Australian Securities and Investments Commission shows that Victorian business insolvencies are, for the first three quarters of the 2024–25 year, higher than the full year prior. Without a thriving private sector our growth is being impacted. Victoria's gross state product measured per capita was \$84,000 last financial year, compared with \$93,000 in both New South Wales and Queensland.

Victoria is also underperforming on employment. This month is the 14th consecutive month that Victoria has recorded the highest or equal-highest unemployment rate of any state. With the Australian Bureau of Statistics having recorded labour force data since February 1978, Victoria's 14-month weak unemployment is the longest streak on their records. It was a mistake for this government to move aside the private sector from the centre of the economy and replace it with the public sector. That is what Labor's taxation and big government have led to.

The biggest repositioning took place during the pandemic, but in infrastructure and housing the government has crowded out the private sector. To get Victoria moving again we will reverse that shift. The second stage of our plan will see a future Liberal–National coalition government unleash private sector growth and job creation. To turn around those underlying weaknesses we will cut red tape for business and builders, making it easier to build homes and start or expand businesses, creating jobs where they are needed most. We have already announced commitments to removing red tape in planning by shaking up the cultural heritage system, mandating approval timeframes, setting out clear costs, publishing annual audits of approvals, establishing clear timelines and costs and instituting annual performance audits for Melbourne Water in its approval authority role. But we need to go further.

One of the biggest criticisms from business across every single sector is that this government does not make decisions. It is so bad the private sector would rather invest in another state. That is why we will shake up Business Victoria's model and establish a single point of contact for investors and businesses, which will mean faster decisions and more jobs. The new point of contact will not simply provide information; we will provide a central point for business to contact government. For business it will mean an end to the merry-go-round of government. We will make sure that business has a point of contact which will be accountable and establish timelines and outcomes that will be reported. We will also establish a Victorian productivity commission, whose job it will be to drive advice to government on growing the productivity of our state. We will successfully reduce public sector delays and we will accelerate project approvals because we know that, if we can unleash private sector growth, we will see confidence back in this state, and confidence will increase Victoria's economic output through gross state product.

With the private sector and jobs growth refocused, the next stage of our plan will see us supporting Victorian workers and easing the cost of living. We have already committed to scrapping five taxes, including scrapping the emergency services tax, which will put \$3 billion dollars back into Victorian pockets, but we need to go further on reducing the burden of the 61 taxes and charges introduced by Labor. That is why we also commit to a review of the 61 taxes and charges, with a further commitment to a pre-election plan on how we can reduce those 61 taxes and charges to support Victorian workers and ease their cost of living – because a reduced tax burden will lead to growth.

Going for growth means seeing industries expand. We have already committed to reversing Labor's ban on gas, because Victorians have a right to clean, affordable, reliable and secure energy. They also have a right to choice. Labor's ban on gas in homes is wrong, and we will reverse it. We will also work with industry to turn the gas tap back on. We will kickstart a gas industry. A gas sector which provides reliable energy to the community will also pay their fair share, which will deliver to the budget bottom line and deliver to the household bottom line too. A gas industry will see cheaper energy costs and cheaper energy bills. Our commitment to growth will see industries that have collapsed under Labor expand. Opening the gas tap will see the gas sector grow. Scrapping stamp duty for first home buyers will see the property sector incentivised, and it will see the housing sector grow. With the education sector being such an important part of our economy, we also need to do more to stop the constant threat of Labor governments imposing caps on international students. Our economic plan will see Victoria grow.

As industry expands, we will also make sure that we protect workers in the workplace. To protect workers we will tackle union corruption and misconduct, because what we have seen on government worksites is a disgrace. What has been worse is Labor's and the Premier's silence. We will not be silent. That is why we called for a royal commission into CFMEU misconduct on Victorian government projects and we have committed to establishing construction enforcement Victoria to enforce a reinstated code of practice for the building construction industry. We will grow industry and make sure that workplaces are fair and safe, because we know that by doing so we will see an increase in real disposable income per capital and a boost in workforce participation.

The final stage of our plan will secure Victoria's future by tackling debt responsibly. Our state debt is about to hit \$200 billion. Labor has left us with a ticking debt bomb; we need to defuse it. Soon our debt repayments will consume almost 10 per cent of our state budget and we will be paying \$1.2 million an hour in interest payments, yet last week the Premier refused five times to even admit that debt matters. The word 'debt' was not even used in the government's economic growth statement. Well, debt does matter, and our level of debt is a ticking time bomb. It must be defused. We believe that the only way out of debt is to grow our state. Growing our state will mean that net debt as a share of the state economy reduces.

We also believe that spending must align with budgeted costs so that debt can be paid down. Labor has no plan for growth, no plan for controlling spending and no plan to pay down debt. If they were to remain in office, interest would soon crowd out the choices we can make as a state, and that is why

their debt is a ticking time bomb. More wasted interest payments will mean less quality services, and we will keep slipping as a state. Well, Victorians deserve better. The structural damage caused by Labor's debt requires action, and that is why we commit to legislating a debt cap. The debt cap will be based on net debt as a percentage of gross state product. We will put into law a cap to protect future generations from dangerous Labor government spending. Labor wants to ignore the debt, but it is time to accept that not only do we have an economic reason to pay it down but we also have a moral obligation. That moral obligation is directly linked to one value difference between the two sides of our chamber: we never forget that every dollar collected by government was first earned through the hard work and sweat of a taxpayer.

We have a plan to stop our state slipping, to stop us from being the run-down state. Our 'Go for growth' economic plan will get Victoria moving again. Our plan will get Premier Jacinta Allan's hand out of Victorians' pockets. It will scrap taxes, restore budget integrity, grow the private sector, support workers, ease the cost of living and tackle Labor's ticking debt bomb. Victoria needs fixing, and it needs change. With change Victoria can be the place to be again, and under a Battin-led Liberal–National coalition government, it will be.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (12:17): Well, what a limp-wristed performance from the Kmart Costello opposite. I mean, seriously, you should make sure that Peter Costello gets royalties for that, mate. It was just a failed 2007 speech. It was absolutely woeful. Honestly, if you are going to come into this place, have a bit of vim and verve, and have a bit of originality. I have sat here and listened to speeches like that for the last 11 years, and I will tell you one thing: that bloke was still tying up his shoelaces when the member for Malvern finished his speech. He was a much better contributor than this bloke. This is just woeful. Well, we are back to 2007, are we? That is the originality. 'Go for growth' – who thought up that idea? 'Let's just get a recycled speech from a failed campaign and dust it off as something new.' You know what, I am on to something, because those opposite themselves – even the out-of-towners who were dragooned to come here to listen to that drivel – were not interested. They were paying no attention. And why? Because it is rubbish; it is just rubbish. The guy is talking the joint down. He is trying to basically have this sense that Victoria is some economic basket case. Nothing could be further from the truth.

When you go out and about and talk to businesses, you can see how this state is going gangbusters. Look at, for example, the CommSec *State of the States* report: Victoria is now, guess what, second, with solid results across the board. Well, okay. Who is first? Western Australia. I mean, finishing second to Western Australia is like winning silver next to Usain Bolt. That is how good it is. The budget is very, very strong and stable, because on this side of the house we recognise we need to have a five-step fiscal strategy. If you look at the budget that has been handed down, the operating surplus for this year is \$600 million. Across the forward estimates it is \$1.6 billion. Those opposite talk about the debt at the end of the forward estimates being \$194 billion. It is probably worth noting that the coalition government of Queensland have indicated at the end of their forward estimates period their debt will be \$218 billion. Those opposite just want to talk the joint down. Just because they are a rabble does not mean the economy is a rabble. They want to talk the place down, and we are not having it, because the reality is we have got a clear plan.

We have got sustained operating surpluses across the forward estimates, growth infrastructure investment declines from \$24.2 billion in 2023–24 to \$15.6 billion in 2028–29 and net debt to gross state product will fall to \$24.9 billion. I note the member for Brighton talked about how he will legislate a debt cap. Okay, that is great. What is the number, mate? What is the number? It is one thing to say you are going to do it, but what is the number? Is it 20 per cent? Is it 50 per cent? What is it going to be? I mean, it is just a joke. Those opposite conveniently forget that we are increasing the payroll tax threshold. I would have thought those opposite would be happy about that. I would have thought those opposite, many of whom are failed small business owners, would be happy with the fact that the payroll tax threshold will increase from \$700,000 to \$1 million as of 1 July.

The member for Brighton let the cat out of the bag: \$3 billion worth of cuts. Where is the money coming from? Where?

Members interjecting.

Danny PEARSON: Tax cuts. Okay, so where are they coming from? Where is the money coming from? You are cutting taxes; okay. For the benefit of the member for Nepean, you have two choices when you cut taxes: you either have to reduce spending or debt will grow. So what is it? Is debt going to keep growing, or are you going to turn around and say you are going to cut? I think the Victorian people are entitled to know where the cuts are coming from. Three billion dollars a year. We know that we have got tied payments with the Commonwealth when it comes to education and we have got tied payments to the Commonwealth when it comes to health care, but where is the money coming from? You are taking \$3 billion out of –

A member interjected.

Danny PEARSON: ‘Your waste’; okay. There is a difference between the capital side of the budget and the operating side of the budget. If you are talking about sustained cuts of \$3 billion a year, how many beds are going to be closed? How many schools are going to be flogged off to your mates in the private sector? How many departments are going to be shut? How many services will close because of this reckless action? This is just a fraud; it is just a con. Three billion dollars – the only way they can do that is to wield the axe to the services that Victorians rely on. And again, it is a reprise of what we saw a few months earlier. They will cut, and Victorians will pay each and every day because of the costs associated with the services that they rely on that will no longer be provided.

Those opposite talk about financial integrity. I appreciate the fact that the member for Brighton did not see the second-reading speech till it had just been handed down. We are doing the biggest single rewrite of the Financial Management Act 1994 since 1994. We are the only jurisdiction in the nation that hands our budget papers over to the Auditor-General for sign-off and approval before they are published – the only one. So on this notion that there is no integrity, what are you saying? ‘There’s no integrity in the budget process’ – what are you saying? Are you questioning the integrity of the Auditor-General? Because that is what they have done in the past. We hand the budget papers to the Auditor-General each and every year, and the Auditor-General signs them. If you bothered to open up the budget papers, you would see it. So it is one of two things. Either you are saying that the Auditor-General does not have any integrity – is that what you are saying? – or you are saying, ‘Oh, I didn’t know the Auditor-General signed off.’ That would not surprise me, because I think those opposite rarely bother to read the budget papers at all.

I also note that in budget paper 5, on page 9, we talk about the investments that we are making. We have got a cash surplus of about \$6 billion this year. We are making further investments in productivity-enhancing infrastructure. When you think about that, we have to grow the economy. We have to continue to invest in productivity-enhancing infrastructure, like the North East Link. The North East Link will be an absolute game changer in terms of taking trucks off local roads and improving throughput around Melbourne. This is going to be an absolute game changer in terms of growing the economy.

Those opposite talked about the parlous state of the economy. Well, I would disagree. If you look at the unemployment rate, it is sitting at 4.2 per cent. When those opposite sat on this side of the house, what was it? It was 6.7 per cent. Those opposite are nothing more than economic vandals when it comes to fiscal responsibility and running the economy. If you look at gross demand, we have increased by 0.6 per cent in the December quarter to 2.4 per cent over the year. Again, those opposite talk about how bad it is for business. What I would say is that we have added more than 113,000 businesses since June of 2020, an increase of 18 per cent.

Those opposite talked about the fact that businesses do not want to invest here. The reality is that business investment has grown by over 30 per cent from 2020–21 to 2023–24. We are growing the

economy, and that is what we do. You have to have the fiscal settings in place. We have to try and find ways in which we can crowd in investment, and we will keep growing the economy, which is why the economic growth statement has played a really important role in supporting key industries like data, like digital, like pharmaceuticals and like food tech, recognising the fact that we have got a unique position in this state to be able to drive those efficiencies and reforms, to expand the economy and to make sure that we have got rising living standards. We are doing that by having a clear plan that is in alignment with our fiscal strategy. I am not sure those opposite could even spell 'fiscal'.

Members interjecting.

Danny PEARSON: I am not sure why you are backing the member for Brighton given his well-known views of you. We are making sure that we are making these sorts of investments, because we have got a plan, which we will step our way through thoughtfully, carefully and methodically. We said very clearly we were going to have a five-step plan. We have delivered the jobs, and we have increased the economy, where there have been something like 900,000 jobs since we were elected. That is a 31 per cent increase, which is the highest absolute increase of any state. We said very clearly we were going to achieve a cash surplus, and that has been achieved. We are now on track to have an operating surplus of \$600 million next year.

As I have indicated, the fourth step of the strategy is to stabilise net debt as a proportion of the economy, and the fifth step is to reduce that. We are doing all of this. We are doing it through hard work, applying ourselves, being dedicated, being forceful, being thoughtful and working with businesses. I do not know what those opposite do when they are not in this place. The businesses I talk to around this city and around this state are investing. They are employing more and more Victorians. They are exporting. They are growing their businesses, and they have got a great sense of hope and optimism, notwithstanding some of the global challenges that we are seeing at the moment. Those opposite just want to keep talking the joint down.

The member for Brighton said – I think his quote was – 'The first home owner dream is dead.' Well, what have you done, sport, to fix it? He is blocking legislation in the other place. Those opposite sought to use the instrument of a disallowable instrument in the other place to block planning scheme amendments. They tried to pull that stunt last sitting week, and we voted it down with the support of the crossbench. How on earth do you actually fix issues around housing if you block supply? You are just a fraud if you think that. You are speaking out of both sides of your mouth. If you are serious, you actually want to increase supply. You want to make sure that you have got the policy settings right, and you start to invest more and support the private sector so they can build more and do more. Those opposite are seeking to block it. They want to lock down Brighton. They want to lock down Hawthorn. We saw the member for Hawthorn on the back of a ute opposing developments.

We can see right through these people. What they want to do is just try to channel Musk and Trump – that is what they want. They just want to have their DOGE, their Department of Government Efficiency, and they want to come down and they want to slash and burn. They have already given us a sense of where they are going – \$3 billion worth of cuts. How many hospitals is that? How many schools is that going to be? How many teachers is that going to be? How many police officers will that be? We know very clearly what they are going to do, because that is all they ever do. They cut, they close, they slash and they burn – that is what they do. It is what they have done every time they have been here, and that is exactly what they are planning this time around.

We have a plan. We have got a fiscal strategy. We have budgets which are audited and signed off by the Auditor-General. We are growing the economy, and the economy is expanding – it is growing. We have got near record lows of unemployment at 4.2 per cent, seasonally adjusted. We are making sure that we have got those right settings in place and we have got a plan for the future for Victoria. We are absolutely committed to doing just that – continuing to invest and continuing to support industry. That is why the economic growth statement is so important.

As a government I am so pleased and proud that we have got the largest trade investment network of any of the other states. There is an opportunity for us to work closely with jurisdictions who have got a similar values-based approach, who respect the rule of law, who want to work with us constructively and collaboratively and who can play to our strengths. Think about our food and fibre exports at the moment; they are phenomenal. Our pharmaceutical industry – we deliver something like over 97 per cent of the pharmaceutical products that Australia exports, all out of here, because years ago John Brumby had the plan that you need to try and support businesses like the pharmaceutical industries. We are doing those sorts of investments, and we are making sure that we are growing and expanding the economy.

I am really pleased that we will also be having our \$150 million Victorian Investment Fund. Why? We are doing that because we want to attract more of that investment here. We want to make sure that capital that is footloose can come here and can continue to grow and expand the economy. These are the things that we are committed to and we are very passionate about. We are working our way through this because we have got a plan that has been signed off and approved by the Auditor-General. We are the only jurisdiction in the nation with a fiscal strategy, and we are getting on with it. While those opposite want to just rip off speeches that Peter Costello gave in a losing campaign nearly 20 years ago, we have got a plan for the 2030s and beyond.

Those opposite are stuck in the dim, dark years of Howard's declining years, and it has been made clear today what they want to do: they will cut, they will cancel, they will close. There is \$3 billion of cuts worth now, and they have not even got the honesty to turn around and say what this debt cap will be. Well, pick a number. Tell us what the cap will be so we all know what it is going to be and therefore we can work out from there what further cuts, because you know if they say \$3 billion now, if they ever win, if they win next year, it will not be \$3 billion, it will be \$6 billion or it will \$9 billion. They will all be egging each other on: 'I'll cut harder, I'll cut deeper.' And you know with the National Party that the cabinet room is round but the National Party in government are always hiding in the corner, because that is what they do. They roll over and they forget their communities in return for the white car and high office.

We are making sure that we have got a plan for the future. All those opposite are going to do is cut, cancel, close. Honestly, I have got to say that would have to be the worst budget reply speech I have heard from the opposition in my 11 years here. Honestly, if the member for Brighton had any sense at all, he might have a bit of time for the member for Malvern. Go and have a chat with him, and you might learn a thing or two, because that was hopeless. And you know it was hopeless because those opposite spent their whole time disengaged, disinterested and on their phones. We have got a plan, we have got a vision for this state, we are getting on with it and we are going to make it happen. I commend the bills.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:32): Labor cannot manage money, and Victorians are paying the price. We just heard from the Minister for Finance, who is already walking straight out the door because he has got nothing more to say as to why Victorians are suffering under this government. If that was the putative Treasurer giving his audition, then that is why he is not the Treasurer now, isn't it? We have heard the Minister for Police has got a bottom drawer full of ideas. Clearly that was the attempt at the top drawer from the Treasurer that would be. We know why he is not there.

There are a couple of things that the Minister for Finance just talked about. He tried to say that we were stuck in the dim, dark years of the Howard government. Actually, most people remember the Howard government as pretty good. It actually was not that dim and dark; it was actually pretty good. We had strong employment growth, and we had a budget under control. What those of us on this side and what all Victorians are concerned about in terms of dim, dark years is that this Labor government has taken us back to the Cain–Kirner dim, dark years. The parallels are so stark. It is absolutely concerning for any Victorians who were around at that time just how bad the state of our finances has got under this Labor government. It is a reminder of the Cain–Kirner government. The difference of course is that this time around there are no power assets to sell to get down that debt, which I remind

those opposite is now higher as a percentage of gross state product than it was in the Cain–Kirner years. We are over 25 per cent of GSP as debt-to-GSP ratio.

Emma Kealy: Who sold those power assets?

Danny O'BRIEN: Well, actually, the Minister for Finance likes to tell us about that. He always says that it was the Kennett government, but he was actually around as an adviser at the time, when it was the White and Kirner government that actually started the sale. It is a bit like how this Labor government did the Land Titles Office and the VicRoads registry and the Port of Melbourne, but anyway. I am indebted to you for your reminder of the economic profligacy of this government. For the Minister for Finance to refer to us as economic vandals is like Tamerlane accusing Genghis Khan of being a warmonger. This government suggests that we are economic vandals. Have a look at the mess that these budget papers are in under this government: \$194 billion of debt. That is \$29 million of debt in interest payments every single day in the out years. \$1.2 million of interest repayments per hour is what we are heading for.

Everyone on that side is looking at their phone or looking down and checking their notes from the Treasurer's office for their speech because none of them actually want to address it. Why is it important? It is not about numbers. The numbers are not what is important in this, and that is sometimes lost in our debates. What is important is the impact on people, the impact on Victorians – \$29 million a day for the fifth budget running. In my electorate the people of Gippsland South have not had funding for Sale College. That could be funded in two days with Labor's interest payments – a new school for the people of Sale and district funded in two days of interest payments – not to mention the Foster fire station and the Mirboo North fire brigade getting a new station, which we are supposedly being promised under this new emergency services tax. There are going to be rivers of gold for our emergency services, but I will come to that in a moment.

I was in Bendigo with Gaelle Broad, a member from the other place, last week. It was mentioned to us that there is an intersection on the Calder Highway and Maiden Gully Road in Maiden Gully that is designed and ready to be implemented, but we are waiting on funding from the state government to actually fix that intersection. Not only is that intersection dangerous and an issue for road safety, but until the intersection has been realigned there are four property developments with over 140 homes that are being held up at a time when we cannot get housing and we cannot find affordability of housing. That project did not get funded. I think the member for Mildura asked me whose electorate that was in. I think you will find that is the Premier's electorate. In her own patch, in her own backyard, that project is still not funded and is being held up because this government cannot manage money. The people of Bendigo are paying the price. The people of regional Victoria are paying the price.

We have seen in this budget, continuing on the issue of regional development, we have got a cut to the regional development budget again – I am not quite sure how that is even possible after being cut repeatedly over the years – cuts to the agriculture budget and a cut in real terms to the roads budget. I want to talk a little bit about roads, because this is dear to my heart as the shadow minister, as it is to all of my colleagues and everyone who travels on our roads in Victoria. The government will be claiming – as I am sure we will hear from future speakers – that they are spending a record amount on roads maintenance this financial year. Let us leave aside for a moment the fact that in real terms what the government is proposing to spend is actually a cut on last year, and that is just on CPI. If you look at actual construction costs and particularly road construction costs, it is actually a significant cut. Let us have a look at some of the performance measures. The budget papers very helpfully set out not only what the government is going to spend but what it is going to do. I like to say – I think it is important for all of us – do not listen to what the Labor government says, actually look at what they do and what they are going to do. The 'Department Performance Statement' highlights on page 135 'road area major patched' in regional Victoria. The target for this year was 1,033,000 square metres of patching. How much do you reckon they got done, given they were spending record amounts last year?

Emma Kealy interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: You would think, member for Lowan, they would get more. In fact what they actually expect the outcome to be this year is 566,000 square metres. Members on this side, bear with me on this. Does that mean that there were not actually that many potholes that they had to fix up? You would think that perhaps the government might say, 'Well, we didn't quite get all that done because we only got half of our target done last year. We probably should increase that this year, should we not?' So what is the target for next year?

Emma Kealy interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: It is not 1,033,000 square metres, member for Lowan. It is not 566,000 that they actually got done; it is 70,000. So the target last year was 1,033,000 square metres of road patching; they did not even get half of that done, and their target for next year is 70,000 square metres. A 93 per cent reduction in the target of what they are going to do to fix our roads – that is part of it. You could actually then go on to roads area resurfaced or rehabilitated in regional Victoria: the target last year, 3,163,000 square metres; the expected outcome – well, once again they did not actually meet the target of just over 3 million. So what is the government doing? Are we going to put in a whole lot more money? Well, apparently we are putting in a whole lot more money. Are we going to get more done? No, we have actually cut that target again by a further 14 per cent.

Members interjecting.

Danny O'BRIEN: Oh, absolutely. You have got a regional Treasurer and a regional Premier. Our roads are goat tracks, and the government cannot actually deliver what it said it was going to do last year. So it gives up and actually cuts the target again for next year – in the case of potholes, by 93 per cent. It is an absolute joke.

Emma Kealy interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: Member for Lowan, I am indebted to you again for highlighting that the budget papers say 'Focused on what matters most'. What matters most appears to be failing and just accepting failure and going back to it and failing again. It is a joke when it comes to roads. We see in the budget papers the police budget getting cut. The member for Nepean and my colleague the member for Gippsland East are here, all very concerned about cuts to the fisheries offices. That is still going ahead because Labor cannot manage money, and it is Victorians paying the price.

Where they are really paying the price for this economic vandalism over there is in this absolutely egregious new emergency services tax. It should just be called a revenue tax – that is what it should be – because it is got almost nothing to do with emergency services, and those opposite do not seem to understand that. It is extraordinary that many of them are out there in public saying, 'I'm very concerned about this, and I'm lobbying the Treasurer,' but none of them voted against it. Every single one of them supported it, and we have now got a \$3 billion bill on Victorians – \$3 billion extra on Victorians – to pay for Labor's economic vandalism. This tax is not about emergency services. It is taking Triple Zero Victoria, Forest Fire Management Victoria, Emergency Management Victoria and the State Control Centre – all of these things funded as core government services and funded out of general revenue for decades – and now shifting them across, and Victorians are being asked to pay for them again. So you get people like Trent in my electorate, who is facing his fire services levy bill going from \$7000 last year to \$22,000 this year – a 210 per cent increase. That is the dividend that we are getting from the economic mismanagement of this government. We could give multiple examples about the emergency services tax and how it is impacting on every single Victorian. This is not a farmers tax; this is a doubling of the tax for every residential owner in Victoria and a doubling of the tax for every business, every commercial business. It is a 64 per cent increase for every industrial property and 150 per cent for farms. That is just outrageous. We asked the Premier why farmers were copping such a big whack, and all she could say was, 'Well, they've got big holdings, and so they're riskier.' That is just offensive, particularly given it is those farmers who are generally the volunteers that jump on the trucks and actually fight the fires.

But it is not just the emergency services tax – also land tax. I have had emails from Mark in Sale in my electorate. He and his wife are retired teachers. They have four investment properties that they have used to actually fund their retirement. They do not take a pension; they are funding their retirement. Three years ago their land tax bill was \$385. The year after it was \$765. Last year their bill was \$2774. It is nearly a 10-times increase of their land tax bill under this Labor government, because Labor cannot manage money, and it is people like Mark and his wife who are paying the price. More particularly, it is their tenants that are paying the price, and the tenants of their four properties are pensioners and single mums. Mark and his wife said to me, ‘We simply can’t absorb that. We have to pass it on.’ Now Mark and his wife – and they have not emailed me about this – will actually be facing a doubling of the fixed charge that they pay on their emergency services tax, plus a doubling of the rate that they pay, in addition to those land tax figures that I just mentioned. That is the dividend of the economic management of this government, a Labor government that cannot manage money, and Victorians suffer.

I want to just touch on one more thing from my electorate that exemplifies the ineptitude of this government: the little Winnindoo fire station between Rosedale and Heyfield – and you know when you say something is between Rosedale and Heyfield it is going to be pretty small. Winnindoo is a great little spot. They have got one fire station, they have got a truck and they hope in the future to have a field command vehicle as well. In 2020, in the COVID budget, the government announced they would fund a new fire station for Winnindoo, which we had been fighting for for a couple of years.

Members interjecting.

Danny O’BRIEN: How is that going? Well, no, it is not due to open, because here we are in 2025, five years since the budget announcement was made, and the Winnindoo fire station still has not started construction and the brigade are being told that they will not get their new station until at least the end of next year. So I was very surprised to pick up the budget papers two weeks ago and find, in a line item for emergency services, funding for the Winnindoo fire station – amazing. Six years after the government first put funding for the Winnindoo fire station in there – which they have not built – they have now announced it again. It just highlights how appalling that is.

I should add, circling back to the emergency services tax, the Winnindoo fire station went off line last week in protest at the emergency services tax that they are all being asked to fund. It is a joke, and this government is a joke when it comes to managing money. Labor cannot manage money. They are failing Victorians, and Victorians are paying the price of this government’s failure to manage money.

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (12:47): This is the 11th time I have risen in this place to make a contribution on the budget. The budget papers really are a series of decisions, and this budget is full of the right choices. The 2025–26 Victorian budget is focused on what matters most. The budget continues to acquit Victoria’s fiscal strategy, returning the budget to an operating surplus for the first time since before the pandemic. This budget really is a statement of the government’s priorities. And what has this government prioritised? This government has prioritised assisting Victorians to manage the current cost-of-living challenges that we see globally. Right now the global cost-of-living crisis is hurting Victorian families. They are feeling it in their bills, they are feeling it in their grocery shop and they are feeling it when they send the kids to school or visit a GP, and I can confidently say that the Labor government is on their side with a record \$2.3 billion in cost-of-living relief.

I am going to go through a number of the initiatives in this budget that will assist Victorians to manage these cost-of-living challenges. I think the centrepiece of that in this current budget is free public transport for under-18s, a game-changing policy, because it is something that is going to save families up to \$755 per year per child. That is a huge practical saving for families who need it most. Of course seniors will also benefit from that cost-of-living measure with free statewide public transport on weekends. It will mean Victorians with a seniors card can experience even more of our state, anywhere in our state, without the extra expense. The budget invests a further \$18 million to enable pharmacists

to treat more Victorians with more conditions without a trip to the doctor for a prescription. Previously trialled as the community pharmacy pilot, this investment locks it in for good and makes it even bigger.

The budget also helps those doing it the hardest, and that includes a power saving bonus for eligible Victorian households with a concession card, delivering \$100 just in time for winter bills in August. Funding of \$30 million is available, which will support 27,000 homes to install electric heat pumps and solar hot-water systems, saving them up to \$400 on their energy bills every year, and a further \$12 million will fund the rollout of insulation upgrades under the Victorian energy upgrades program, halving the average cost of ceiling insulation from \$3000 to \$1500.

Labor established the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund in 2015, making sure that no young Victorian misses out on the things that make school fun, and this year it is helping around 200,000 kids who have a parent or carer with a healthcare or concession card. What this budget does is increase that payment from \$154 for primary school students and \$256 for secondary school students to \$400 for every eligible student every single year. It is not a one-off – every single year. We are also delivering more than 65,000 Get Active Kids vouchers, which provide up to \$200 towards the cost of kids sport membership, equipment or uniforms for families with a healthcare or eligible concession card.

Most importantly, we are supporting food relief charities and organisations by doubling the community food relief program. We all have wonderful organisations in our electorates – not-for-profit groups, charity groups, who offer emergency relief – and many of us have community information and support services. This \$18 million investment will deliver \$9 million to support frontline organisations through the community food relief program, \$6 million to double our support for regional food shares and \$3 million for Foodbank's grow program, which will make sure surplus farm produce that would otherwise go to waste instead supports Victorians experiencing food insecurity. Funding of \$5.1 million will support Good Shepherd's Good Money program, providing no-interest loans to more Victorians and making sure a stroke of bad luck does not have serious financial consequences. Of course the budget also continues free kinder for three- and four-year-olds, saving families up to \$2600 a year per child on kinder fees.

Perhaps most importantly, this budget continues the Labor government's ambition to get more Victorians into a home, and that includes \$61 million to extend the stamp duty concession announced in October 2024, slashing stamp duty on eligible off-the-plan apartments, units and townhouses for another 12 months. That is a fair amount of stimulus for supply in this state. Earlier today we heard the member for Brighton in his budget reply announce a Liberal policy for stamp duty relief. But it does nothing about supply, and that is the key. That is what this government is addressing. In fact the member for Brighton has done everything he can to block supply. We remember that protest on Church Street, Brighton. We remember that famous photograph of the member for Brighton glaring into the window like a Disney cartoon villain. He has done everything he can to block supply. He outlined nothing in his budget reply that would actually do anything for supply. I mean, empty words about supporting first home buyers – you cannot help a young person purchase a home that does not exist. That is why this government has prioritised supply. Supply is what this government has prioritised. This budget extends our ambition to not just help first home buyers purchase a new home but actually ensure that we have new homes for first home buyers to purchase.

I would now like to turn to some matters that fall within the area of my portfolio responsibility of consumer affairs. I am very grateful to be the Minister for Consumer Affairs, because it is in that portfolio where my one ambition is to achieve fairness and equity for all Victorians. In this budget we have a \$4 million grant for Mortgage Stress Victoria. Mortgage Stress Victoria is a wonderful organisation that exists with funding from this state government. This organisation provides practical support to people experiencing mortgage stress, whether that is social work, financial counselling, financial planning, advocacy or negotiating with your bank on your behalf. It is about relieving the burden on people experiencing mortgage stress and ensuring that they are getting the right advice. You know what, in the last couple of years Mortgage Stress Victoria, with the support of our government, has prevented 190 reposessions, and a third of their clients are victim-survivors of family violence.

So I am very, very proud that as part of our record cost-of-living measures announced in this budget we are providing \$4 million to Mortgage Stress Victoria so that they can reach more people in mortgage stress. I am so very proud of that, because it is only a Labor government that ever takes that sort of action.

I was with Mortgage Stress Victoria a number of weeks ago visiting their offices, because in addition to the \$4 million grant that we have just announced, we have also provided Mortgage Stress Victoria and a number of other not-for-profit organisations with financial counselling grants. In addition to Mortgage Stress Victoria, there are 15 others for whom I have approved a financial counselling grant earlier this year, and I am really pleased to have visited a number of them. I visited South East Community Links with the member for Mulgrave. I think the member for Mulgrave mentioned this in this house recently, but when we visited South East Community Links the member for Mulgrave shared that she was raised by a single mum who received a lot of assistance from South East Community Links and actually said that without South East Community Links she does not know where she would be today. She is a member of Parliament today – a member of this house – probably in part because of the support of these wonderful organisations that we as a government fund.

I also visited the Cancer Council recently. They have also received a grant of nearly \$1 million from our government for financial counselling services, because a cancer diagnosis can lead to some financial difficulties. These financial counsellors take this burden off the shoulders of people experiencing cancer by ensuring that they know their rights – ensuring if they have income protection insurance, for instance, that they know they have income protection insurance – and assisting them to prioritise bills. That is what the financial counsellors at the Cancer Council do.

Better Health Network is another organisation that we have funded. They are in my electorate of Bentleigh. I met with the financial counsellors over there. They assist particularly people with gambling addictions, and they said to me that they have met people who have literally lost their homes from the comfort of their couch. What these financial counsellors do is set these Victorians on the right path back; that is what they do.

I have met a number of other organisations for whom we have granted financial counselling grants: the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency in Werribee; Meli, Geelong, with the member for Geelong; and Tenants Victoria, who assist so many people in rental stress, with the full support and funding of this government. Consumer Action Law Centre was another one. Consumer Action Law Centre run the debt helpline – again, an organisation funded by this government to help people who need their help, to help people achieve fairness and equity. This is why I am proud of what we have done in the consumer affairs portfolio, aided by this government through this budget.

I would like to mention another cost-of-living initiative that the Premier and I announced earlier in the year, and that is the government's fair fuel plan. The first phase of the fair fuel plan will be introduced in the next couple of months, and that includes a special feature on the Service Victoria app, which is very well known to Victorians.

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

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

The SPEAKER: I would like to acknowledge in the gallery the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory Mark Parton MLA.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Bail laws

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. The Premier consistently talks about Victoria having the toughest bail laws in the country, yet the revolving

door in the justice system continues. Premier, how many offenders at the Northland shopping centre were on bail?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Mordialloc, you can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Mordialloc withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): In thanking the Leader of the Opposition for his question, can I also thank the men and women of Victoria Police and all first responders who attended very, very quickly to what was undoubtedly for the families, the shoppers and the retail workers at Northland shopping centre on Sunday an incredibly distressing and traumatic incident to have to witness. I do hope that we can all collectively thank and acknowledge the work that is done by Victoria Police and show some respect for the work of Victoria Police in thanking them. Also I do want to take this opportunity in answering the question to acknowledge that it was an unacceptable incident that would have caused a lot of trauma for those who witnessed it.

In terms of the Leader of the Opposition's question, I am aware of at least one of the alleged offenders, but I will seek some further advice from Victoria Police, because what I will not do is compromise the investigation from Victoria Police. I say this in the context that when I was briefed yesterday morning by the acting chief commissioner he advised me that it was continuing to be an active investigation. I would have thought someone who has spent a lot of his time in Victoria Police would know that having an active investigation means that Victoria Police are pursuing their investigation, and that should never be compromised by the words of politicians in any place, including this place.

I will also say this: we brought to this Parliament tough new bail laws that those opposite opposed. These tough new bail laws are in place and put community safety first. But I do want to be very clear –

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance, the question was very specific about how many were on bail due to the weakened bail laws of this government that were changed last year that allow these offenders to continue to be on the streets.

Ben Carroll: On the point of order, Speaker, on page 155 of *Rulings from the Chair* Lindell is very specific that the preamble forms part of the question. The opposition leader went to bail laws, and then he asked about Northland specifically and he asked about a number. The Premier gave him a number and is also seeking further advice and then went to bail laws. It was a very thorough answer, and I ask you to rule the opposition leader's point of order out of order.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition and Deputy Premier, I ask you to make your points of order succinctly. The Premier was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was saying in reference to the tough new bail laws that have been passed through this Parliament that they have placed community safety first. I do want to be very clear that the safety of all Victorians depends on all aspects of our justice system placing community safety first, which is why we will continue to back Victoria Police, resource them, support them and give them tough new powers.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): Premier, in the 48 hours since the violent attack at Northland, putting families, retail staff and security at risk, how many of the violent offenders have been granted bail, putting them back on the street?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): Again I will not be drawn by the Leader of the Opposition into compromising an active police investigation. Secondly, Victoria Police have already reported on the work that they have done to date. They reported on this publicly yesterday and reported that two of the offenders were remanded to appear before the courts. As I have said, there is an active investigation, and I know those on this side of the house are focused on supporting the work of Victoria

Police, not compromising the work of Victoria Police. This line of questioning from the Leader of the Opposition yet again exposes that they are all about the politics and not about community safety.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. It was very narrow: how many violent offenders were granted bail from that very, very tragic incident on the weekend?

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business knows that a point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: State Electricity Commission

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:08): I was delighted to join the Minister for the State Electricity Commission this morning to announce that the SEC is back and it is doing what it has not done for 30 years: powering Victorian buildings with clean, reliable renewable energy and of course putting people first. When we were at the John Cain Arena this morning – I repeat, John Cain Arena this morning – ‘Powered by the SEC’ was lit up on the screens at the John Cain Arena –

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Polwarth left the chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: and it was a big, bright orange reminder of the difference between us on this side of the house, who are focused on putting people first, and those opposite, who sold off the SEC, put profits before people and demonstrated quite clearly that they were not on the side of Victorians. Well, we are, and from 1 July the SEC is going to power our schools, our hospitals, our trains, our trams, our police stations and our fire stations with renewable energy. What is even better is that every dollar it earns is going to go straight back into building more renewables, like the renewables that are being built in Horsham, which the minister and I attended – what a great project that solar farm is in Horsham – or indeed the renewable battery project in Plumpton. We are doing this because Victorian families and businesses deserve cheaper bills, not higher profits for overseas companies. It was a proud day, particularly. The Deputy Premier and I will be proud to tell our fathers that we have brought back the SEC, because they lost their jobs as a result of those opposite cutting and selling off the SEC.

Community safety

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:11): My question is to the Premier. Crysta Healey has said that she is too afraid to go to a service station after being viciously attacked by a machete-wielding thug in an attempted carjacking and, in relation to a ban on machetes, has simply said, ‘Why wait?’ On behalf of Crysta, I ask the Premier: why wait?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:11): Again, I reiterate my thoughts are with people like Crysta who experienced the trauma of what they witnessed at the Northland shopping centre on the weekend, which is why we announced yesterday that we were moving immediately to choke the supply of these dangerous weapons from being sold here in Victoria. In answer to the broader question about the timing of how we are moving to ban machetes here in Victoria, we are the only state in Australia to do so, firstly. Secondly, bringing about this ban in six months, which took the United Kingdom 18 months to introduce, we are also doing it –

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, if the Premier had begun this process 18 months ago when we put forward a private members bill, maybe they would have been banned already.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, you know that is not a point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: What I was also going on to say is that the key and central piece of advice to how we roll out the first ban on machetes here in this nation was the advice of Victoria Police on how this rollout could be done as quickly as possible and as safely as possible. When we are considering

community safety in terms of dealing with these dangerous weapons, we certainly have an obligation to protect the community, which is why we are moving to choke the supply of these dangerous weapons as soon as possible. But we also have a responsibility to support the men and women of Victoria Police to ensure that their workplace is also a safe one.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, instead of gaslighting police, the Premier should just answer the very narrow question: why wait? Why not introduce the ban now?

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: That point of order just demonstrates yet again the politics of those opposite – not interested in community safety. Offensive remarks like that, attacking the work –

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was very simple: why wait? If the Premier wants to talk about playing politics, on Sunday she said she could not stop the sale and yet the day after she said she could.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: I think the member for Evelyn's point of order shows deep disrespect. I was in the process of referring to the advice from Victoria Police on how to do it as quickly as possible but as safely as possible. I know the Leader of the Opposition is not too fussed about workplace safety; we know that well and truly.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition will come to order. Leader of the Opposition, it is extremely disrespectful. I have asked you to cease interjecting across the table several times.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, we care about the workplace safety of those retail workers. Why wait when there are machetes out on the street now?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members who continue to raise points of order that are not points of order will be sat down. I ask the Leader of the Opposition to cease interjecting across the table, and the Leader of the Nationals and the Leader of the House.

Jacinta ALLAN: I am going to go back and start again. The reason why taking the advice of Victoria Police was so central to the timing of introducing the first ban on machetes in Australia is that it was to do it as quickly as possible but as safely as possible. In considering our obligations around community safety, we have an obligation to the men and women of Victoria Police, who work in difficult and dangerous conditions, to not make their job any more difficult and dangerous. That might not be a concern of the Leader of the Opposition, but it is certainly of importance to me.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:16): On Sunday Superintendent Kelly Lawson said of a machete ban:

It's no secret that Victoria Police would like to see that put in place as soon as possible.

Why does the Premier continue to ignore the request to ban machetes and keep Victorians safe?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:16): The Leader of the Opposition knows he is deliberately misrepresenting the comments from Victoria Police, and I find that pretty unconscionable from someone who stands here as the leader of a major political party. We have worked with Victoria Police to bring about this Australia-first ban of machetes as quickly as possible, a point that has been reiterated on a number of occasions by Victoria Police command. We have worked with them to bring it about as quickly as possible and as safely as possible. If the Leader of the Opposition has a problem with dealing with workplace safety, I would suggest that is a matter for the Leader of the Opposition, because we will not compromise on supporting workplace safety, whether it is Victoria Police or

whether it is retail workers, which is why we are bringing about new powers to strengthen protections for retail workers – and, can I say, members of parliamentary staff as well, who deserve our respect in keeping their workplace safe.

Ministers statements: State Electricity Commission

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:18): This morning I was absolutely delighted to announce with the Premier that the SEC will power the Victorian government with 100 per cent renewable electricity. 4346 schools, hospitals, police stations, trains, trams and more will be powered by the SEC, a publicly owned entity, from 1 July, and every Victorian will benefit from this because the SEC is on the side of Victorians. SEC profits will be invested back into building more renewables right here in Victoria, not sent to private shareholders overseas.

As we know, the more renewables we build, the cheaper power prices will be for every single Victorian. It is why our electricity wholesale and retail electricity prices are the lowest in the country. Victorians pay less on their bills because of our renewable energy investments, and just yesterday the Victorian default offer showed itself to be \$431 less than the default market offer in other states. And the SEC projects are creating jobs. More than 1100 people have worked at the Melbourne renewable energy hub in Plumpton, and more than 246 full-time roles will build the SEC renewable energy park in Horsham.

The SEC will be powering every corner of our state with cheap renewable electricity, from health services in Hastings to schools in Sydenham, water supply in Wendouree, trains in Thomastown, right here at Parliament House and the icons of our city and our great state, like the John Cain Arena, Flinders Street station and the Melbourne Zoo. Our government is focusing on what matters most to Victorians, driving down their energy bills, helping with the cost of living, delivering the renewable energy transition and delivering 67,000 jobs in the energy sector by 2040. We are on the side of families, powering Victoria for Victorians with the SEC.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:20): My question is to the Premier. The Premier has repeatedly said that every cent raised by the new emergency services tax will go to boosting our emergency services. Budget papers show the tax will raise an additional \$600 million next financial year, but the emergency management capability output is actually reducing by \$203 million. Why is the Premier taxing Victorians more but giving emergency services less?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:20): Acknowledging the question from the Leader of the National Party, I have to say that I am not going to take his word or his interpretation of the budget papers. I say this in the context that the member for Rowville is still denying that he cut money from the CFA and the MFB. You are still denying that. The member for Rowville is still denying that.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, on the question of both relevance and debating, and to assist the house: budget paper 3, page 158, Premier.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. The Premier was being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: This goes to why we have brought about a change to an existing levy, because it is about making sure that the SES who are based in Maribyrnong, who responded to the floods in Maribyrnong, have the support that they deserve. It is about making sure that the Emerald SES, who respond time and time and time again to the storm and wind events that occur in that part of our beautiful state, have the support that they deserve. It is about making sure the emergency services that I met in Mirboo North last year after those wild wind events that tore through our state have the equipment and the tools that they deserve. That is why we have made this change. We are putting investment back into our emergency services.

Danny O'Brien: I renew the point of order on relevance, Speaker. The rhetoric is fine, but the budget papers show otherwise. The government is not giving extra money to the SES or anyone else.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked. I cannot direct the Premier how to answer the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: If the Leader of the National Party needs any further assistance, he is wrong. As I was going through –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: I will give this to the member for Gippsland South: he spent a lot of time on PAEC. The member for Gippsland South spent a lot of time on PAEC, and on the occasions that I attended PAEC, he often also did not get the questions right. It is a fact that we are investing in our emergency services. It is a fact that those opposite have signalled that they would cut funding to the state emergency services, that they would not support our state emergency services, and that is just reverting back to type.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:24): Mark from Mirboo North was at the protest last week. He is facing a doubling of his emergency services levy, yet the Mirboo North fire brigade has been waiting for a new station for eight years. Will any of the extra tax Mark and other local residents pay go towards funding a new station for Mirboo North?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:24): I would like to thank the Leader of the National Party for his endorsement of the changes that have been made, because that is exactly why, by taking an existing levy and expanding it, we can provide more investment in fire stations, in state emergency services. This is exactly why. Whether it is a letter from the member for Kew or correspondence from the member for Lowan about more investment in our fire and emergency services, that is exactly why we have made this change. So I thank the Leader of the National Party for his endorsement of the changes that have been made.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual, and the fact is that the tax revenue is not reserved for CFA or SES volunteers. I ask you to ask her to be factual.

The SPEAKER: As I have ruled previously, there is an expectation that all members will be factual when they are on their feet. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: State Electricity Commission

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:25): On this side of the house we know that the health impacts of climate change are real, whether it is the increased incidence of heat-related illness, more mosquito-borne viruses, respiratory illness or indeed thunderstorm asthma. We also know that this is an issue which our health professionals care deeply about, and that is why I am so proud that from 1 July Victoria's health services will be 100 per cent powered by the SEC – by cheap, renewable, publicly owned energy. What is more, our hospitals will save approximately \$13 million over the next three years on their energy bills, allowing us to ensure that this money is invested back into what matters most for Victorians, and that is the delivery of frontline care.

Powering our hospitals will support the SEC to continue its work building more solar and battery storage right around the state. This includes of course in Melton, where, by the way, we are on track to deliver Victoria's first ever 100 per cent electric hospital. Pumping more renewable energy into the grid, driving down energy prices for Victorians and slashing emissions are all part of the many advantages that come from bringing back the SEC. This government is making sure that our hospitals reduce their contribution to climate change. But can I say all of this –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! It is very disrespectful for me not to be able to hear the minister on her feet. There is too much conversation in the chamber.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: We have proudly brought back the SEC. But I need to say this: it is all at risk should the Liberals come back to power, because we all know, just like they cut, close and privatise hospitals, they will cut, close and privatise the SEC once again.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the comments that the Leader of the House is making are baseless. Ministers statements are not an opportunity to attack the opposition. I would ask you to ask her to stop doing so.

The SPEAKER: The minister has completed her ministers statement.

Education system

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:28): My question is for the Minister for Education. Minister, earlier this month the *Age* reported that your government has cut \$2.4 billion from our public schools by delaying Gonski funding commitments by three years. Our state schools are already the lowest funded in Australia, receiving thousands less per student than all other states and territories. Our wonderful teachers are the lowest paid in Australia, and they are leaving the profession in droves because they are overworked and underpaid. Minister, will you reverse the decision to cut \$2.4 billion from Victorian public schools?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:29): I do thank the member for Richmond for her question on what is such an important topic: public education. Can I say, not since Federation has a government invested more in public education than the Allan Labor government. We have made sure that every child, by 34 per cent, has increased their public school funding under the Allan Labor government. Add to that that one in two schools built across Australia are built right here in Victoria. Can I just say, the last budget handed down had \$4.9 billion invested for our education system, beginning with 90 per cent of the brain being built right before pre-prep. Through the work of Minister Blandthorn right through to post-secondary, including Best Start, Best Life, we are making sure every child, no matter their postcode, can live their best life.

What it also means is there is additional funding. The member for Richmond went to teachers. About \$150 million is there to make sure Victoria's best teachers are supported and get all the support they can. We also know the evidence shows that explicit instruction, teaching kids mathematics and phonics, helps those teachers, helps drive down behaviour and makes sure that all of our kids are equipped with all the skills they need.

It is no secret that when it comes to NAPLAN we are top of our class. On every NAPLAN measure Victoria is above the national average, and that is something we should be proud of. That is why we will continue to invest in the Education State and continue to make sure our public school kids get every best start. I remind the member for Richmond that since we have come to office, across all that infrastructure, 99 per cent of that infrastructure spend came from Victoria and 1 per cent from the Commonwealth. Through the Premier's leadership –

Tim Read: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the Deputy Premier has not gone near the question.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Education was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Ben CARROLL: We will fund to 75 per cent our state-resourced students. We will make sure they get the funding they deserve. That is why since we were elected we have reversed the cuts that came on education. We will continue to make sure everyone from pre-prep to primary to secondary to post compulsory education continues to have their best life and gets every opportunity in the Education State.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:32): I thank the minister for his answer. Just to be clear, the \$2.4 billion of cuts was to operational funding, but since the minister has mentioned capital works funding, let us talk about capital works funding. Spensley Street Primary is an example of a good community with dedicated teachers, but it is one of hundreds of schools across Victoria that have been neglected for decades by the state government and are desperate for upgrades. Families have donated and fundraised over \$1 million to cover basic maintenance and upgrades, but their toilet blocks are in desperate need of an upgrade to make them safe and appropriate and their learning spaces have not had any upgrades for decades. Minister, will you fund urgent upgrades to make Spensley Street Primary a suitable environment for students and staff?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:33): I had the pleasure of meeting 19 brand new principals that will start teaching next year at our brand new schools. Not since free education was introduced back in the 1870s have we had a government that has invested more in public education. I challenge the member for Richmond to find any other year where one government opened 19 new schools in one year. The member for Richmond also went to capital: 2300 upgrades done under the Labor government and \$18.5 billion invested in capital alone. When it comes to capital, we will not be lectured by the other side. We will make sure every person gets the opportunity and continue to invest in education.

Gabrielle de Vietri: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I asked a very specific question about a school that does not have suitable toilets right now because of funding cuts to its capital works.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Education was referring to capital, which was in the body of the question. I cannot direct the minister how to answer the question. The minister was being relevant.

Ben CARROLL: There have been no funding cuts. There has only been record investment by the Allan Labor government in education, making sure every child gets to live their best life.

Ministers statements: State Electricity Commission

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:34): I rise to update the house on how the State Electricity Commission is not only powering the Education State but powering the futures of young Victorians everywhere. I just spoke about 19 new schools. What I did not mention is they are all going to be powered by the State Electricity Commission – all powered by renewable energy in these 19 new schools. \$18.5 billion invested by the Allan Labor government is making sure everyone gets that opportunity to live their best life. But we also know that climate change is not a future threat; it is here and now. That is why from 1 July 90 per cent of schools – nine out of every 10 – across our state will be powered by renewable energy, and that is making sure that our young people know that the solar panels on their classroom roofs are renewable energy. It is making sure it builds a future for them and makes sure they have jobs for the future through our rollout of STEM education as well.

As the Premier said, both our dads were Jeffed and lost their jobs at the SEC. That was a tragedy for our families and many other thousands of families around Victoria, but it was also a tragedy for climate action, because we knew from the previous Labor administrations the SEC was going to cut emissions. It took another Labor minister and another Labor government to bring the SEC back. That is why I am so proud, as the son of someone who worked at the SEC, that I will be the first Minister for Education in 30 years to say our public education system will be powered by renewable energy. I commend the Minister for Climate Action for that work.

We know that under the Allan Labor government green, clean renewable energy will be what powers our young people and what powers our state. We will make sure they never, ever have to contemplate a school powered by nuclear, because we know on this side of the chamber that clean, green renewable energy is what it is about. It is what future jobs are about. It is the existential crisis that we are focused on right now.

Housing

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:36): My question is to the Premier. Over the time Labor has been in government the home ownership rate amongst 30- to 34-year-olds in Victoria has fallen almost 15 per cent, from 64 per cent to just over 50 per cent. Why do home ownership rates continue to fall so dramatically under this government?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:37): I know props in the house are disorderly, but if I had a big, giant mirror I would hold it up to the member for Brighton and say this is the reason why we are seeing more and more young people locked out of the opportunity to buy their first home, start a family and build their long-term wealth. The gall of the member for Brighton to come into this place – the member for Brighton, who marches up and down the main street of Brighton with his megaphone –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: I say this in answering the member for Brighton's question: who was it just recently, just a couple of weeks ago in the Parliament, that tried to block –

Bridget Vallence interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: I am going to get it out, member for Evelyn. No matter how many points of order, I am going to get it out.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Laverton can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Laverton withdrew from chamber.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: It is entirely relevant to the question that is being asked, because we are working incredibly hard to reform the planning system, to work with industry and to work with local government to get more homes built here in Victoria. Occasionally the levers that we need to use to get more homes exist here in the Parliament, and just recently who was it that tried to block the building of more homes near train stations? Who was it? The Liberal Party.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, it was a very narrow question: why have home ownership rates fallen under this Labor government?

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, on the point of order, you have repeatedly asked the Manager of Opposition Business not to use points of order as an opportunity to restate the question, yet she continues to defy your ruling.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate that ruling, because I have got a few more examples to share with you. Who was it that just recently in the Victorian Parliament tried to block vital planning reforms to build more townhouses here in Victoria? The Liberal Party. Who was it who took time out from marching up and down main street in Brighton and went to a different part of Brighton to oppose more homes built? It was the member for Brighton. The member for Sandringham has had a go at this as well, opposing the construction of more homes in Highett.

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: You are going to confess as well, are you?

The SPEAKER: Member for Point Cook, off you go: an hour. The member for Sunbury is warned.

Member for Point Cook withdrew from chamber.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order on the question of relevance and also debating, Speaker, the Premier seems to have forgotten that she is the government and has been for a long time.

The SPEAKER: The Premier is being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I would have thought the Leader of the National Party, to get to that lofty position, would have understood that there are things like the Parliament that need to approve the townhouse code, the train and tram code. But what I was just getting to is that the member for Brighton, the member for Sandringham and the member for Hawthorn have all marched up and down the main streets of their communities blocking the construction of more homes. That is why we are using every tool and lever – the work of the planning minister in reforming the planning system, the work with industry, the release of more greenfields land and, yes, legislative and parliamentary reform – to get more homes built to support young people here in this state.

Members interjecting.

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

Jade Benham interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Make that an hour and a half.

Member for Mildura withdrew from chamber.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:42): With up to 43 per cent of the cost of a new home being tax, pricing thousands of Victoria's young people out of the property market, isn't government tax the biggest obstacle to young people buying their first home?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Eureka, you can leave the chamber for half an hour. Minister for Finance, this is your last warning.

Member for Eureka withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:43): I am again delighted to remind the member for Brighton that the state in Australia that has more first home buyers than any other state is Victoria. The state that is building, completing and approving more homes than any other state is Victoria. The government that is working hard –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask members on their feet, particularly those at the table, not to incite members to respond.

Jacinta ALLAN: We are proud of the work we are doing, recognising that young Victorians have been denied the opportunity of previous generations to buy their first home, start a family and build their long-term wealth, and we are on their side and we will continue to support them, not block more homes.

Danny Pearson interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: The Minister for Finance is right: it is a question of supply and demand. I know there are plenty of people demanding the Shadow Treasurer's role, but we are blessed that the member for Brighton is performing those duties so well, because it gives me the chance to remind the house and the Victorian community that you cannot trust the Liberals when it comes to building more homes.

Ministers statements: State Electricity Commission

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:44): 2025 is a year of switching on. We will be switching on the Metro Tunnel, we will be switching on the West Gate Tunnel and we will be switching on the SEC to power our public transport network. The Allan Labor government is continuing to invest in great transport services –

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Bulleen withdrew from chamber.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: and soon they will be powered by clean renewable energy. We have already committed to transforming our bus fleet to zero emissions, guaranteeing smoother and quieter journeys for passengers and also cleaner air for communities, but from July this year trains, trams and stations will also go green, joining all the other government services in being powered by the great SEC. Millions of trips across the state each year will run on clean renewable energy. When the member for Sunbury catches a train into the city, he will be travelling on a train powered by the SEC – and someone might even take a photo of you, Bully, while you are there. When the member for Footscray catches a new G-class tram through the new level access tram stops on Droop Street, it will be powered by the SEC. When the member for Pakenham catches a train from the new East Pakenham station, that will be a train station powered by the SEC. This will save 420,000 tonnes of CO₂ across our public transport network, which is about 175,000 cars a year.

Thirty years ago those opposite switched off the SEC. They switched off work on the Metro Tunnel when they had the chance to build it. They switch things off; we switch things on. They switch things off, which is why in 2014, in 2018 and in 2022 voters switched them off, and at this rate they will be doing the same thing in 2026.

Constituency questions

South-West Coast electorate

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (14:47): (1140) My constituency question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Why can't practical, proven solutions like those used in other short-platform train stations be implemented to immediately restore the six-carriage service and dignity to south-west commuters? Given the significant taxpayer investment in the rail line between Geelong and Warrnambool, we should have a better train service. The government offers the excuse that the platforms are too short to accommodate six-carriage trains. The trains now run with only three carriages, half the capacity of the previous N-class trains. As a result, people are forced to stand for hours, seats are hotly contested, the atmosphere is increasingly antisocial and essential services like catering and device charging are nowhere to be seen on these so-called upgraded trains. Historically, longer trains were used with rear carriages locked and the passengers were requested to disembark from front carriages. This commonsense solution is used in Victoria in Dingee and Heathcote Junction, and it should be in Warrnambool now.

Pascoe Vale electorate

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (14:48): (1141) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. What are the Victorian government, the Department of Transport and Planning and VicRoads doing to improve safety through the Moreland Road corridor? Moreland Road is a major east-west arterial road traversing through Pascoe Vale South, Brunswick West, Coburg West, Coburg and East Coburg, connecting locals from Pascoe Vale Road and CityLink in the west right over to Nicholson Street to the east. While residents have welcomed measures over recent years to make the corridor safer, including the removal of the Upfield level crossing and the new pedestrian crossing at Walhalla Street, ongoing opportunities exist to make the corridor safer. In

particular the main ask from local residents is around improving safety in the vicinity of the Queen Street and Moreland Road intersection, which following the opening of the IGA supermarket continues to generate more road safety, congestion and road hazard issues for many local families. It is increasingly utilised by local families attending Coburg West Primary, St Fidelis Primary and Brunswick North Primary. It has generated two separate community petitions calling for a new crossing: over 2000 signatures on a change.org petition and almost 330 signatures on a Merri-bek council petition. Following a previous engagement, on 22 May I again met with locals Tahlia Azaria and Chris Snee at the site.

Ovens Valley electorate

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (14:49): (1142) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety on behalf of Paul Mason, who seeks clarification on timelines for the repair of the Great Alpine Road on the Myrtleford side of Everton. This dangerous section of road approximately 3 kilometres east of Everton has deteriorated vastly in the last two years and has now become a danger to all who use it, particularly motorcycle riders, who are frequent users of the Great Alpine Road. Locals believe this poor section of road will be responsible for a major accident if not fixed immediately.

The SPEAKER: Member for Ovens Valley, I ask you to rephrase your question so it is a question.

Tim McCURDY: When will the minister fix the road?

Bass electorate

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (14:50): (1143) My constituency question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. What are we doing to alleviate the shortage of student transport to and from Bass Coast College? This school has over 1700 students and four campuses and is the only government school in the Bass Coast LGA. There are currently 25 buses with a total capacity of 1437 seats also servicing several government and independent primary schools. There are seat shortages and stop locations that disadvantage students. For example, kids in Woolamai must travel to Bass to catch the bus. Waterline and island students are on a waitlist. Families without cars are disadvantaged, and those with cars are getting to work late. Local V/Line and public buses do not align with our school hours, leaving no alternative. Applications have been made for five new services, and I am pleased two will begin next term for the San Remo junior campus. Thanks to principal Leith Cummings, bus coordinator extraordinaire Penny Witherden and the families that have – *(Time expired)*

Kew electorate

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:51): (1144) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Minister, when will you commit to urgently repairing the potholes near the Pakington Street tram stop on High Street, Kew? A local resident recently suffered a fractured ankle after stepping into one of these potholes while trying to board a tram. As a result, he has been forced to delay the start of a new job for at least eight weeks. This incident highlights the dangerous condition of this section of High Street, not just for motorists but for pedestrians as well. This is not an isolated case. Across Victoria and across the electorate of Kew road maintenance has been neglected, raising concerns about safety. The community should not have to wait for more accidents before the Labor government finally takes action. Once again I ask: when will the minister take immediate steps to repair these potholes to prevent further harm to local constituents in the electorate of Kew?

Lara electorate

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (14:52): (1145) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. How will residents in the Lara electorate have their say on the regional bus network review announced in this year's state budget? The review into the bus network across the Geelong region is welcome news to many across the Lara electorate and wider Geelong community. Our community has seen massive growth in recent years, and with even more growth planned, including in the northern

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and western growth areas project in the electorate of Lara, planning to support the ever-changing public transport needs of the community is vital. The best way to ensure we get this review right is to ensure we are hearing directly from locals who need it. We need to hear about the bus services that people currently use and also what would encourage them to use bus services more, and that is why consultation, which will form the basis of this review, is so important.

Richmond electorate

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:52): (1146) My question is for the Minister for Housing and Building. A social worker in my electorate told me that every day homelessness services are turning people away because they cannot meet demand. The numbers tell us why: in 2023 Victoria built 3000 public and community homes, but that same year the government demolished or sold off 1626 homes, a net increase of just 1312 homes across the state. With a growing list of people waiting for a public home, experts recommend that Victoria needs to build at least 6000 homes every year for 10 years to meet demand, but Labor is failing to meet even a quarter of that. Will the government meet or even try to meet the recommended target?

Wendouree electorate

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (14:53): (1147) My constituency question is for the Minister for Mental Health in the other place regarding mental health support for young people in my electorate of Wendouree. With construction underway, how will the new youth prevention and recovery care centre in Ballarat support young people with their mental health challenges? I know that mental health support has never been more important for young people across Ballarat than it is right now, and the new YPARC will make a real and lasting difference in Ballarat and across our region. Following our landmark Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, I am proud that the Allan Labor government is delivering a multimillion-dollar, 10-bed youth prevention and recovery centre in my community. Once completed, our YPARC will be operated by Grampians Health and provide a welcome homelike environment to support young people throughout their recovery journey. Importantly, the YPARC will provide quality mental health care for consumers as well as reduce pressure on the Ballarat Base Hospital by providing an alternative to acute hospital admission.

Benambra electorate

Bill TILLEY (Benambra) (14:54): (1148) My question is for the Minister for Health, and the information I seek is: when will this Labor government fully and properly fund all 16 short-stay beds at Albury Wodonga Health? These beds act as a circuit breaker for the bed blockages and ambulance ramping that plague our health service. They allow for patients to get hospital treatment without compromising the emergency department or taking up a vital bed. There are 16 short-stay beds at Albury Base Hospital, but in the latest budget this government is only funding nine. New South Wales have already paid for their share. Why are all the beds not funded? Albury Wodonga Health has only 44 emergency beds across two hospital campuses, with 210 people present there every day. By comparison, Barwon Health in Geelong has 77 emergency beds for 220 patients a day. The number of people waiting for surgery is a mystery; the last two quarterly reports are blank. Minister, do what matters most: fund these beds.

Ripon electorate

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (14:55): (1149) My question is for the Minister for Agriculture. Minister, how many farmers in the Ripon electorate have been supported by our government's drought package? I was pleased to see the recent expansion of the package to help more farmers and communities over winter, including primary producers in the Northern Grampians, Hepburn and Ballarat local government areas. So many farmers are hurting right now, with bone-dry paddocks, hungry livestock and feed and freight costs through the roof. Many tell me they have never seen conditions so bad, with recent bushfires and floods across our region compounding these effects. Farmers in drought-declared areas will be exempt from paying the Emergency Services and

Volunteers Fund, to give some much-needed relief at such a hard time, but many farmers across Ripon have contacted me about what more we can do to support them. I look forward to providing them with the minister's response and continuing to advocate on their behalf for more drought support during this difficult time.

David Hodgett: On a point of order, Speaker, I wish to draw to your attention an outstanding constituency question, 1014. It was asked to the Minister for Police on 4 March, and a response was due on 3 April. The minister was at the table at the time I asked the question. I ask you to draw it to his attention to get a response, please.

Bills

Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025

Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (14:57): Prior to being interrupted by the lunch break, I was talking about the government's fair fuel plan, which I announced with the Premier early this year. Under that plan, we will make it compulsory for the more than 1500 fuel retailers in Victoria to provide their fuel-pricing data in real time, and this data will then be fed into a special feature on the Service Victoria app which will allow Victorians to compare fuel prices in their local area so that they can find the best possible deal. The fuel finder and mandatory reporting will support phase 2 of the fair fuel plan, which will not only cap the number of fuel price rises to just one per day but also lock in those prices the day before and freeze them for 24 hours. That means that if on a Sunday night you are sitting at home looking up the Service Victoria app for the best possible fuel deal, you will be confident that the next day when you go to fill up you will get that deal. And while fuel retailers will not be able to increase their fuel prices, they will indeed be able to decrease their fuel prices throughout the day. This is just another tool in the pockets of Victorians to assist with the cost of living.

In the short time remaining to me, I do want to talk about a couple of things in the budget that will benefit my electorate greatly – firstly, McKinnon Primary School. In 1999 the Kennett government made the decision to close McKinnon Primary School at the end of that year. But something happened in September, the election of the Bracks government, which saved that school. Over the years since, Labor governments have invested in that school, and in this budget we have \$12.6 million for a major upgrade, new classrooms and an upgrade of the main building. Secondly, Bentleigh Junior Football Club – we have \$200,000 in the budget for brand new lights at King George VI Memorial Reserve. I think of it as a bit of a birthday present for Bentleigh junior footy club, because that proud club this year celebrates its 40th anniversary. So happy 40th birthday to Bentleigh junior footy club. I am not far behind you – I turn 40 next year.

I commend this budget to the house. It is a budget focused on what matters most, it is a budget that is delivering real help with the cost of living and it is a budget that invests in Victoria's future.

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (14:59): I rise to give a contribution on this year's Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025 and Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025. I support the member for Brighton, the Shadow Treasurer, in his plan as outlined, the plan set forth by the Leader of the Opposition and Leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Berwick; the Leader of the Nationals, the member for Gippsland South; and all of our team, which shows a positive outlook for Victoria should there be a change of government in November 2026.

It is not all optimism. I will start with what has been a budget delivered that I am sure none of those on the other side of the chamber will want to talk about when it comes to this state's level of debt, this state's level of interest payments and incompetence from this government in delivering a budget that

does anything other than take more money from the pockets of everyday Victorians, who continue to foot the bill for this government's incompetence when it comes to managing money.

We know based on the budget papers, the forward estimates, \$194 billion of debt is coming to Victoria by 2028–29. What does that actually mean for those people in Victoria? It means over the next four years this government is going to take close to \$180 billion of tax out of Victorians' pockets. I mean, let us think about the level of tax that this government are actually ripping from this state – \$180 billion because this government cannot manage major projects, they cannot manage small business, they cannot manage red tape, they cannot manage the finances and instead it is Victorians who continue to pay the price.

Today the Shadow Treasurer outlined our plan and the fifth tax that we will scrap when we come to government in 2026. This will give first home buyers in this state a real chance to get into the property market, a chance to own their own piece of this state and a chance to build a family in a house that they own. It will give them an opportunity to purchase a property when the median house price in Victoria is over \$900,000 – a realistic chance to get into the property market. We want to give every Victorian the opportunity to own a home. We want to give every Victorian the opportunity to build a future here in Victoria, and it is only this side of the house that actually gives Victorian first home buyers a real opportunity. I commend the Shadow Treasurer and those on this side of the house for making that commitment today. It is the fifth tax that we have said that we will scrap when we have the opportunity to sit on the other side of the chamber.

We saw a commitment last week to cutting the emergency services tax of this government, which will not deliver better outcomes, better services or equipment for emergency services here in Victoria. All it does is rip \$3 billion over the next four years out of the pockets of Victorians, \$3 billion that Victorians, according to the Treasurer, can afford to pay. But I can tell you, based on the conversations that we are having and I am sure those on the other side of the chamber have to be having, based on some of the comments that I read on social media from some of the members – and I am happy to go to that in a moment – Victorians at the moment, with a rise in land tax, with a rise now in their emergency services tax, cannot continue to foot the bill for a government that has no other lever it knows how to pull than greater taxes.

I can tell you, even though they may have voted for it in this place, members on the other side of the house say something completely different to their communities when they go back into their areas. I am disappointed that the member for Hastings is not in the chamber, because he is one of those members that voted for this big new tax on Victorians, that voted for members of the Victorian community in the seat of Hastings to pay a tax that they cannot afford. I refer to – and I am happy to make this available to the house – a comment from Paul Mercurio MP on Facebook a few days ago in relation to the emergency services tax. There was a member of the public that raised that the member for Hastings would have known about this tax for months and there was no word from him. And his contribution says:

I knew nothing about the bill until ... a week or so before it came to parliament. The labor party votes as a block – to vote against a bill that the party put forward pretty much gets you kicked out of the party and you would end up as an independent. That would be a completely useless and ineffective place to be.

Is the member for Hastings saying that he would be ineffective if he voted in the best interests of his community? Or is he saying that he is an ineffective member of Parliament because he cannot vote the way he wants? Or is he saying that if he were to vote the way he wants –

Sonya Kilkenny: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I appreciate this is a wideranging debate, but I would ask you to ask the member to come back to the bills before the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O'Keeffe): I do think the member was being relevant to the bills, and they are far-reaching. I do not think he was straying far away in his conversation.

Sam GROTH: I would say it is completely relevant to the bill when the emergency services tax forms a line in the bill and in the budget papers. The fact that the member for Hastings wants to say that he knew nothing about the bill until a week or so before it came into Parliament shows he does not pay much attention in this place, because this tax was announced back in December of last year. For the member to say he did not know the bill was coming, either he was not paying attention to the work of his own government –

Sonya Kilkenny: On a point of order – and I refer also to my previous point of order, Acting Speaker – the member has now strayed significantly from the bill, and I ask you to ask the member to come back to the bill before the house.

Sam GROTH: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, you have already ruled on this point of order once. It is directly related to the budget papers, where there is a line item for the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O’Keeffe): I will ask the member to come back a little bit closer to the bill, please.

Sam GROTH: Member for Hastings, I encourage you to represent the best interests of your community when it comes to tax in this place and how you vote. Now, I will speak about –

Mathew Hilakari: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, representations in this house are not an opportunity to attack members.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O’Keeffe): I will ask the member to continue.

Sam GROTH: I am sure the member for Point Cook has strongly advocated for his community when it comes to the emergency services tax, just like other members who sit in peri-urban semi-regional seats have done.

Mathew Hilakari: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, certainly I have advocated for it, because there is a brand new SES station.

A member: What is your point of order?

Mathew Hilakari: Relevance.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O’Keeffe): There is no point of order.

Sam GROTH: As the member for Brighton raised, we will be scrapping five taxes. The emergency services tax will be number 2 behind raising the stamp duty exemption for first home buyers to \$1 million. We also have committed to scrapping the schools tax on payroll for private and religious schools. We have also committed to scrapping the health tax that this government wanted to impose so that patients can have better access and equitable access to health care. Something that is very, very close to my community – we have a lot of holiday homes, but people need to use those to visit – is the holiday and tourism tax. When we committed to scrapping that last year that was actually the 55th tax at the time proposed by this government, and now, as we stand here today, there are well over 60 taxes, new or increased, that this government has committed to. It is absolutely disgraceful, the way this government continues to tax Victorians.

The emergency services tax that we committed to scrapping last week will hit every single resident in Nepean, hit every single business owner, hit every single commercial property and hit every single farmer in my electorate. A recent report by the Mornington Peninsula shire said owners of a commercial property will see an increase of nearly \$1000. An owner of a primary production property in my electorate will have an increase of nearly \$2500. A residential owner will be paying \$350. It is not just a tax on farmers, who we have seen protesting out here on the steps of Parliament. I did not see any members of the government out there speaking and advocating to people in public, like they continue to say that they do on social media, behind a wall. They sit in this place, they vote and they

say they that they cannot vote against a tax, but they tell their community one thing and they do another when they come in here. This is not just a tax on farmers, it is a tax on every single Victorian.

This government delivered a budget that I do not think Victorians should have any trust in whatsoever. They delivered a budget that says they are going to have a \$600 million surplus. This government have delivered 10 budgets prior to this one, and not one of them has been accurate when it comes to their forecasts. On average – and we heard the Shadow Treasurer say this today – the forecast and the actuals from this government’s budgets have been out by \$14 billion per year. Only last year in the budget update they said they were going to have a surplus of over \$1.5 billion. All of a sudden, when they deliver their actual budget, it is \$600 million. You cannot trust a word that comes out of this government’s mouth when it comes to how they are going to deliver a budget.

Victorians also need to realise that the government’s pet project, the Suburban Rail Loop, which is going to cost upwards of \$200 billion, still remains a TBC line item in this government’s budget. They do not have the funding needed from the federal government to match what they say they need, and it continues to be a drain on every Victorian. The only reason this government have moved emergency services out of consolidated revenue and put a big new tax on Victorians is because they want to be able to throw all of that extra money down a hole that goes from Cheltenham to Box Hill. We have seen huge blowouts when it comes to public sector wages and we have seen huge blowouts when it comes to major projects, and it is Victorians that will continue to pay the price.

Disappointingly, when I talk about local projects in this year’s budget – this government claim they are focused on doing what matters most. Well, for people in Nepean, it would seem that they do not matter, because this government went and spruiked regional health care and back in 2022 the then health minister said that Rosebud Hospital was a priority – this is a hospital that needs serious investment – and once again it is missing from the budget papers. If you ask anybody on the Mornington Peninsula what the one project is that they need covered, it is Rosebud Hospital. The member for Mornington, I am sure I can say, agrees. The member for Hastings – maybe not in this place, because he does one thing in this place and one thing outside, but it is important to his electorate as well. It is the health care that covers the peninsula. Yes, there is investment going into Frankston, I will admit. The member for Frankston sits over there. A great investment is going into Frankston that is much needed for that growing community. But it is too far for people on the peninsula to have to go to Frankston for the health care they need. I have one of the oldest demographics in the state living in my electorate. For people in Rye, in Sorrento, in Flinders, in Red Hill in non-peak times to get to the hospital in Frankston it is a minimum of 45 minutes, and for some people that is life and death. They cannot afford it, for their health, to have to travel. I am sure many people in this house have been down to my electorate during the busy months when you cannot get four blocks in 45 minutes, let alone to Frankston. There is no way that Rosebud Hospital should continue to miss out. It needs serious investment.

I am glad that there was funding to progress Eastbourne Primary School, but I note again that Tootgarook Primary School in my electorate remains the only school without an undercover play area. Leigh McQuillen, the principal there, is doing an incredible job. He has grown the numbers in his school by 50 this year. He is building it up from a low base. He has got over 200 enrolments there, and he continues to strongly advocate. He has changed the school logo, he has changed the uniform and he has given everything a fresh lick of paint. But they desperately need a new basketball court cover – it is old asphalt, it is cracked and it is not meeting the needs of that school – so I continue to ask the government to try to provide that investment.

I do note that the Leader of the Nationals brought up road maintenance, which in my electorate continues to be heavily neglected. Some of the numbers that the member for Gippsland South raised in terms of a line here in the road asset management part of the budget that says ‘road area major patched: roads in outer metropolitan Melbourne’.

Danny O’Brien interjected.

Sam GROTH: We can have an argument, member for Gippsland South, about where the people of Nepean lie, but I will class myself as outer metropolitan for the moment. It was due in 2024–25 to have 131,000 square metres of major patching works done, and the government delivered 25,000 square metres, so less than a fifth of the outcome was delivered. But you would think if they did not deliver it this year, they would deliver it next year. Well, they delivered 25,000 last year, and this year they have budgeted for 14,000 square metres. For the people of Nepean who continue to dodge potholes on Boneo Road, on Point Nepean Road, on Frankston-Flinders Road: I am sorry, but this government do not think you matter and they are not focused on you. You will be dodging potholes for a long time to come, because this Labor government under Jacinta Allan has no idea when it comes to the needs of the people in Nepean. It has no idea when it comes to the needs of –

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, can the member please use correct titles in the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O’Keeffe): Can the member for Nepean please use correct titles.

Sam GROTH: This government has no idea when it comes to what matters to the people of Nepean. They will continue to tax you. They will continue to rip money from your pockets. They will continue to charge the volunteers, the farmers, the residents and the business owners of my electorate. They will continue to send you to Frankston to get your health care. They will continue to neglect your education. They will continue to neglect the needs of every single constituent in my electorate.

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (15:15): I am very honoured to rise to contribute to the debate on the appropriation bills that are before the house today. I am honoured to do so because I think nothing distinguishes the Allan Labor government more from those opposite than what is in this budget. It is about choices. It is about what we invest in, where we invest and who we support.

We heard today about the opposition’s plans for tax cuts, and whilst those might sound appealing – certainly appealing in headlines – I think they really fail the test of leadership. These are short-term sugar hits, if you like. There is nothing visionary in what the opposition has put forward. It certainly will not set up Victoria for future prosperity. At a time when leadership and vision are what is needed – it is what the community is demanding – those opposite are choosing headlines over honesty. When vision is needed, they choose populism over progress. It is everything that we have seen before. I really say Victorians deserve an awful lot better than that and certainly a lot better than resurrecting old slogans and old policies from a bygone era.

Cutting taxes without a clear, credible plan to invest in housing, infrastructure, health, education and jobs is not reform, it is absolute retreat. Visionary governments invest in the future. They build homes so young people can afford to stay in their communities, so young people can afford their first home. They fund hospitals and schools so every Victorian has access to care and opportunity. They back public transport, including with opening the Metro Tunnel later this year and offering free public transport for every single child every single day of the year and free public transport for seniors on weekends. We back clean energy to drive productivity and tackle climate change, including bringing back the SEC. As we heard earlier today, the SEC from 1 July will be powering all of our government buildings with 100 per cent renewable energy. These are the kinds of investments that set Victoria up for long-term success, not the tax cuts that have been put forward by those opposite, which do not benefit Victorians and in fact probably benefit the few and not the many. We know that prosperity comes from building, not from cutting, and Victoria certainly deserves a lot more than short-sighted politics when what we need is real lasting progress.

This budget is really a defining budget for Victoria and Victoria’s future. It is a budget that is focused on what matters most for Victorians. I want to start with housing because I really feel that the difference could not be starker, and I do so because housing really is one of the most fundamental human needs. It provides safety. It provides stability. It provides belonging, identity and, importantly,

a foundation for opportunity. That is why housing is not just a personal issue, it is indeed a public one as well. It affects every corner of our economy and every layer of our society. Ensuring everyone has access to a decent home is not just the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do, because we know when people are securely housed everyone across our state benefits.

I see also today the opposition has made an announcement about stamp duty relief for first home buyers. We are already doing this. We are already providing stamp duty relief to first home buyers. Our stamp duty relief goes even further than that and extends stamp duty relief to all buyers of off-the-plan developments. I think it is becoming a bit of a pattern from those opposite – I have been seeing this a bit now – that those opposite are copying Labor's policies, repackaging them and selling them as their own. But I want to thank those opposite for endorsing our policy, particularly around stamp duty. Let me be clear: if we want more housing, we need bold, decisive action. What we do not need – what Victorians cannot afford – is an opposition that continues to block homes. You do not get more homes by blocking them, trying to block them in the other place –

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Nepean is making interjections not from his seat.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O'Keeffe): Order! Can we please have some quiet in the chamber. I ask the member for Nepean not to interject while not in his seat.

Sonya KILKENNY: As I said, you do not get more homes by blocking them. We have seen time and time again those opposite, whether it is here or in the other place, blocking codes and blocking reforms that we have been putting through to incentivise and support more housing and blocking homes, whether in their own electorate or in other electorates as well.

The facts are simple: Victoria's population is projected to grow, with Melbourne to grow to the size of London. Yet despite this urgency, all we have seen from those opposite is them playing politics with planning and housing instead of supporting well-designed medium-density developments, reforms to our planning rules, everything to support more housing in established areas and everything to support more housing, particularly for young Victorians. Instead of embracing more housing near trains, near tram stops and in employment hubs, they resist it, and instead of contributing to real solutions, what we see time and time again is the fearmongering, the mischief, the deception, the misinformation and that fear of progress. That is not leadership, that is obstruction. It is also deeply unfair. When we block new housing in inner and middle-ring suburbs – these are areas rich with infrastructure and good access to schools and jobs and services – we are not preserving the so-called character of these neighbourhoods, we are entrenching inequality and locking out of these areas young Victorians in particular, who are not getting the same opportunities that their parents had. What those opposite are saying to young Victorians is 'These neighbourhoods are off limits to you.' What those opposite are saying to key workers, teachers, paramedics, hospital workers and police is 'You can work in our hospitals, you can work in our schools and you can work in our cafes and restaurants; you just cannot live here.' What those opposite want to do is push more and more people into our outer suburbs. These are communities that have already carried a disproportionate burden of new housing for years and years. It is not fair. So for the opposition to claim that they are all about affordability, what their actions are doing are actually driving up costs, driving up prices and locking out more and more Victorians from getting that home.

At the end of the day, those opposite just do not get it. We have heard already today that it is a question, a basic question, of supply and demand. When you block housing in good locations, what happens? Prices rise. And when there are not enough homes, what happens? You have got more and more people competing for too few homes. When we fail to build more homes in established areas, we are putting, as I said, an unfair burden on our outer-suburban communities, communities who have for too long been carrying that burden. When we see politics get in the way of planning, it is everyday Victorians

who carry that and pay the price. Those opposite are reckless when it comes to housing. They are reckless when it comes to planning, and now they have made their position crystal clear. Those opposite are not on the side of young Victorians; those opposite are not on the side of Victorians at all.

What we have put forward – what the Allan Labor government has put forward – is a bold housing plan that matches the scale of the challenge before us. This means unlocking more land in the right places for more housing. It means making it easier, not harder, to build townhouses, to build multiunit developments and to build duplexes near public transport, near jobs, near services and near schools. It means supporting social and affordable housing projects and embracing innovative models like build-to-rent, modern methods of construction, co-housing and land consolidation. It means cutting red tape, speeding up approvals and confronting what are outdated zoning rules across our local government areas that are really keeping our city locked in the past. But more than that, it does require political courage, because we know that the alternative is clear: if we do not build the homes Victoria needs, housing will become more out of reach. More families will be forced into long commutes, insecure rentals or unaffordable mortgages, and more people will give up on the dream of owning a home.

I say to those opposite that it is really a moment for vision, not vetoing the changes that we want to make – changes that are going to have a positive impact on so many Victorians. The time is now for bold plans, not blocking housing in your own electorates and not saying to young Victorians, ‘You’re not entitled to live here. You can go and live further out on the fringes, not close to your family and friends.’ We need more homes, not more politics, so we want to get on and build them. I say to those opposite: support these reforms, stop blocking the homes and get out of the way of young Victorians in particular, who rightly deserve and need a home.

The budget will deliver 50 train and tram zone activity centres across Melbourne’s inner and middle suburbs. This will transform the way that we can plan for and build more homes – 300,000 new homes in these terrific locations, as I have said, that are well-serviced with public transport, jobs, services and schools. This budget also invests in providing that housing choice. It also invests in the houses and the backyards in our growing suburbs by kickstarting planning work for additional precinct structure plans at Clyde South and Derrimut Fields in the west, also contributing to more employment and more jobs.

Victoria is leading the nation in tackling Australia’s housing crisis, and this is despite the attempts of those opposite, who continue to block new homes all across our city and state. The Allan Labor government has taken bold, decisive action to boost housing supply, and I have got to say the results do speak for themselves. We have heard over the past year Victoria has been leading the nation in the number of new home approvals and home builds, and for first home buyers we are also leading the nation. But we have more work to do, and I ask those on the opposite benches to join with us and to support us in delivering all of these new homes, particularly for young Victorians who need them.

Victoria’s housing strategy focuses on delivering more homes in those really well located areas, and this means everyone sharing the spaces that they love. This means ensuring that opportunities are there for young Victorians to choose where they live, whether that is near where they grew up, where their families are or where their friends might be. So while others talk, we will get on and build the homes. It is with this vision, investment and determination that we can get on and deliver the homes that Victorians need, and this budget goes to that with funding, as I said, for the train and tram zones – 50 of them – that are going to deliver 300,000 homes.

This is a budget for Victorians. It is about being on the side of Victorians and understanding what is important for Victorians. That is not blocking homes; that is working with Victorians, supporting home ownership and supporting them to find a home in the place they want to live.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (15:30): The budget handed down by this tired Labor government puts beyond doubt what Victorians already knew: Labor cannot be trusted with Victorians’ money. Budget after budget after budget this Labor government shows that they cannot manage money wisely or well, and Victorians are paying the price. For more than 10 years we have seen this tired Labor

government wreak economic ruin on Victoria's finances. Under Labor, Victoria has the highest debt in the country and Victorians are the highest taxed in the country. They have delivered deficit after deficit after deficit and cost blowout after cost blowout on government infrastructure projects. Labor has not only run out of money, but it has run out of ideas. And now because it has run out of money, it is coming again after the money of hardworking Victorian families. The government has simply lied that this budget is responsible and has no new taxes. Just look at the line item in the budget in black and white – the emergency services tax that will cost Victorians an extra \$3 billion in tax. It is included as a new tax in the budget papers. No wonder Labor did a dirty backroom deal with the Greens and with the independents in this Parliament just two weeks ago at 3 am to push through this massive new tax. Victorians are expected to have to fork out nearly \$42 billion in taxes this financial year – that equates to around \$5937 per person in tax. That has some impact on the cost of living.

It is clear Labor has not only become financially bankrupt, but it has become morally bankrupt as well. When we hear the speeches from the Labor MPs on the other side – as we have already and we will going forward – we will hear from them about how proud they are of this budget. But let me assure you, there is absolutely nothing to be proud of in this budget. This is a budget that sees debt soar to record levels of \$190 billion, more new taxes, cuts to services and cuts to jobs. It is a budget that will do absolutely nothing to stop Victoria's economic decline and will only make the cost of living harder for everyday Victorians. What we want to see more of is incentivising Victoria and growing Victoria, but all we see under this Labor government is more debt and more taxes, and Victorians are paying the price.

When the Treasurer gave her budget speech here in the Assembly she remarked that Victorians had been hit hard by the cost of living. But what the Treasurer sneakily omitted from her speech is that it is her Labor government that is the primary cause of the cost-of-living crisis that is impacting Victorians and that Victorians are suffering from now. It is those massive new taxes that are impacting their cost of living. It is Labor's policies and their financial mismanagement that are not only making the cost of living harder for Victorians, they are penalising Victorians for the litany of mistakes and financial incompetence under this Labor government.

The Treasurer here in the Assembly delivering her budget speech – and in fact in the lead-up to the budget as well – had the temerity to tell Victorians that there was nothing in the budget that changed the tax settings. That statement could not be further from the truth; it is totally misleading Victorians. The Treasurer's own budget indicates new taxes – a new emergency services tax and increases in the congestion levy. There are new taxes in this budget. Not only does it include new taxes, it increases a number of other taxes. How can the Victorian public have any trust in a Treasurer or any trust in this Labor government when they say one thing and then deliver something completely different in the black and white of their own budget papers?

For years this government has delivered nothing but deficits, and now they absolutely have a trust deficit. There is no amount of political stunts that can recover that trust. The thousands of farmers, volunteer firefighters, career firefighters and small business owners that protested on the steps of Parliament on budget day – they were protesting Labor's budget, protesting the deceitful new emergency services tax, which is not quarantined for SES and CFA volunteers or for frontline emergency services workers but instead will fund back-office public sector agencies in the inner city due to prior budget cuts to Triple Zero. It is plugging those holes in the budget. With the thousands of people who came to the steps of Parliament last week, the Labor government know that they have lost the trust of Victorians. The Victorian Liberals and Nationals have listened. The Victorian Liberals and Nationals in government will scrap the emergency services tax, and we will give that \$3 billion back to Victorians. We value and respect the volunteer emergency services of the SES and the CFA – and I give a shout-out to the Lilydale SES and all of the CFA brigades right through the Evelyn electorate, who do tremendous work going to the danger, protecting our communities 365 days of the year – and we will work hard to ensure that they are properly funded for their capital and for their operations and

that they are not tricked by this Labor government and mixed up in a new tax that funds back-office public sector agencies and drives farmers and small businesses out of business.

Only six months ago, in December 2024, the budget update was projecting an operating surplus of \$1.6 billion in the 2025–26 financial year. Now the Treasurer tells us that it will only be \$600 million, so in the space of six months this government has managed to lose a billion dollars. Is it any wonder that no-one trusts this Labor government anymore, because if Labor can lose a billion dollars in six months, how on earth can this government ever deliver a surplus? There is absolutely no trust in that figure or any trust that they will be able to pay down the debt.

Last year Labor forecast it would deliver a \$2.2 billion deficit for the 2024–25 financial year, yet now in these budget papers it is revealed the operating deficit will be \$3.4 billion. That is a blowout of \$1.2 billion – no wonder the Big Build is totally financially out of control and billions and billions and billions over budget, let alone years behind schedule. After delivering a budget deficit \$1.2 billion worse than they forecast, Labor now want Victorians to believe that they can deliver a surplus. Who are they kidding? Certainly not the Victorians who are really turning off this Labor government. Just look at the massive swings in the Bendigo electorate recently, the Premier's own electorate. They have not delivered a surplus for six years.

You do not have to take my word on how morally bankrupt and fiscally irresponsible this Labor government have become and how worthless their budget papers really are, because the Auditor-General, in his recent report on major projects performance reporting, made specific findings about how unreliable the budget papers have become in assessing government expenditure and performance. Referring to budget paper 4, 'State Capital Program', the Auditor-General said:

BP4 footnotes do not always accurately and transparently report underlying factors that impact a major project's performance.

And he said that this budget paper:

... is not useful or reliable for assessing major project performance.

This is a damning indictment on the quality and reliability of this Labor government's budget papers. The fact that the Auditor-General himself, a most trusted person in our state to monitor government expenditure, has found that he cannot even rely on the Labor government's budget papers is an absolute disgrace, and it is an indictment on their economic credibility.

In recent days we have also heard the Premier talking about this budget, but when asked about debt levels the Premier's retort, as usual, was that the Labor government has a fiscal strategy on paper and that is how the government is dealing with it. But members may recall that this so-called fiscal strategy was something that the former Treasurer Tim Pallas dreamt up about two years ago because he was forced to do so – forced to publicise a fiscal strategy – after the credit ratings agencies told him that Victoria's credit rating would be cut. It is now the lowest in the country. What good is a fiscal strategy when you cannot even follow it? The first step in Labor's fiscal strategy was to reduce unemployment. But in the budget papers unemployment is forecast to increase to 4.75 per cent, an increase of 0.5 per cent. And it is above the national average and has been above the national average for 14 months straight now. That means more Victorians are going to be out of work next year under this Labor government.

The second step was to return the budget to an operating cash surplus. Whilst back in March the Department of Treasury and Finance were predicting a \$1.8 billion cash deficit, that figure has miraculously turned around to be a \$620 million cash surplus. Such a massive turnaround deserves closer interrogation. It is not because this Labor government has suddenly adopted some sort of fiscally responsible measures and put in place structural reforms. We can see that in black and white in the budget papers. The turnaround is a result of deception. Not only did the Labor government receive a GST windfall, many property owners received their land tax bills earlier this year; they received their land tax bills twice in the one year. So instead of being required to pay their land tax in August like

every other year, they were forced to pay it the week before the budget. When you think it could not get any worse in terms of transparency and integrity, this government has stooped to a new low. The clearest example of how Labor penalises and cheats Victorians is the doctoring of numbers in their budget in this way. The budget papers at least do not seek to hide this con job, stating in the budget papers that the change in position reflects ‘the timing of various receipts such as land tax’.

This government is absolutely outrageous. Making Victorians pay their land tax twice in one financial year just to make the bottom line creep up that little bit back into the black is an absolute disgrace. How can this Labor government say it is helping Victorians with the cost of living when all it is doing is asking them to pay their tax more and sooner, when it is forcing Victorian families to pay land tax twice in 12 months? It just goes to show that this is not a government that cares about Victorians in a cost-of-living crisis. It instead would rather hurt Victorians in order to prop up this dismal budget.

The third step in Labor’s plan was to return to operating surpluses. This is another spectacular fail from this tired Labor government. The government has not recorded an operating surplus since 2019. Again we talk about trust. They have repeatedly demonstrated that they are incapable of making financially responsible decisions, making the hard decisions and introducing structural reforms to this budget to curb spending and to tackle waste.

The fourth step of Labor’s fiscal strategy – so-called – was to stabilise debt. Now, the government said it was going to do this by introducing a COVID debt levy. The former Treasurer said that this was necessary because, according to him, some did better out of the pandemic than others. I have never met anyone who has done better out of the pandemic, and they still have to pay this COVID debt levy until 2033. It is just a disgrace.

But, guess what, the title of this budget is ‘Focused on what matters most’. Given there is next to zero funding in the Evelyn electorate, that does send a loud message that our community in the Evelyn electorate does not matter to this Labor government. There is only a small amount of money for new toilets at Mooroolbark East Primary and Montrose Primary schools – something that they absolutely need and deserve and are just the basics. But there is absolutely no funding to upgrade dangerous and congested roads throughout the Evelyn electorate – nothing for Warburton Highway in Seville East, nothing for the bottleneck at Hull Road and Mooroolbark Road in Mooroolbark and again no commitment to delivering the Maroondah Highway at Killara Road, Coldstream, upgrade despite having Commonwealth funding for six years now – no commitment to that project in this budget again. And mystery still surrounds the Maroondah Hospital or Queen Elizabeth II hospital upgrade because that has been promised by the Labor government since 2018 and it has remained stuck in the planning process now for four years. I will continue to fight for funding for vital road safety upgrades, for upgrades to our local schools and for better access to health care. I mean, this government’s debt is soaring to \$194 billion and \$29 million a day in interest just to pay down that debt. Just think what we could achieve with \$29 million a day. In the Evelyn electorate we would fix those roads, we would get more police and more nurses and the Lilydale youth mental health hub would be funded. But unfortunately \$29 million a day is going to pay down interest on this whopping debt under the Labor government. This is a shameful budget, and Victorians are paying the price.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (15:45): Last week this government handed down a budget for all Victorians. It delivers for Victorians. It delivers funding for health, for education, for housing, for infrastructure. It is a budget that makes responsible decisions. It protects jobs and it invests in our future, because we are on the side of Victorians. As Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer, I just want to extend a huge thankyou to the Treasurer and the Treasury team.

I could not help but notice that the member for Evelyn was by herself in this chamber talking then. You have got my respect. I would sit down and listen to you anytime, member for Evelyn. You do a great job. I was a bit sad to see that there was no-one here to hear you speak, but I hope there is for me. I hope they come in and they are entertained.

What did we see from the opposition this morning? Well, it was a budget reply that ran out of puff before the second paragraph. Even the slogan 'Go for growth', not 'Go for Groth', was ripped off from John Howard's 2007 campaign slogan, I believe. I am not sure it went that well, that campaign. I think that the budget reply was less a plan and more a cry for help in dot point form, actually. I do know that the Shadow Treasurer showed us that if outrage were a revenue stream the Liberals would definitely be running a surplus right now.

Let us have a quick analysis of the Shadow Treasurer's comments, and then we might go to something that makes a little more sense. Let us start with the stamp duty announcement. First of all, that is a Labor policy. But with that announcement my questions are these: how many homes will this create? Zero. How many more homes are they planning to build over there? Zero. So how does this help people get homes, to live in homes, when homes are not being built? Because we know the issue is supply and demand; it is a supply-and-demand issue.

The other question I have got is: why are they talking Victoria down? I do take umbrage with some of the Shadow Treasurer's stats. There is no doubt that Victoria's economy is growing, and the labour market remains healthy at this stage. Unemployment is at 4.4 per cent, below the long-term prepandemic average. I believe when we came into office in 2014 we inherited the highest unemployment in mainland Australia under that mob. The real gross state product is 14 per cent larger than pre pandemic, or 4.7 per cent larger in per capita terms.

We heard the Shadow Treasurer talking about business investment. Well, look, I am aspirational – I think we could always do better – but just for him I will say that Victoria has outpaced national business investment over the last four years. Victoria's growth was 3.7 per cent versus a national decline of 1.3 per cent. That is a stark difference. Victoria's national business investment is much larger than the nation's as an average. Since the peak impacts of COVID in September 2020, Victorian business investment has actually risen 46 per cent, and we can compare that to 28 per cent nationally. As I said, I am aspirational, though; I know we can work harder and we can increase that number. But the one thing I do know, as well as that, is you do not do that by talking Victoria down. You do not do that by talking this place down.

I was talking to one of my colleagues before, and we did have a chuckle. We think that the cow was the most productive member of the opposition last week. It did not say a word and it did not leak to the papers, but it still made a bigger impact. It made a bigger impact than what people are talking about today. Judging by that contribution from the Shadow Treasurer and the exploration of faeces from members opposite, the shadow cabinet do not need a budget reply, they actually need a group therapist and a calculator, because that should not happen in a workplace – it just should not happen in a workplace.

Seriously, though, I take issue with some of the comments from the Shadow Treasurer, and I am not sure how members opposite can actually stand in this chamber with a straight face and lecture people on this side of the chamber about leadership, about economic credibility, about integrity and about caring for Victorians. I am about to talk about something that I find deplorable and actually quite upsetting, because it involves a very, very decent member of Parliament, somebody from the opposite side, who I rarely ever agree with. I will rarely ever agree with the member for Hawthorn, but I reckon he might be the hardest working opposition member there. I do not think members on that side of the chamber can talk about their economic credibility and leadership when their own party is forcing one of its own members into bankruptcy.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I think what the member on his feet is speaking about is totally irrelevant to the appropriation bill. It has got nothing to do with the budget, and I would ask you to ask him to come back to the budget.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O'Keeffe): Please come back to the bill, member for Frankston.

Paul EDBROOKE: No worries. I take it as spoken that the member for Evelyn is supportive of what is happening over there. I take umbrage with that. Forcing a member of Parliament to crowdfund while you are here talking about economic –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O’Keeffe): Member for Frankston, you need to listen to my ruling. Could you please come back to the bill.

Paul EDBROOKE: I am absolutely saddened by what is going on over there, and it is a joke to hear people on that side talking about fiscal responsibility. The bill is about fiscal responsibility. The bill is about integrity.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Frankston has defied your ruling not once but twice now. I think that is totally disrespectful and a poor reflection on the Chair, and I would ask you to ask the member to come back to the appropriation bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O’Keeffe): Please come back to the bill, member for Frankston.

Paul EDBROOKE: Thank you. I think that is a lack of leadership. How can Victorians trust anyone that will not stick up for the person sitting beside them in this chamber? In contrast, this budget puts Victorians first and the numbers show it. Let me educate you on some of the numbers: \$2.3 billion invested in cost-of-living help – the biggest investment of its kind in Victoria’s history; 15 new schools being built and hundreds more upgraded, because every Victorian child deserves a great education close to home, not a lesson in austerity economics; and billions in major projects, because we are building a state for the next generation while the opposition cannot even really build a coherent sentence on transport policy.

Every Victorian also deserves to know that they or someone else they love can rely on quality health care. That is why \$9.3 billion has been invested in hospital care, including the opening and operationalising of nine new or expanded hospitals, including the hospital in Footscray, the redeveloped Frankston Hospital and Maryborough and district hospital, and it is why this budget includes an extra \$11.1 billion for health. This year alone we are providing over \$31 billion to our health system – the biggest investment in frontline care ever. This investment will cover the globally increased costs of providing care while making sure Victoria’s hospitals have everything that they need to look after patients and their families. A further \$230 million will make our hospital emergency departments even better equipped and reduce ambulance waiting times, helping Victorians get the care they need when they need it. We are continuing our investments in our incredible healthcare workforce with \$203 million to make sure staff have the right skills and also \$497 million to support Victoria’s mental health and wellbeing system.

Locally in Frankston it was an absolute pleasure to speak to the Kananook Primary School principal – to give him a phone call and let him know that that school has been funded \$521,000 to rebuild part of the school. I also spoke to the Mount Erin Secondary College principal and let her know that \$5 million has been funded for that school. Finally they got their master plan done, and it is about time to get on with that. Frankston Hospital received funding to make sure that we can open that hospital up. I know the member for Hastings was talking about it just before, but he was very, very, excited – I would even say pumped – about the new route 886, the cross-peninsula bus service from Hastings to Mornington. It is a good one; get on it. We have also got the Get Active Kids vouchers in my electorate, which will be very, very popular, as will the \$18 million community pharmacy expansion as well. That will enable pharmacists to treat more Victorians with more conditions, saving families the money and time of a GP visit.

We have also seen some of our members talk about strengthening food security with investment in that and social inclusion action groups down on the peninsula and the Nepean Highway and Overton Road partnership with the federal government. And the big one in Frankston I reckon was the free PT for young people – a \$320 million initiative to deliver free public transport for under-18s and free state-wide public transport for seniors on the weekend so they can go see the grandkids. We have also

got \$50 million to deliver a new \$100 power saving bonus for Victorians who need it most. I did hear someone recently talking down the value of \$100 in the power saving bonus. To those people I say: you obviously do not know the value of \$100 if you are talking that down.

This budget is one that is honest, disciplined and progressive and yet makes tough decisions – it does. But those decisions are driven by our everyday values. I think it is because we, unlike the opposition, do not flinch when it is time to govern. We do not vanish when things get hard. What we have seen in the past couple of months, in the lead-up to this policy that was announced today, is that the shadow cabinet is not actually a team. It is more a support group for failed leaders and people who peaked in student politics. They talk a big game, but they do not offer any plan. They do not have any numbers. They will not tell us what the debt cap is. There are no policies, just reheated press releases. With that debt cap, I would love to know what the number is, because from that we could extrapolate out and figure out how many job losses come with that debt cap, how many people lose their jobs, how many people cannot put food on the table.

Here is the truth: the opposition cannot manage their party room, let alone the state's economy. You cannot claim to be the party of fiscal responsibility while crowdfunding your former leader's legal fees. I will say it again: it is an absolute shame for anyone in this house to have to go through that, to have their life potentially destroyed. We have people in the opposition talking about what they will do for housing with stamp duty. What about the member for Hawthorn's house? You are sitting next to someone who looks like he is about to lose his house. I would be very, very uncomfortable with that, and it shows you are very uncomfortable with it.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Frankston is yet again defying your ruling, talking about something that is totally unrelated. I would love to know the budget paper reference that he is referring to in his speech, because it is totally unrelated to the appropriation bills and totally unrelated to the budget papers. He is defying your ruling. It is a poor reflection on the Chair. I would ask you to ask him to come back to the appropriation bills.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O'Keeffe): Could you please come back to the bills, member for Frankston.

Paul EDBROOKE: I would be ashamed too. Getting back to the Shadow Treasurer, he has had some pretty poor question time performances when it comes to numbers. I think he wants to see himself as a bit of a fiscal falcon. I would like to think of him more as an economic echidna: he is a little bit spiky, he is a bit slow and he belongs nowhere near budget papers. What it comes down to is, I think: just because you do not educate yourself to be able to read budget papers, just because you do not take that time, does not mean those budget papers are wrong. There is an Auditor-General that looks through those papers and signs them off. Just because you cannot read them does not mean the Auditor-General is wrong. It means you are wrong.

When it comes down to it, to wrap up, Acting Speaker – I know you have enjoyed this one – we are building hospitals; across the way they are building conspiracy theories. We are building schools while they are playing like kids in Parliament with animal dung. They are worried about headlines; we are worried about homes, health and hardworking Victorians. Let them rant and rave. We will continue to roll up our sleeves at every opportunity, because this is a Labor government that governs with purpose, and we are building a better Victoria and we are not backing down. Last week they delivered a box of cow dung. We delivered a budget. I will let Victorians decide who turned up to do the actual work.

Emma KEALY (Lohan) (15:58): In my limited time before the break I would like to reflect upon what has been contributed to this Parliament and what was handed down by the Victorian Treasurer. Let us remember this is a Treasurer who stepped into the role saying she would stand up for regional Victoria because she is a regional Victorian. It is a Premier who stood up and said, 'I'm going to deliver for regional Victoria because I'm a regional Victorian.' We have got a budget that is focused on what matters most, and the biggest line item in here is the \$3 billion additional tax bill from the

Labor government on every single Victorian. The emergency services tax is ripping money out of every community around Victoria. It will double the tax for all householders and renters, it will double the tax for all businesses and it will triple the tax for farmers. The Nationals have committed to scrapping the tax. That is what we are focused on, and that is exactly what the Labor government is not, because we know that Labor cannot manage money, and every single time it is Victorians that pay the price.

I think that we are close to our time with that, dear Speaker. We have got 5 seconds to go. I will say it again: Labor cannot manage money and they cannot manage projects, and it is Victorians that pay the price. The Nationals will scrap the tax.

Business interrupted under resolution of house of 14 May.

Grievance debate

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That grievances be noted.

Government performance

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (16:01): Today I rise to grieve for all Victorians, who are struggling under a government that sees the only way to govern Victoria is to keep slapping taxes on Victorians, ignoring the fact that families are struggling and that families cannot take any more taxes under this cost-of-living crisis – they just cannot take any more. I grieve for our farmers in South-West Coast; I just do not think they can take any more.

South-west Victoria is in the grip of the most devastating drought ever seen. In south-west Victoria a land once lush with promise is cracking beneath our boots. The paddocks are dust, not a blade of grass to be found. The dams are dry. Our people, the farmers, the lifeblood of this land, are doing everything they can just to hang on. These are our food producers. They rise before the sun, their hands are calloused and their spirits are tested, and they are still trying to do what they have always done: feed this state, feed this nation, feed you and me. How much do we think they can take? How much should they be pushed by this government ignoring them? Their mental health is under enormous strain. And what do we think is going to happen when their backs are pushed too far up against the wall? There is a six-week wait to get in to see a rural financial counsellor, and that is the only mental health support that is available.

The farmers feel like this government has deserted them. They cannot afford to feed their stock, they cannot borrow any more from the government and they are taxed to the hilt by a government more interested in ledgers than livelihoods – a government that treats our producers not as partners but as numbers on a spreadsheet. Where is this government's understanding? Where is the Allan Labor government's genuine support? And where are the leaders? Where are they when these farmers are crying out for assistance? The Minister for Agriculture is missing in action, unable to answer the question: when were you last here, Minister? I think from my calculations it was eight months ago when the Minister for Agriculture visited Mortlake. So much has happened in those last eight months. I think if Minister Spence visited Mortlake again, she would be shocked at the landscape that was terrible then but is devastated now. These men and women, these farmers, are not asking for handouts; they are asking for fairness, for vision – for rain, yes, no doubt about that, and not 1 mil or 3 mils, like we have seen in the last couple of days. That is not rain and it is not hope. But without our farmers, we need to recognise there is no food security, no economy, no future.

The Allan Labor government have run Victoria into the ground. This enormous debt facing Victoria of \$194 billion is no excuse for deserting our food producers now. What we need to understand, though, is that this debt the government have racked up equates to \$29 million per day in interest payments required to be paid by the government – not to pay the debt down, just to pay the interest on that debt. Compare \$29 million a day with how much drought relief the government has offered

farmers – not even \$29 million, not even one day's worth of interest payments. This government has got its priorities all wrong.

We saw this week a multimillion-dollar injection into Luna Park. Just two weeks ago the grand prix, a four-day event, was given \$350 million. What would \$350 million do for our farmers? Our community are reaching out to help. They are doing whatever they can to demonstrate to the farmers that they care. They are putting on drought relief concerts. There are 240 people booked in for a drought event tonight. That will demonstrate to our farmers that their community wants to see that they are okay, but it will not actually fix the problem. That is the government's job, and we are not seeing any empathy or understanding. Mark my words, the ramification of this will be felt across all Victoria. Families who are struggling with the cost-of-living crisis will struggle more when they have to pay much more for milk to put on the Weeties in the morning for the kids, to buy a latte in Melbourne and right across Victoria or to buy the lamb chops for dinner on Sunday night, or the roast, the steak or the mincemeat. These are the ramifications of this drought. Without assistance, prices will go up – if you can actually get products, because many, many animals are being sent to slaughter. There just is not any feed, and the government needs to help.

There is feed in Western Australia. The Victorian Farmers Federation have come out today with a drought relief strategy that they are asking the Premier to listen to, and they have talked about some things that can be put in place now to halt this terrible situation and give the farmers some relief. So I ask – no, I do not ask, I demand – that the Premier and the Minister for Agriculture wake up to the reality of what is happening in the west and come and stand in the dust with us, feel the heat of the anger from being ignored, look into the eyes of farmers who have just sent their last cows to slaughter and tell them to just keep going. How? It is time to act. It is time to invest in our farmers and our food future. It is time for the Allan Labor government to care, because when our farmers go under, the rest of us will not be far behind.

The government can start helping farmers by scrapping the new emergency services volunteer tax. It rips \$2.1 billion out of all Victorians' pockets. It targets farmers in particular. At a time when they can least cope with the pressure they are under, this government targets them by charging them three times their current fire services levy fee. It is a tone-deaf government. Residential home owners will be paying double. For businesses and commercial properties it is a massive increase as well. Renters, as Treasurer Symes said in the debate last week in the Parliament here, will be affected, with \$310 million coming out of renters' pockets. But renewable developers will pay 96 per cent less as a reduction by this government to ensure we have more renewable energy. These are overseas multimillion-dollar companies, often, who already get subsidies to assist with renewable energy, and they are often foreign-owned companies such as IKEA or Vestas. Where is the reasonableness in this?

CFA volunteers are rebelling against this government's cruel trickery. They are going off line – brigade after brigade, truck after truck – as a show of defiance of this levy. It is insulting to the CFA and SES volunteers, who were told they would get a rebate – an exemption, actually, not a rebate. The government has tried to fool them into believing that they are exempt from the levy, but they know they are paying three times more, which equates to actually thousands of dollars a year more than last year – year in, year out. The exemption which they are getting, which is actually a rebate, is on average just \$108, and the details of how they get it – in your frequently asked questions – are yet to be determined.

So insulting is the claim by this government that emergency services will get more funding from the increased tax – well, that is the claim that the government have been making, but the reality is quite clearly outlined in black and white in the budget papers. Have a look at page 158 of budget paper 3. You can look it up online. Have a look; it is there to be seen. The government's increase in income from the levy equates to \$600 million, yet you can see there is a decrease in income going to the emergency services, like the CFA and SES, of \$203 million less than last year. The government get more in tax coming in to fill the coffers of consolidated revenue. Do not believe they are going to be

giving it all to emergency services, because right in front of your eyes on that budget paper 3, page 158, it tells you they are getting \$203.1 million less.

At a post-budget breakfast attended by 200 people the Treasurer Jaclyn Symes was so tone-deaf to the pain felt by our community, who are taxed to the hilt, she asked the audience, 'What's your favourite tax?' This Treasurer, tone-deaf to Victoria's pain from the 61 taxes inflicted by this callous government, was making a joke. What else could that have been? A developer in the audience said, 'It's like the Victorian government wear this punishing tax regime as a badge of honour.' How tone-deaf, making jokes: 'What's your favourite tax?' The councils across Victoria are all banding together, saying no to the government. They do not want to be the dirty tax collector for this exorbitant amount of money. It is not what they were being asked to do in the past; it is a hell of a lot dirtier. They know their communities cannot take this tax. They know the farmers cannot tolerate it. They know there is not \$2 million or \$4 million, depending on the size of the council, that is in the community – they just cannot do it. And then the government makes jokes.

We Liberals recognise the pain of the emergency services and volunteers tax, and we will scrap it when elected next year. This tax causes pain for every Victorian – home owners, renters and businesses – and targets farmers specifically with a 150 per cent increase. We Liberals understand you incentivise, you enable and you will get an economy to grow. Punishing taxes hold back Victorians. You will not get growth from punishment.

This government is still handing out money. I think Victorians are seeing that they are giving more than they are getting back, though, in the freebies that are being announced, like the free public transport for kids under 18. That is a great announcement for people in the city, but as my country counterparts keep telling me, there is no public transport in the country. Our kids cannot get from Woolsthorpe to Warrnambool on public transport or from Mortlake to Warrnambool or Port Fairy. There just is not the public transport. So it is a cruel joke when the country is doing it so tough. It is a useless promise.

Let me be clear: what is happening right now in South-West Coast is not just a rural issue, it is a crisis with shockwaves that will be felt across every town and every city, all the way to the kitchen tables of Melbourne. This drought is gutting our farmers, stripping them of their livelihoods and leaving entire communities on the brink. As they fall, so too will the stability of our food supply, with skyrocketing costs for meat, milk and everyday essentials that every Victorian depends on.

Premier Allan and Minister for Agriculture Spence, it is time to get out of your offices and come to the south-west, see the dying paddocks, speak to the farmers and hear the desperation in their voices. You cannot keep being so tone-deaf to this devastation. Announce drought disaster relief now – not next month, not next season, now – and scrap this cruel and cowardly emergency services tax passed last week, which slaps just another burden on farmers, our CFA volunteers and every single Victorian household, renters included. This is not leadership, this is abandonment. And let me remind you: without food producers there is no food, and without food there is no future. Ignoring this crisis is not just negligent, it is foolish and it is dangerous. South-West Coast will not be silenced – our farmers are way too important. We all understand their value, and we know that the community around the farmers will also be absolutely devastated for years and years to come. The farmers have asked me to beg the government to come and listen. South-West Coast cannot take this irresponsible government much longer.

Economic policy

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (16:16): I rise to grieve on behalf of Victorians, if the Liberal–National coalition were to get into government, the savage cutbacks in programs like the SEC and in jobs, infrastructure, health care, housing and transport investment. I do so fortunately on the back of the Shadow Treasurer's speech today. It was an interesting journey to hear the Shadow Treasurer walk us through what could be described as probably a few themes. I do not think anyone needed a microphone for that performance. It was interesting just to contrast it with the lines and messaging of

the Nationals leader, who was I think a little bit more on message with the lines that he went out first with. But there was an opening of the true values, morals and ethics of those opposite, and it was clear as day that when you talk about taking back revenue without any additional sources then you are talking about cuts in the billions of dollars for Victorians. It was quite clear. I sat here for a long time – Speaker, I am not sure if you were in the chair at the time as well – and I was looking around the gallery. It thinned out a bit, people were checking their phones and there was a bit of distraction. There was a bit of umming and ahing; it went for I think nearly 40 minutes. You really should have that on a timer. I do not know if that should be the way to go in the future. But when the press start walking off halfway through, I think you know you have gone a bit too far – you have run around the garden path on your message.

I know there is a little bit of banter between these two, maybe a bit of rivalry – it was not as clean and crisp as the 7-minute performance of the member for Sandringham in reply. They are a bit more grabby. I think there was a lot more content. Whether there was a lot more depth is arguable. But when you boil down what was actually said, it was that billions of dollars would be taken away from revenue, and there was no discussion of or attempt to describe how that would be filled. And what does that look like? That looks like savage cuts to Victorian jobs and services, the likes of which we never would see. They would make the shadow minister at the table blush – and there was the campaign that we put out during 2022, the ‘cuts guy’. The member for Brighton is in a different stratosphere.

We know the story was given away by members in the other place who talked about wanting to make substantial cuts to the Victorian community – savage cuts to frontline services. We see time and time again that past behaviour is an indication of future outcomes. We saw that with the federal government and the Labor and Liberal–National campaigns federally; we did not hear one discussion around how in the budget federally then opposition leader Peter Dutton would find \$650 billion for his nuclear hoax. We saw none of that detail, and I think the same thing is happening here and in the next 79 weeks, leading up to the Victorian election. The Shadow Treasurer does not think that he needs to describe to the Victorian people what services would be impacted into the future when you take billions out of revenue.

I want to describe a few things, because the Shadow Treasurer went on a bit of a rant. It was an interesting sort of performance. It narrated an alternative universe to the reality we face. The Shadow Treasurer talked about there being no business investment, talking down Victoria. I get that it is in the Liberal–Nationals’ interest to talk down the state; they want to obviously present a scenario that enhances their political fortunes. But when the reality is there has been 3.7 per cent business investment growth in Victoria over the year to December 2024 compared to a 1.3 per cent decline in the rest of Australia, the narrative does not stack up. When you have Victoria’s record share of the overall economic output in the latest financial year, 2023–24, the narrative does not stack up. I then thought, ‘Well, has the Shadow Treasurer taken a pandemic-level speech and brought it into this chamber, dressing it up in 2025?’ It just felt completely underdone. And when the five points that he would have liked to have articulated were referenced 10 times, I realised that the 40-minute speech actually only had three minutes of content. It showed once again that this is the muscle memory of those opposite. They are not interested in the business of government, and they are not interested in policy development. Today was another classic example: oppose everything, talk down the state and hope that you limp in without doing any work on the policy and those outcomes.

The other thing that was put forward was around the debt levels that have been put forward. I keep reminding those opposite, because it does not stack up when we get to the credibility of discussion around economic performance, that their heroes under the Morrison, Turnbull and Abbott governments took debt towards \$1 trillion. It was over 30 per cent of GDP. The member for Mornington probably saw the budget papers during that time in estimates hearings. It took national debt as a proportion of the Victorian economy to substantially more than where Victoria is. We are the only jurisdiction that has a debt repayment strategy over five different points. So I thought maybe

there would be a little nuance – maybe the Shadow Treasurer would take the time to reference that, go through that and scrutinise that. There was no attempt whatsoever, and it just shows.

This person was the hero of the member for Sandringham back in the day: Dom Perrottet, the former New South Wales Premier. He has been rolled out every now and then to fundraisers: ‘Let’s get Dom along.’ He is a good speaker, he is very eloquent and he obviously has a wonderful bipartisan charm with Chris Minns up there. He has even done some fundraising for the member for Sandringham, who I think went over some of his material and had a look. But what did Dom Perrottet say about cost escalations and what they would describe as overruns? With a building boom in the new infrastructure of Australia’s eastern coast, pitting states against each other, Premier Dom Perrottet said at the time it was okay if costs increased from the estimations at the start of projects:

We are talking increases and that’s not unique to NSW – it’s happening right across the eastern seaboard ... We have a duty to make sure we get our projects built that are value for taxpayers, but ultimately, we’ve got to keep going.

John Mullahy interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: ‘Is Dom, is good,’ as the member for Glen Waverley nicely chimes in. That is a very good point. If you are running him out as a hero – and that narrative was put forward by someone who was not only Treasurer for a period of time but Premier – then you cannot walk back these major projects. You cannot walk back the infrastructure needs of tomorrow and the investments that are required.

When you hear the Shadow Treasurer and the Leader of the Opposition talk about cutting major projects and cutting massive projects like the SEC, there is a consequence to that. There are tens of thousands of jobs on the line with those policies – and the economic prosperity of our state and our future. That is what is at stake as we go forward in the next 79 weeks: a record level of cuts to services, with a frontline service impact that would be unprecedented. The question that should have been asked of the Shadow Treasurer today in that waffly 40-minute rant is: what are the revenue sources they would try to attract? Because if they are not going to prop that up in the tens of billions over the forward estimates that they suggest that they are finding, we know what that means. The impact will be on nurses, it will be on teachers, it will be on child protection workers and it will be on people helping to build our state in housing and in mental health and wellbeing. It will mean substantial impacts over the forward estimates, and we know that that will have a dire impact on the confidence and economics of our state.

When the Shadow Treasurer talks about confidence and the impact on confidence, nothing is more detrimental to confidence than austerity. Where did we see that? We saw that with the Abbott and Hockey journey. Remember them out the back in Canberra? They were sat there so joyous after they tore shreds through services federally. We saw the then federal opposition leader Peter Dutton say that he would take nearly 40,000 jobs out of the public service. That was the plan that was put forward federally, which was substantially rejected. Then they walked that back under panic, and we can see that there is a bit of policy panic from time to time from those opposite, where they walk back. I must say, though, the Shadow Treasurer and Leader of the Opposition have not walked back their work-from-home policy; in fact they have doubled down on that. So that whole impact on communities, the gendered nature of that policy and how that was resoundingly rejected is still Liberal–National policy going forward.

There is another important point that comes to those opposite: if they want to be seen seriously to be able to govern Victoria, they have got to be able to govern themselves, and they are in utter turmoil at the moment. The media was out the back here. I rolled in for a chat today with a couple of colleagues, and I do not normally get in at 7, but I have never seen the media roll up that early. I thought, ‘What’s going on?’ They were catching Liberals – not Nationals but Liberals – going in, wondering what on earth they were doing in their party room at 7:45. The craziness of that being cancelled, put off – I do not know, the member for Bulleen or the member for Mornington might be able to give some insights

into what on earth all the flurry was. But they are so divided, so bitter and twisted towards each other that they cannot even govern their own party room, cannot even have a sense of solidarity. How on earth could this mob ever be trusted to govern themselves?

We see this play out. There are fault lines left, right and centre. We know the junior coalition party in the Nationals is carrying the team at the moment with the performances put forward. I must say, though, there was barely a Liberal in here when the Nationals leader gave his budget speech. It was extraordinary not to see the solidarity on the agreement. And we see nationally how they play out now with the destruction of the coalition agreement. But it matters, because they are not an effective functioning opposition when they are too busy fighting each other, when they hate themselves more than they hate the Labor Party. You can see some of the challenges that we face in an effective opposition holding us to account.

These are the choices and the things that will be put forward to Victorians over the coming months as we head towards the state election in 2026. What are the cuts that the Shadow Treasurer proposes, who has come in here, who has talked down the Victorian economy, who has talked down business investment, even though, if he had got past chapter one of the second budget paper, he would have seen that there is economic growth and prosperity that is outstripping the nation? How lazy to come in here and not detail them. At least the member for Sandringham would give it a go and have his slogans lined up. It was very disappointing. I thought we would get an A-1 performance. But what cuts will they make? The media and Victorians want to know what that would look to –

Chris Crewther interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: He should be a shadow. He was up with the feds for a bit; give him a break. The member for Mornington says, 'We'll cut taxes.' All right, we will cut taxes there. Well, how will you plug the revenue holes? I counted about \$10 billion.

Chris Crewther interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: Grow the economy. I tell you, he is on the hook here – you know, when they jump on the hook themselves. I will go to the playbook here. On the budget paper – and I am not sure if you have had a chance to see this, member for Mornington – we are outstripping the nation on business growth. It is actually foot to the floor. We are in sixth gear going absolute hell for leather. We have got 3.7 per cent business growth. Just go past the six dot points that the Shadow Treasurer gave everyone on that side to run out with in their speeches or their member statements or their budget contributions. Look a little bit further into the detail, and you will see that. The notion to grow the economy – the budget is now over \$100 billion. When we came into government in 2014, guess what it was: \$43 billion. So we are growing the economy. It was \$43 billion under Napthine and Baillieu.

Members interjecting.

Tim RICHARDSON: It would be more under them, they say. They did not build anything during that time. Remember when they had the stickers at Southern Cross on the airport rail, and remember those tourists that came out of Southern Cross? Maybe they had come up from Geelong or Avalon and thinking, 'You know what, I've got to get to Tullamarine for my flight.' They saw the stickers at Southern Cross on the ground, and they went walking towards the where the rail line would have been. That was their infrastructure contribution; that was Baillieu–Napthine. It does not stack up, member for Mornington; it does not stack up.

Those opposite have not built a thing. All they have built is division. All they have built is a party room that is more divided than we have ever seen before, at risk of fault lines that could only be matched by the absolute, utter turmoil that the Liberal–Nationals are in at the moment. I mean, they are not in coalition. I have been watching closely the body language between the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Nationals, because it must be awkward. You have got the leader, Littleproud, who has got probably four weeks until Barnaby Joyce comes back. You have got then the

leader of the Liberal Party at the moment, Sussan Ley, who has been treated utterly appallingly by fellow Liberals and Nationals.

It goes to the fundamentals: when you cannot get your house in order, when you cannot govern yourselves, you can never govern the nation. When you cannot govern yourselves and your party room and you are busy spending time down on Queen Street suing the hell out of each other rather than governing for Victorians here in this place, that is what people will see: a divided rabble. You can see that they have been distracted. I can give the Shadow Treasurer some leeway. Maybe there has been a little bit of distraction around how much turmoil has been in there, like trying to keep the show together, on the phones, all the factional chats and everything. All I could see was a \$15 billion hole per annum that was put forward by the Shadow Treasurer, and the only thing that would mean is a reduction in expenditure, which he criticised consistently, wanting a smaller government, which means Victorians would pay the price. Victorians would pay the price for the cuts to the services they see, the teachers they rely on, the nurses that care for them each and every day, the essential workers that front up time and time again and the people on building projects helping to build the future. They are the cuts and consequences and job losses that will hit the livelihoods of Victorians like we have never seen before. That is the Shadow Treasurer and Leader of the Opposition's playbook.

Government performance

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (16:31): I rise to voice a grievance on behalf of Victorians, including locals in my electorate of Mornington, regarding the litany of failures under this Allan Labor government and indeed this Labor government over the last 12 years. This Labor government will have been in for nearly 12 years in a row by the election in November next year and they will have been in government for 23 out of the last 27 years here in Victoria. From unfair taxes and economic mismanagement to community neglect and cuts to services, this government has failed Victorians by every single metric. Instead of fostering economic prosperity and focusing on policies that enhance productivity, encourage investment, improve the business environment, streamline regulations and cut red tape, this government has become the modern-day Sheriff of Nottingham: corrupt, greedy and taxing Victorians to fill their own budget black hole.

Let us look at the emergency services tax. This is a tax that will undeniably impact so many Victorians, indeed so many hardworking Victorians. All landholders across Victoria – farmers, small businesses, suburban home owners, renters and volunteers – will be forced to pay more under this tax. In fact the government's own budget papers show that this tax will rip \$765 million a year from Victorians – over \$2.1 billion in just three years. This is a big, indiscriminate tax on property, and the member for Mordialloc, who spoke before, seems to think that such a tax is great for farmers and great for volunteers, but it is not. The impact on farmers and rural communities is especially pronounced. Farmers are being slugged with levy hikes as high as 150 per cent. Farmers and so many Victorians are furious. They are fighting government fires and volunteering as well, only to be rewarded with an unjust new tax, all while many are facing drought as well. They are so furious, thousands have attended protests on the steps of Parliament and elsewhere across Victoria in recent weeks.

The Victorian Farmers Federation and 79 local councils have opposed this money grab. Indeed the VFF Mornington Peninsula, who I have been speaking with closely about this, have opposed it as well, and they even went so far as to give four different alternative options that will raise the government revenue without impacting upon farmers. Many local CFA brigades, from Mornington to Mount Eliza, Moorooduc and elsewhere, have approached me about their concerns about this tax as well. And many local farmers in the Mornington electorate and indeed across the Mornington Peninsula and elsewhere, from cattle farmers to dryland farmers, horticulturalists, vineyard owners and others, have expressed extreme concerns about the rise in their rates under this tax.

But Premier Allan and Labor have rushed this tax through Parliament, as we have seen recently, in the darkness of the night, doing a dirty deal to get it over the line before their budget and cutting off debate so as to pass it through the Assembly at about 1:30 the other Friday morning. This is a government

that are looking to purely raise revenue to offset their skyrocketing state debt, which is looking at growing to \$194 billion in just a few years time, which is \$29 million in interest a day, which is \$1.2 million every single hour. As I mentioned in a speech earlier today, that is more than a home for every single Victorian every single hour that is being paid on interest by taxpayers that could actually be spent on infrastructure and services. This is a Labor government that is broke, and it is making the community pay on the back of goodwill towards emergency services workers and others. Labor have always wanted to tax farmland, it seems; now they have found a sneaky way to do it – even more so than before – with this emergency services tax. A Liberal and National government, if elected in November 2026, will have no higher priority than scrapping this unfair emergency services tax and restoring fairness.

Let us face it, the 2025–26 Victorian budget is an absolute disaster. We have a debt bomb set to burden future generations. As mentioned before, debt is forecast to reach over \$167 billion this year, with an eye-watering \$194 billion within three years. This is the highest debt of Victoria's history, nearly double what it was just a few years ago. By 2028–29 interest payments in total will be over \$10.5 billion a year, almost as much as the entire budget for public order and safety at the moment – \$10 billion in interest that taxpayers have to pay, money that is not building a single school or hospital, just lining lenders pockets because of Labor's endless credit card spending frenzy. That could build schools like Mount Eliza Secondary College in my electorate, which is more than 50 years old in terms of its infrastructure. They need an entire school redevelopment, which is not forthcoming at this point in time. All they need is about \$30 million to \$40 million to do so. The interest payments are much more than that even at the moment, and so many other schools are missing out as well.

And let us face it as well, Moody's recently delivered what it called Victoria's final warning, slamming reckless spending, lack of debt management strategy and weak budgetary transparency. Moody's bluntly noted that the government has no credible plan to stabilise the debt without 'more restrained spending and sustained momentum on reform'. They also urged broader financial reforms. If we cop another credit downgrade, it will sharply increase the interest on Labor's debt bomb. I am seriously worried about the trajectory of Victoria's debt. This is the final warning. We have such strong language being used by Moody's, such as 'reckless', 'weak' and 'lack of strategy'. This is serious stuff, and the government should take this seriously.

There are countless real-world examples where a failure to control debt has led to economic crises. I will mention they are perhaps a bit more extreme examples than Victoria, but this is a situation we do not want to end up in. Argentina: we have seen chronic overspending, inflation and reliance on debt, which led to repeated defaults in 2001, 2014 and 2020. The consequences were skyrocketing inflation, currency collapse, mass poverty and a reputation for default that haunts the economy. Italy's debt remains the highest in the world – over 140 per cent of its GDP – with decades of sluggish growth. This means constant scrutiny from bond markets, reliance on European Central Bank bailouts and limited fiscal flexibility. In Puerto Rico they have had decades of borrowing and government mismanagement that have led to \$70 billion in debt, with the government ultimately defaulting in 2015. The consequences are cuts to public services, school closures, mass emigration and so forth.

I acknowledge that these are extreme examples and that thankfully Victoria is in a relatively better situation at the moment than many of these countries. However, there are so many lessons to be learned. You just cannot borrow, borrow, borrow, putting everything on the credit card with no plan to rein in debt. So what is Labor's response to this debt crisis? They have increased taxes – more than 60 new or increased taxes – and they have cut services, infrastructure and more. We have seen cuts to public schools. We have seen cuts to fisheries offices, including in the Mornington electorate – although they have backtracked recently with much advocacy to at least keep the Mornington fisheries office open – and more. The Victorian government has led Victoria to have the highest taxes per person in Australia.

Going to public school funding, from which I mentioned that \$2.4 billion has been cut, that betrays a promise to meet Gonski education standards. This is a sneaky cut concealed in budget papers which

delays critical funding that public schools were counting on, making Victoria the lowest funder of public schools in the nation. Children starting prep this year – like my son, who is in prep – will not see full school funding resources until grade 6, an entire primary education underfunded. What an appalling breach of the government's duty of care to students and teachers. If we look at public sector cuts, we see zero transparency or care for workers. The government has vaguely promised \$3.3 billion in savings by slashing thousands of jobs but provides barely any details. As usual with Labor, it is spin first and substance later, if ever. While some of the cuts may be warranted efficiency measures, we are again sacrificing people's jobs, careers and livelihoods to pay for the government's reckless spending.

What will we do in contrast? The Liberals and Nationals, if we form government in November 2026, will not stand for this horror budget. We will stand for responsible budgeting and transparency. A government must live within its means, reining in debt, not axing things like school funding, and stimulating the economy, not taxing Victorians. A coalition government will restore trust by opening up the books and charting a real path to stabilising debt. Victorians deserve an economic plan grounded in reality that is not a debt-fuelled house of cards. As raised by the member for Brighton in his budget reply earlier today, we will scrap five taxes that have already been put up by this Labor government. This includes in particular the emergency services tax, which is impacting volunteers, farmers, renters and others right across Victoria. We will also scrap their GP patients tax, their holiday tourism tax and their schools tax.

Importantly, a fifth announcement today was that we will scrap stamp duty for first home buyers up to \$1 million. Home ownership has been going down, particularly amongst young people, and we must help to get them into homes in the first place, so they are not just putting money on rent or filling other people's pockets. They need a home of their own, and we need to be a party – we need to be a government – that provides opportunity, that gives aspiration, that gives hope, that enables young people to fulfil their dreams by not doing what the Labor government is doing, which is increasing taxes and removing investment, trying to drive away investment from this state. We need to be a government that drives up investment and brings in new revenue which will help to pay down this horror debt that Labor has built up.

If we look further, we can look at crime, for example. Crime has surged in Victoria to the highest level in nearly a decade. The latest statistics show that there were over 605,000 offences in 2024, a 15.7 per cent jump from the previous year, with the crime rate per 100,000 people up over 13 per cent year on year. This links in with the debt levels as well. We have a shortage of more than 1000 police. We have many stations where hours have been reduced or where they have been closed. We need to actually fill this gap in the police force and enable the community to have the safety they deserve, but instead we have a rise in youth offending, with crimes by children aged 10–17 hitting their highest levels since records began in 1993. What was the government's response? A rushed, tough-on-crime bail bill only after much pressure from the public and the opposition. We brought bail bills of our own many times, which were blocked by this government.

Look at other issues as well. We need to go into things like housing. On housing, the Labor government's record is equally dismal. The Labor government's grand promise of 80,000 new homes a year has been a dramatic failure. As I mentioned earlier, if we were not in a few years time going to be paying \$1.2 million of interest every single hour, there are many, many, many homes that could be built. I am sure the member for Tarneit would enjoy living in one of those homes as well if it was not for the taxpayer paying interest. Recent data on public housing also shows that we have over 60,000 Victorians on the waitlist as well. That is a situation that we should not be in. People should not be living in crisis accommodation. They should actually be going into proper accommodation. The debt levels that this Labor government has built up mean that we are not investing in public housing the way we need to.

If we go further, let us look at my electorate of Mornington. Time and time again, the Mornington Peninsula community has been overlooked and underfunded by this government. If you want proof that Labor governs for its own electorates rather than all Victorians, you just have to look at the

electorate of Mornington and our experiences. We have many schools in my electorate. I mentioned Mount Eliza Secondary College, which is over 50 years old in its infrastructure and urgently needs an upgrade, and there are so many other schools as well. Moorooduc Primary School's pavement looks like the pavements that I saw in Kosovo when I was living there. It is terrible, and it should not be in that state. We need a government that actually look after our schools and provide fairness to schools and fair funding to schools, not just to schools in their own electorates.

One thing I will mention is that there was one positive announcement, which was the Mornington to Hastings cross-peninsula bus service that was announced in the budget. That is a good thing, but that has taken many, many years and much advocacy by me and others to happen. We also have some funding set aside for Mount Eliza North Primary. It is not new funding. It has taken years for a commitment that was made in 2022 to actually be budgeted. It will be delayed, but this will now go ahead. But with more and more funding being available, the Labor government could do a lot more. They need to better manage the economy, as we would do in government.

Transport infrastructure

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (16:46): I am going to spend my next 15 minutes talking about how much I would grieve for the people of Victoria if the Liberals–Nationals were ever to get back into power, because the cuts to our public transport would be deep and long lasting. It has always been said here in this place that the Victorian Liberal Party have never met any infrastructure project they liked. I think that pretty much sums up the approach that those opposite take when it comes to the transport infrastructure projects that are absolutely transforming our state as we speak. I grieve at the prospect of what would happen to Victoria's public transport system should those opposite ever return to government with the attitude they have towards public transport in Victoria. There is always a reason. In the past almost seven years that I have been here I have heard many reasons, but there is always a reason for them to cut, to scrap or to absolutely gut projects that are important to Victorians.

Labor has been in government here in Victoria now for over a decade. The phrase that comes to mind for me and that people think of when it comes to what we have been able to achieve in that time is our 2018 slogan that we went to the election with, and that was 'Getting things done'. Some of you may remember that. When I am out talking to people in my community they talk about how we are doing things and what they can see, and we are making a difference because we are getting things done. They can see new schools being built across Melbourne's west. They can see the work crews out on the rail lines, removing level crossings and getting us moving. And they can see the big cranes. I see so many of them on our major road projects.

2025 will bring to an end construction on two of our government's flagship infrastructure projects, the Metro Tunnel and the West Gate Tunnel. When these projects do in fact open – and I am going to be reminding my community – it is going to be worth remembering that neither of these projects have ever been backed or have ever been supported by the opposition, not once. Back in 2017 they moved a motion in the other place to give Stonnington City Council – conveniently and historically a strong Liberal-leaning council – the power to stop the Metro Tunnel from proceeding. Can you believe that? Imagine stopping the Metro Tunnel from proceeding. Those opposite, when they actually have the opportunity to go and use and check out the new stations as part of Metro Tunnel, will be absolutely overwhelmed, because it is an incredible piece of infrastructure. It has taken a long time to build, but it is going to be so worth it. Imagine if those opposite had actually stopped the Metro Tunnel from happening.

If you cast your mind back, they called the tunnel – get this – a hoax and said it was all smoke and mirrors. They said it would be an absolute disaster and – get this; I love this bit – it would divide the city like the Berlin Wall. This is the mentality of those opposite. Thank God for all of us that motion failed, because even now they complain about the fact that certain trains will not fit in the Metro Tunnel, as if they did not realise that we designed and we ordered a specific type of high-capacity metro train precisely for running through this tunnel and that we safety-proofed the platforms at the

station with platform screen doors so that people could not fall off the platforms or, worse, throw themselves in front of a train. It is kind of like Paris.

At times I have been down to view Parkville station – which, by the way, and I know members on this side of the house have been down there, is absolutely incredible. I have taken a few people from my community lately, and there is one thing that strikes them, particularly the younger kids at school – Sunshine College in fact. Two young boys, both doing engineering next year – or hoping to – at Melbourne Uni, could not believe that the screen doors would open and close. It was absolutely amazing. This is the type of technology that is going into these five brand new stations. It is a complete indictment of those opposite's understanding in fact of transport policy, and these lines were regurgitated by their transport spokesman. Who was that? Does anyone remember? Does the member for Bulleen, sitting at the table this afternoon, remember? A self-styled gunzel, I hear, who could not wrap his head around this project if he tried. But what I do know about the member for Bulleen is when he goes down and he gets to use that Metro Tunnel for the first time with his family and his children, that experience will be incredible. I hope the member for Bulleen has as much fun as the Connolly family.

But let me get started on the West Gate Tunnel. In 2018 those opposite teamed up with the Greens for another motion, can you believe, in the other place to stop works on the West Gate Tunnel. The West Gate Tunnel is a project that will save my community in Melbourne's west 20 minutes on their morning and afternoon commute by taking trucks – the member for Bulleen's family will love it, guaranteed. He can ride it with the Connolly family. It will save folks in Melbourne's west 20 minutes on their morning and afternoon commute by taking trucks and heavy vehicles off the West Gate Bridge. It is going to just basically unlock the traffic, the gridlock of traffic, that westies have been in for far too long. Those opposite wanted to scrap the project.

I think of road projects that have been done in my electorate, like our government's \$1.8 billion western roads project – projects that those opposite could never have conjured up, never have thought about, never have funded, never have built, never have opened or driven down, on roads like Leakes, Palmers, Derrimut, Dohertys and the Forsyth Road interchange, which, by the way, is one of my favourites, because it has the best fluoro yellow overpass. I do not know who chose that colour, but you could see that from the moon. It is absolutely huge, and I think about it every time I drive under it, which is almost on a weekly basis on the way to my electorate. It is amazing.

But what amazes me most is the difference that these works have made in getting around just in my little patch, my little hood of Melbourne's west; they have made it so much easier to get around. And you know that road improvements like these were not on the agenda when they were last in government. When it comes to projects they do tactically support, like Melbourne Airport rail, the Liberal Party still cannot commit to the full deal. I have spoken enough in this place about how the federal Liberal Party were going to scrap the \$2 billion in funding for the Sunshine station superhub, and I will continue to thank Melbourne's western suburbs for voting overwhelmingly for the Australian Labor Party at the federal election most recently. They voted in droves to keep the \$2 billion in funding for Sunshine station superhub. And where did the Liberal Party want to send the \$2 billion for the Sunshine station superhub? Guess. Well, folks in the south-east will not want to guess, but westies will know they were going to send it to projects in the south-east. One of the most revered projects that westies needed they wanted to rip the guts out of – \$2 billion – and send across the bridge into the south-east. Well, that did not work for them, did it? Of course the other side of this announcement was that their funding would be matched by a future – I love this – Battin Liberal government. I wonder if the Leader of the Opposition and those opposite would take the same approach – I suspect they would – to my much beloved Sunshine station and gut the heart out of airport rail. That is essentially what gutting the Sunshine station superhub would do. Let me explain. The Sunshine superhub is the absolutely critical first step to electrifying the Melton and Wyndham Vale lines and separating those services from existing regional rail lines.

I am sure I have heard some of their members talk about some of these projects. They try and talk a big game, those opposites, about these two lines, so I felt absolutely curious to see if they would set them back by a decade by watering down Sunshine station as part of airport rail. They have talked a big game these past couple of years about Melbourne's west, and they have tried to create a narrative of neglect and complained that local infrastructure has not kept up in areas like Wyndham, where – and it is a shame the member for Bulleen has left – 11 precinct structure plans were approved by their last planning minister, the member for Bulleen, without correlating any future investment in public transport infrastructure. Can you imagine what that would do to folks who moved into the 11 PSPs? They are living out there now. Some of the really tough conversations that we have around transport and getting around that local area are a legacy of the past Liberal–National government. The challenges we face out in Melbourne's west – I have said before and I am going to say it all the way to the election – were because of some of the worst urban planning policies, and yet all of the opportunities we have for improvement and renewal have come from a Labor government. Whether it was the Andrews Labor government or the now Allan Labor government, they have come from Labor.

I would be remiss if I did not mention a favourite of so many people, and I do not talk about having favourites too often, but as someone who has seen quite a few level crossings in my previous and my current electorate removed, the level crossing removal projects that we have been undertaking deserve a mention here. The Werribee line is going to be level crossing free, and that means the Wyndham community and the Laverton community are going to be level crossing free. That is something folks love and they continue to vote for time and time again. All of these crossings were removed in the last term of government, but what you may have missed is that at the 2018 election the Liberal Party – I still cannot believe this – were going to scrap all of these projects. Do you know what they were going to scrap them in the name of? It is pretty relevant to the member for Brighton's contribution today about the budget. They were going to cut them in the name of budget savings. Wyndham locals and the folks in Laverton could have kissed their level crossing removals goodbye if the Libs had gotten into power back then. Folks in Wyndham would know that they would probably still be stuck behind the boom gates in Werribee, the boom gates in Hoppers and the boom gates in Laverton. I imagine we would not even be talking, and I am looking at the member for Melton, about the Melton level crossing projects, which – you would not believe it – are underway right now.

I cannot not mention the mother of all infrastructure projects they opposed: our government's flagship Suburban Rail Loop. I remember when the project was first announced all the way back in 2018. It was a bold, ambitious plan that we knew would take decades to fully realise, but it was the kind of important forward thinking that Victorians rightly expect us to be considering and expect governments to be considering when they are in fact in government. You cannot be in government and not build one single public transport project here in this state. When we came to government in 2014 the walls and the bookshelves were completely empty and devoid of any project, devoid of any vision, devoid of any future investment for the folks living in the 11 PSPs out in Wyndham and God knows where else.

What I will do is finish with this: just a few weeks ago Victorians resoundingly sent the Liberal Party packing out of Melbourne, and they broke the coalition. The coalition have been left with just two urban electorates in Melbourne, one of which is more peri-urban. Next year we go to the polls, and we go to the polls with major projects completed and more under construction. Our government has a long-term vision for Victoria. We have our challenges – yes, we do – but we meet them. Most importantly, we meet them with opportunities. I will put that vision and that ambition against the paralysis of those opposites any day of the week, time and time again. They may think they are in with a bit of a shot, but what my community and I know is that if all they promise are cuts and further paralysis, which I think we saw today in the member for Brighton's delivery of his budget reply, those opposites are going to be in for one hell of a shock next year.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (17:01): I rise today to grieve for all Victorians for the grievous impost that is being put onto them under this Labor government's emergency services tax, the so-called Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. What it is is a tax. I was astounded last sitting week when we had questions about this and we asked about the tax. The plaintive voice came from the government benches: 'It's not a tax, it's a levy.' Well, funnily enough, the budget papers say otherwise, because if you go to the section on taxation, you will find references to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. It is a tax on volunteers, it is a tax on home owners, it is a tax on business owners, it is a tax on industrial owners and, most egregiously, it is a tax on farmers – a primary production tax that is completely unconscionable from this government.

I would like to go through what the government is actually proposing here. The government would like to have us believe that this is just a continuation of something that the former coalition government introduced in 2012. We know that there was a Black Saturday Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, and at the time the royal commission found that the fire services levy, which was then levied on insurance bills, was inadequate because many people either did not insure or were underinsured. The government at the time took the pretty brave decision to implement a new levy that would fund our fire services properly, and that was what it was for. The recommendation from the royal commission was to create Fire Rescue Victoria, then known as the MFB and the CFA. The Premier will have us believe that this is just a continuation of that, but the fact that we have had legislation to change it, a change of name and a massive increase in scope would say otherwise.

The government's own website has a table with a comparison of the fire services property levy rates and charges being levied this year versus the new Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund rates for 2025–26, and I want to go through them. The residential rate – the rate that every single Victorian home owner will pay next year – will go from 8.7 cents to 17.3 cents.

Richard Riordan interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: It is almost exactly double the figure, member for Polwarth. It is a doubling of the residential rate. The government is introducing a new rate, surprisingly. Not only are we expanding the scope of this tax but we are actually bringing in a new category as well for a residential non-primary place of residence. What does that mean? That essentially means every rental provider in the state will pay not only –

Jade Benham interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: Landlords, in the old vernacular, member for Mildura, absolutely. Landlords provide rental properties to –

Members interjecting.

Danny O'BRIEN: renters; that is right. They will cop a 100 per cent increase in the rate they pay. Not only that, but under the new arrangements, when they are brought in at the end of next financial year, landlords will see a doubling in the rate of the fixed charge that they pay as well, going from \$136 to \$267. The commercial rate will rise from 66.4 cents per \$1000 of capital improved value (CIV) to 133 cents of capital improved value. That is also a 100 per cent increase, or a doubling of the rate. The industrial rate goes from 81.1 cents to 133 cents, a 64 per cent increase in the rate. And most egregiously, the primary production rate will go from 28.7 cents to 71.8 cents, a tripling of the rate that farmers will pay. We might remember that we have been saying different figures; we were saying that it was 189 per cent until a couple of weeks ago.

Jade Benham: So what is it now?

Danny O'BRIEN: It is only 150 per cent, member for Mildura. So instead of nearly quadrupling the rate that farmers pay, the government and the Greens have come up with a deal that apparently

farmers should be dancing in the streets about because now they will only get to pay triple the rate that they are currently paying, or 71.8 cents per \$1000 of CIV.

I think it is important to add to this, for the chamber's benefit, that the government, when it merged the fire services in 2020, froze the fire services levy for two years. It lifted that cap last financial year, and that saw farmers' rates increase by 60 per cent last year. That was under the old scheme, and now they are copping an additional 150 per cent this year. It is completely unconscionable in drought at a time when things are difficult, when events around the world are making commodities highly volatile. So farmers, quite rightly, are angry about this, but I emphasise this is not just a farmers tax. This is a tax on every single Victorian property owner: residential, shopkeepers, commercial, industrial, farmers. But only a few are paying a big increase, because there is another category in the government's table of these things. It is called the public benefit category.

Richard Riordan interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: I will tell you about it, member for Polwarth. It is a very important category of course, because it covers things like schools and hospitals and Scout halls and those sorts of facilities. But under this government it also is the rate that wind and solar farms and other renewable energy companies pay for their emergency services levy: 5.7 per cent. And guess what the rate is next year under the new arrangements: 5.7 per cent. So 5.7 cents per \$1000 dollars of CIV – no change. Those of us who have been around a few years will remember that the government actually did say, 'Well, that's not fair,' about wind and solar farms, which are, to quote the Premier in question time today, predominantly foreign-owned. She was talking about where the coal generators are, but the wind and solar farms are predominantly foreign-owned.

To his credit, the former Treasurer Mr Pallas actually did try to change this. Not only was he going to, he actually brought in legislation to ensure that those renewable energy companies paid their full whack and paid the industrial rate, which would be, under this arrangement, 133 cents. But in an extraordinary backdown, the government literally just said, 'No, it's all a bit too hard.' When the Clean Energy Council got the lobbyists going and said this was going to be a danger –

Richard Riordan interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: there might have been some canapés – to renewable investment in Victoria, the government backed down completely. We have now got a situation where farmers in western Victoria, parts of Gippsland, central Victoria, north-western Victoria – pretty much everywhere in Victoria except Gippsland East – are on their knees. They are paying 71.8 cents. But the multinational renewable energy companies that are investing in wind and solar in Victoria are paying 5.7 cents. That is unbelievable – absolute hypocrisy from the Labor government.

I want to go on to a little bit about that non-residential, non-principal place of residence. In the committee stage when the bill was passed a couple of weeks ago, Ms Bath in the other place asked a question about the forward estimates as they were at the time, which showed that there was a \$310 million increase over two years in what the government expects to raise from this tax. Some of us assumed that might be due to an increase in land values projected over the next couple of years, but the response from the Treasurer in the other place was, 'No, Ms Bath, that is based on the increased fixed charge for the non-principal places of residence, which has been delayed by a year for implementation.' So what was \$310 million?

If we now go to the budget papers, the increase in that tax goes to \$1.8 billion. So \$800 million, which is about \$175 million a year, which in the three out years, once this new landlord's tax comes in, is a total of \$525 million. \$525 million extra per year is going to be levied on those people with a second residence, the vast majority of whom are landlords or rental providers. They have got tenants. Now, what do we think is going to happen with that money? Do we think the landlords are so wealthy that they will just cop it and say, 'That's okay, \$525 million'? No, that is not what is going to happen. That is what economics 101 will tell you. It is another property tax, and it is a tax that is going to be levied

on renters. And yet the economic troglodytes up here in the back in the Greens thought that this was a good idea to do a deal with the Labor Party to whack another tax on renters. And then they will be saying, 'Oh, we need rental assistance. We need caps on rents and everything.' It is just unbelievable that the government does this.

When it comes to the to the question of what farmers are paying, one of the questions I get from farmers as I go around to events is, 'Why us? Why have we copped such a big increase? Why are we getting 150 per cent increase when everyone else is only copping a doubling?' So the member for Lowan actually asked the Premier that question: 'Why is there such a big slug for farmers?' The Premier took about 2 minutes and 50 seconds, but she eventually got to the answer. She said this:

The advice I have from the Treasurer is that the increase in the levy for primary producers is the equivalent of 0.5 to 0.8 per cent of agricultural production ...

What the hell that has got to do with anything, I do not know. And then she went on to say:

... which also recognises the large landholdings of primary producers and the risk they face in the event of fire.

So basically you have got big properties, which is actually not true for many farmers, and you face risk, so that is why you are paying 150 per cent.

Members interjecting.

Danny O'BRIEN: As the member for Lowan has just pointed out, it is actually those farmers who are generally the volunteers in our brigades who are getting on the back of the truck and saving their communities when there is a fire. Forget the risk that their own properties face, they are out there fighting for their neighbours and half the time actually fighting to protect Crown land and community assets as well, which is just extraordinary. We have got farmers who are facing a 150 per cent increase in the rate, but many are facing far more than that.

Then, to rub salt into the wound, we heard from question time today what this means. The Premier has been telling us and the Treasurer has been telling us time and time again that every single cent from this new tax will go to supporting our emergency services. As I have just said, the government is raising an extra \$600 million next financial year. It is raising an extra \$800 million for the three out years. You would assume then that there is a big, massive increase for our emergency services. If you go to page 158 of budget paper 3, which actually provides the outputs and the line items for the Department of Justice and Community Safety, under 'Emergency Management Capability' the revised figure for this year is \$2.176 billion. You would think the budget for next year would be more than that. It is in fact \$1.973 billion. It is a \$203 million reduction in the line item for emergency management. So the government is taxing us more in the name of emergency services but actually giving emergency services less. This is just extraordinary.

The government might well say, 'But hang on, we're now funding Forest Fire Management Victoria and Triple Zero Victoria and all these other things from it.' Okay, let us go to another page in the book, page 112 of budget paper 3 for the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, 'Fire and Emergency Management'. Fire and emergency management is where Forest Fire Management Victoria is funded from – a 9.2 per cent reduction in the money going there this year. So it is not even looking after Crown land or public land – we are not doing anything there – but we are seeing a reduction in the spending both on emergency management capability and on Forest Fire Management Victoria at the same time that this government is whacking Victorians with a \$3 billion new tax. And what do we hear from those opposite? We hear explanations: 'Well, I'm lobbying hard.' We heard Ms Ermacora in the other place saying, 'Well, this is really difficult for me because I'm a farm girl and I'm a former CFA volunteer.' Did she oppose this? No. Did the member for Ripon oppose this? No. Did the member for Bass oppose this? I think there was a protest outside her office today. None of this has happened. This is a grievous new tax, and I grieve for Victorians. This is all happening not to support our emergency services but because Labor cannot manage money, and regional Victorians are paying the price.

Emergency services

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (17:16): It gives me great pleasure this evening to rise to contribute to our grievance debate. I grieve for Victoria's emergency services under a future Liberal government or a potential future Liberal government.

Members interjecting.

Dylan WIGHT: It will be good. If you listen, you might learn something. Before I get into the substantive part of my contribution on this debate, I just thought I would mention it was incredibly entertaining to sit in the chamber here and listen to the economic rationalism of the member for Mornington. The same guy that wants to put HECS on high school students in Victoria is sitting in here and standing in here, telling the government how they should run their budget and Victorians how the economy should run. How fantastic that would be for disadvantaged kids all across Victoria to finish high school with a crippling HECS debt. To stand here having listened to that, followed by the member for Gippsland South and the Nationals just having a conversation with each other, from what I could tell, for 15 minutes, is incredibly funny.

The Liberals will cut our emergency services and put Victorians at risk of disaster. We know that because they point-blank have said that they will. But we also know that because they have form: every time they are given the gift of government in this state they cut frontline services. We know that they did it between 2010 and 2014, and they did it during the Kennett years as well; I mean, they cut everything during the Kennett years.

The Labor government is delivering a \$250 million boost to our emergency services through the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. What this will do is it will help fund the workers and volunteers that we need to keep Victorians safe during extreme weather events, during floods and during fires. It includes the SES, which it had not previously. There are those opposite that actually believe in climate change, but let us be frank, there are not that many of them. The member for Gippsland South could not stop himself then from having a drive-by on the renewable energy sector. There are those opposite that actually believe in climate change, but I will tell you what, the member for Polwarth at the table does not. He is from that part of the Liberal party room that sit on the fringe of absolutely every issue. But unlike the member for Polwarth, those in his party room that have half a brain and that believe in climate change know that these extreme weather events – flood and fire, downpours of rain, washed-out roads – are going to become more and more frequent as the effects of climate change are borne out in Australia and in Victoria.

It is incredibly important that we have the capacity to fund the services that we need to protect everyday Victorians. Those opposite, if they wanted to be fair dinkum, instead of going out into the community and whipping up fear and lying to people, they would know that the volunteers that do this work out in the bush are exempt. They are exempt from this levy because we know that volunteers – CFA volunteers in particular – out in regional and rural Victoria do absolutely fantastic work when they are faced with natural disasters. If those opposite wanted to go out and be honest with the communities that they represent, they would tell them that volunteers are exempt from this levy. They could have been in here on budget day last week giving speeches to that effect. Do you know what they were –

Richard Riordan: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is misleading the house.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not a point of order, member for Polwarth, and you understand that.

Richard Riordan: Well, he needs to be relevant in speaking to the grievance today. You cannot say there are exemptions when there are not.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not a point of order, and I think the member knows that.

Dylan WIGHT: Honestly, if I wanted to hear the ramblings of an incoherent person, I would go to the pub across the road – and to my point, that is exactly where those opposite were when the Parliament was in session during Tuesday, budget day, of last week. Instead of sitting in here and giving speeches and speaking to those that they represent and coming clean on the truth with them, they were over the road at about 5 pm slapping each other on the back, having a beer, telling each other how smart they were. Half their party room were not in the Parliament; they were over the road drinking beer telling each other how smart they were. I tell you what, you would have got a private room if you were that smart, instead of sitting in the main bar of the Imperial drinking piss with each other –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Unparliamentary language.

Dylan WIGHT: when you were supposed to be in here representing your constituents. It is an absolute joke. Those opposite are a dangerous show. Everybody in Victoria should know what they are going to get when they go to the ballot box in November next year. They will get an absolutely divided, lazy rabble that do not represent mainstream views in Victoria, that sit on the fringe of absolutely everything. We know what they will do if they are ever given the gift of government again. They will cut everything that is dear to Victorians, everything that Victorians need. They have a history of it. We saw what they did under the Baillieu and Napthine governments. We saw what they did under the under the Kennett government as well. It is fundamentally in their DNA, and they will start with essential services. If they ever win government, after their first budget I can guarantee you that they will not be drinking beers with that union secretary then, because they will have cut money out of emergency services, out of essential services, because it is in their DNA.

There was a budget reply speech today, and the Shadow Treasurer –

Richard Riordan interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: It was fantastic. I was enthralled. The Shadow Treasurer has already forecast that a future government that he may be part of would cut four different revenue streams, along with the stamp duty announcement that they made today. That is all well and good. I mean, it is all a bit haphazard. They still have not really brought the show together with a cogent offering as to how they can improve the lives of Victorians, but those revenue streams are forecast to bring in several billion dollars into the Victorian budget over the forward estimates. It might be about \$4 billion or \$5 billion, I believe. So those opposite have to come clean. If you are going to cut those revenue streams whilst also saying that you are going to have budgets in surplus, then you have to be honest about the essential services that you are going to cut. You have to be honest with the Victorian people. Those opposite cannot honestly think that they are going to go to an election in 2026 with a \$4 billion or \$5 billion budget black hole and not be honest with the Victorian people about the essential services that they are going to cut after the election. Some amongst them have at least been honest with the Victorian people that they plan to cut services after the election. Do not just take my word for it, because I brought receipts. The internet is an amazing thing, unless you are a member of the Liberal Party room that clearly cannot think:

Newly promoted Liberal MP Joe McCracken –

I had to Google who Joe McCracken was; apparently he is a member of the upper house –

has publicly foreshadowed plans to cut ... services ...

if the Liberal Party wins government. Do not say the quiet things out loud, Joe. It is in this mob's DNA to cut essential services, and that is exactly what they will do if they are given that precious gift of government ever again. God help us that they are not.

They walk into this place – the Shadow Treasurer, the member for Brighton, does it all the time – and say they are going to cut revenue, they are going to fix every road, they are going to cut stamp duty, they are going to reduce debt and they are going to produce a budget surplus. Give me a break. How

can you possibly do that without cutting essential services? How can you possibly do it? You cannot. And they have a history of doing it. This McCracken fella has already said that they are going to do it. Let us look at their history – TAFE cuts during 2010 and 2014. We won government in 2014 and literally had to rebuild a TAFE system from the ground up. We had to go to TAFE campuses with boltcutters to get the chains off the fence, because they had closed them. And who does that affect? That affects Victoria's most vulnerable people.

We saw between 2010 and 2014 the former government go to war with our paramedics and our firefighters. I remember in 2014, when I was 24 years old, at a pre-poll leading into the 2014 election, standing next to paramedics and firefighters who were actively campaigning for the victory of a Labor government because the incumbent Liberal government at the time had gone to war with them, did not respect their work, did not want to engage with them and bargain in good faith, did not want to pay them a decent wage, did not respect work-life balance – did not respect any of those things. That is exactly what a future Liberal government will do as well, because they cannot deliver the things that they say without cutting essential services. They have got no idea how to grow the economy, so it cannot be about that. All they can do to keep a budget in surplus, to reduce debt and to stop those revenue streams will be to cut services.

I will go on. Liberals tore the heart out of Victoria's social housing – \$500 million out of social housing between 2010 and 2014 – once again affecting Victoria's most vulnerable people. Five hundred million dollars they cut from housing: that means that less Victorians, less vulnerable Victorians, had the security of their own home and a roof over their head under the previous Liberal government. And one from the archives, Deputy Speaker, which I know you will love: in the 1990s hundreds of school closures hit Victoria. We will never, ever forget what Jeff Kennett did to Victoria's public school system: closing local schools, sacking teachers and closing hospitals. Let us be honest, for most of the people in that party room he is still their hero; they want to be Jeff. So how could Victorians possibly trust them not to cut the things that matter most to them?

Make no mistake, in 2026 it will be a binary choice between a Labor government that will do the right thing for insecure Victorian people and those opposite, who will cut everything that is important to Victorian families and disadvantaged Victorians.

Government performance

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (17:31): I grieve for Victoria, and I also grieve for my eardrums after listening to that last 15 minutes of rubbish. Honestly, what a load of rubbish. And let us debunk a few things, shall we? The member for Tarneit is going to walk out of the chamber because he knows I am going to towel him up on this. The member for Tarneit just went on to social housing, and this is part of the reason why I grieve for Victoria. He banged on about our history of social housing and how bad we were. Well, in 2014 there were 13,000 applicants for social housing; now there are over 60,000, member for Tarneit. Yes, I thought you would walk out. Now there are over 60,000 applicants for social and affordable housing in this state. There is the first grievance of the day. I am on a regional committee at the moment, and I will not go too much into it, but this government is failing across the state when it comes to housing. People are on waiting list after waiting list and they cannot get a roof over their head, and that is a fact.

Members interjecting.

Wayne FARNHAM: I am trying to grieve; go away. Okay, it is hard to grieve when I have got a baby smiling at me; it is hard to be angry when that is happening.

Let me get back to the debate. There is no crueller tax than the one the government brought in last week, the fire services volunteer levy, and we heard the member for Gippsland South touch on it earlier. It is a cruel tax on our farmers. At the moment our farmers are really, really struggling – they are really struggling. A lot of those farmers are CFA volunteers, but some of them are not CFA volunteers. Whether they are up in the north of the state, the north-west or even down in West

Gippsland, our farming community are really struggling, and they cannot afford this tax. They just cannot afford it. People say to me, 'You're not in drought, it's green in West Gippsland.' Yes, it is green because we get a frost and the grass greens up, but there is no growth. They are buying in feed every day. They are buying in water every day. It is cruel to do this to our farming community, but it is not just the farming community, it is every household and every business in this state. That is why the Liberal and National Party said, 'We will reverse it,' because we know there are cost-of-living pressures across the state in every sector.

You cannot turn around when we have got the public of Victoria in this much trouble and then introduce another tax just after the new Treasurer said, 'We won't introduce any more taxes.' It was the first bill back – it was a tax – and then the next bill, the gambling bill, was another tax just after they said no more new taxes. It is exactly the same rubbish that Daniel Andrews said in 2014: 'We will not introduce any new taxes into Victoria.' Sixty-one new or increased taxes later – 61 – how in the hell are Victorians meant to believe this government and this present Treasurer when they break their promise in the first budget with new taxes straightaway?

This state is under so much pressure. People are under so much pressure. We are in so much debt it is beyond comprehension – \$194 billion worth of forecast debt. We are getting into some serious territory here with debt. I thought it was bad enough when I got elected – the forecast was at \$167 billion when I got elected – but now it is \$194 billion, with \$1.2 million a day in interest, and that is if we keep our current credit rating. Let us not forget that. That is a very important point, because right at the moment our credit rating agencies are looking at the state of Victoria and saying, 'It is a basket case; they cannot fix it.' The Treasurer is going to do some pretty hard grovelling, I imagine, to try and keep our credit rating in check, because if we lose that current credit rating, what is our interest bill going to be per day then, or per hour? It is \$1.2 million an hour now. Will it go up to \$2 million an hour? That is something this state cannot afford. It is something every Victorian cannot afford. We know that interest going out the door is not delivering any services that we need, and that is a fact. I just listened to the other side say, 'All you guys do is cut, cut, cut.' Well, in the budget the other day, where the West Gippsland Hospital is, there was \$12.99 million in reduced project scope, and that means cuts. No matter what way you spin it, it is a cut – a \$13 million cut in hospitals, done by this government. It has not been done by us. They are in government, not us.

The member for Tarneit leaned into the public service. He says we cut, cut, cut. I do not think he has been doing too much reading lately. On 19 May 2025 it was announced that several thousand public servants' jobs will go; that is by this government. So out of the 57,000-odd public servants in this state, whose job is that? Several thousand public servants' jobs will go. There has been another one that said 1200 jobs will go; that is by this government. This government is cutting the public service – not the opposition, the government. And this is the thing: the government like to make us out to be the bad guys all the time, but they are doing that right now. The CPSU is fighting to save 3000 jobs. So out of those 57,000 public servants, whose jobs are they? Those 57,000 public servants will be going home wondering, 'Is that my job?' And their partner will be thinking, 'Is that their job?' So that is going to put a lot of people in doubt about their future in this state, not to mention that the state is in a terrible condition at the moment. It is in a terrible condition.

When we talk about housing and building and our social housing, it is all spin by this government – 80,000 houses a year, 800,000 over 10 years. We have not reached that target at all. Was it a factual target? Was it an aspirational target? Who knows. I am tipping it was more aspirational than factual, but they have not reached that target. We have a building bill going through the upper house this week that will, if passed, hamstring the building industry. It will mean less homes delivered because you will have less builders to deliver homes, because this bill will push builders out of the industry. This is why I grieve for Victoria – because nothing this government do they get right. There is nothing they can do. They cannot deliver a project on time or on budget. \$48 billion in budget blowouts is an amazing, obscene amount of money to mismanage.

This government is not brave enough to stand up to the CFMEU to get projects under control. The other side were having a go at us, saying we will not do projects, we will not do this and we will not do that. We will, but the difference between us and them is we will do them on budget because we will not be beholden to the CFMEU – a criminal, corrupt organisation that this government has just let run riot in this state for the best part of a decade. They have done nothing to address it. Yes, the CFMEU has been put into administration by the federal government, but that is still not stopping the behaviour on the ground. We have seen that time and time again. We have seen news articles. We saw it on television, where we saw women getting abused on CFMEU sites, which is disgraceful behaviour. I have said it before in this chamber and I will say it again: I have got good friends that are in the CFMEU and they are good people, but this government has done nothing to get the criminal element out of the CFMEU. They have refused to bring in police checks to protect the good men and women of the CFMEU – blatantly refused. We tried to introduce a bill to do that, to protect the good workers, but the government, who is meant to be for the worker, refused to do it because they are too scared that their donations will dry up from the CFMEU. We know the CFMEU give the Victorian Labor government a fair bit of coin. But I tell you what, this government actually needs to stand up for the workers like they used to, not be beholden to the corrupt thugs of the CFMEU. ‘Doing what matters’ was one of the government election slogans in the 2022 election. The member for Laverton touched on it earlier. ‘Getting things done’ and ‘Governing for all Victorians’ were the slogans. The problem is this government is not governing for all Victorians.

Talking about infrastructure delivery, the Gippsland rail line down in my patch runs through to Morwell all the way down to Bairnsdale in East Gippsland. They were meant to duplicate the whole line. It was about a \$490 million investment from the federal government and about \$40 million from the state. They have not completed the project. Not only that, they went back to get another \$380 million from the federal government. Guess what, they still have not completed the project. They still have not duplicated the line from Bunyip to Longwarry, which was in the original scope of works. Guess what, they have cut that out. There is a cut they do not want to talk about, and they do not want to talk about it because they cut it based on a report that does not exist – an environmental report that has not been done and does not exist. It was the Premier that gave me that statement when she was the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. I have done my research; that report does not exist. She has misled my community about that rail line. Why has not it been done? Because they constantly run out of money. This government goes back to the feds, puts its hand out and says, ‘We need more money because we can’t manage it.’ This government is like a petulant child – a child you give \$100 to and say, ‘Go spend \$100,’ but they go out and spend \$200 and ask for more, with no accountability. That is a problem. This is why I grieve for Victoria, because with every budget blowout and every bit of waste somebody misses out.

In my community, with this budget that came through, the West Gippsland Hospital is delayed again. It was meant to start in 2024, and it is not going to start until the back end of 2026 at best. It is meant to be completed by 2028. A hospital that size will take four years to complete. We are not going to see that, at best, till 2030, and by then our population would have grown by about another 7000 or 8000 people, which is going to put Latrobe Valley hospital under pressure and any other surrounding hospital under pressure – not to mention the pressure that exists in that hospital, and those staff work in terrible conditions. That is why I grieve for Victoria, and I grieve for my electorate. Our roads and intersections are poor. I have asked the Minister for Roads and Road Safety on several occasions about an intersection in Bunyip where there is accident after accident, and it will not get fixed. All I get is a press release and a little line at the bottom that says, ‘We’re monitoring the situation.’

The government cannot even get the surplus right. It was reported we were going to have a \$1.5 billion surplus; well, all of a sudden \$900 million went missing, and we only had a \$600 million surplus. Where did the \$900 million go? More waste and more budget blowouts, or is it all getting funnelled into the Suburban Rail Loop, the very project that could bury this state and the very project that the ratings agencies are warning against by downgrading our credit rating? The government has to seriously rethink the Suburban Rail Loop, because this state cannot afford it. It was originally

announced in 2018 at \$50 billion, but in 2018 we did not have the debt level we have today – nowhere near it. Now it is \$214 billion with a debt of \$194 billion, and we are paying \$1.2 million an hour in interest.

I grieve for this state because this government, in a word, has stuffed it. People are hurting all over the state. Yes, the government build things, but they waste so much, and that is what is costing Victoria. This is why I grieve for Victoria, because the waste of this government is going to cost jobs and is going to cost the community the services they desperately need.

Housing

Katie HALL (Footscray) (17:46): I am very pleased to make the final contribution to tonight's grievance debate, and the issue I want to focus on is the building of new homes. I grieve that the Liberal Party will cut our targets for new homes for young people to have the opportunity to live in a home in Melbourne in the middle of a housing crisis. The member for Narracan spoke quite a bit about housing, and I am looking forward to putting some facts into the story, because the Labor government in Victoria is delivering more townhouses and more apartments where young people want to live, near train stations. It is about opening doors for young people to get into a home that they can afford, and we know that the Liberal Party will reverse it, because sometimes you should believe what they say and sometimes they say the quiet things out loud, and they are doing that this week in the upper house. We know what this means: no change to the status quo and no end to the housing crisis.

Do not take my word for it – experts from the Grattan Institute have written a fantastic article in the *Conversation* titled 'Victoria's planning reforms could help solve the housing crisis. But they are under threat'. Why are they under threat – because the Liberal Party and the National Party oppose it. And the authors contend that Melbourne – one of the least dense cities of its size in the world – has a problem with areas that are locked up, especially close to areas where people want to live and should live. The middle ring has been locked up. We know that the neighbourhood residential zone covers 42 per cent of land in the inner 10 kilometres of Melbourne. Look at some of the great cities of the world. Take a place like Barcelona: we know that there is a consistent medium density throughout the city. It does not impact their liveability; in fact it makes it one of the great cities of the world. The article says:

If Melbourne's middle suburbs – those between two and 20 kilometres from the CBD – were as dense as those of Toronto, that increase in density alone could accommodate all of the 800,000 extra homes the state government plans to build over the next decade.

The flow-on effect is high prices and rents, a stagnating economy because fewer people can live close to jobs, and further expensive and environmentally damaging sprawl into farmland and floodplains.

It goes on:

The Victorian parliament shouldn't stand in the way of young families who want to buy a townhouse in the suburb they grew up in, or seniors downsizing to an apartment in their local neighbourhood.

These reforms are about allowing more homes, and creating a better, healthier, and more vibrant Melbourne.

We were all today subjected to 40 minutes of bellowing from the member for Brighton, when the Liberal Party said that they would cut stamp duty as a way to get more young people into housing. Well, it is a pea and thimble trick, because we know that this \$3 billion commitment means cuts elsewhere. How can you trust them if they are going to block sensible reforms for medium-density development throughout suburbs with access to great schools, parks, train stations? They just cannot be trusted, because the Liberal Party, we know, have already made it harder for people to buy their first home, because when they were in government they cut access to the first home owners grant by \$7000. It is give and take.

But worse, they have teamed up with their mates the Greens to hold an inquiry into the townhouse reforms of this government – which the experts from the Grattan Institute described as a disaster for affordability. It is a mean trick – restricting access to more supply, cutting who knows what to pay for

it. If you want to live in existing suburbs in Melbourne, perhaps where you grew up, it is, 'Good luck to you. Perhaps out in the boondocks where there are no amenities.' That is where it would be acceptable for people opposite to keep building and keep expanding Melbourne's growth corridor.

It is a very peculiar mindset, because we know that in terms of infrastructure some of these areas are really struggling, because when they were last in government the approval of PSPs with no complementary infrastructure was rife. My suburb of Footscray, which has accommodated a huge amount of growth, has seen the devastating impact of what has been described as Australia's worst apartment development precinct, at Joseph Road. The previous Minister for Housing, Minister Wynne, had to take the developers to court to try and recoup some developer contributions because the development was approved with no developer contribution. So the people that live in this apartment complex – after the previous Liberal Minister for Planning the member for Bulleen approved it – still have dirt roads, because we are only now finally getting money flowing through from the developers to pay for the essential infrastructure. It is a shocking approach to planning housing. It is really backwards, and anything in terms of infrastructure that makes Melbourne livable, those opposite are opposed to.

Four Corners gave us a bit of an insight last night about that mindset. It is like policy development by the *Betoota Advocate* over there. They stopped the Metro Tunnel because they claimed that the trains could not fit in it – like some sort of witchcraft, that we could not fit the trains in the tunnel. So they delayed it. But thankfully under this government it is now a year ahead of schedule, and it will be opening later this year. What an extraordinary investment that is for the people of this great city, to have the Metro Tunnel. It is fantastic for housing in precincts like Arden. We know that building the infrastructure first and then building the housing second is a really smart way to go about it. It is close to the city, close to amenities. And for my community of Footscray, we will be two stations away from Parkville, and some of the apartment growth that we have had thankfully will be complemented by the infrastructure that this government is funding.

Of course they are committed to scrapping the Suburban Rail Loop. As someone who went to Monash University from Footscray, I can tell you it was a nightmare. It was an absolute nightmare to drive there from Footscray, and for young people to be able to aspire to go to Monash University or Deakin University, wherever they live in Melbourne, I think is a fantastic thing. Of course those opposite also wanted to scrap the West Gate Tunnel, because, you know, why not just have one river crossing? We know that when the M1 stops, like it did this morning, the entire city comes to a standstill. The West Gate Tunnel is a magnificent piece of infrastructure. Again, my community live right next to the port and have grappled with bigger and bigger trucks – thousands and thousands of them every day – using local roads to get to the port and get to container parks. We know that the truck ban is forcing these heavy vehicles off local roads into the West Gate Tunnel, and that is something that every major city with a port the size of ours has around the world, and now we will have it too when it opens later this year. There are a whole range of infrastructure projects that complement a livable city that those opposite oppose.

Also – and the member for Narracan went to this – the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025, which is going to the upper house this week and which those opposite are of course opposing, is about protecting people from the small number of dodgy builders who do the wrong thing. Why on earth would you oppose that? Why would you oppose reforms to protect people and protect consumers who are spending everything they have ever had in their life to buy a property? They get stuck in this situation where they might have poor waterproofing and leaking in their house. Why wouldn't you want to protect those consumers and also level the playing field for other builders who do the right thing and who are not cutting corners and offering cheaper, shonky buildings? It is a small proportion of builders, but this is a really important reform about confidence in our market and in particular confidence in the apartment sector, which we need to continue to develop. People should be buying into quality, and they should know that if after they move in they discover that there are problems, they can be remedied. This is a really sensible reform and one in fact that the Liberal Party

endeavoured to introduce themselves when they were last in government, but when the Housing Industry Association opposed it, they pulled the bill.

They have a pretty bad record when it comes to housing, and when they were last in office we saw exactly what they would do. The last time the Liberal Party were in government every single budget delivered significant cuts to housing assistance, social housing and support for disadvantaged Victorians to access the rental market. \$348 million was cut from social housing funding in the Liberals' 2011–12 budget, \$1.8 million was cut from housing assistance and support programs in the Liberals' 2012–13 budget and \$13.1 million was cut from housing assistance and support programs in the Liberals' 2013–14 budget. So when they say they are going to cut, believe them, because that is what they will do.

We have seen examples in these middle-ring suburbs with sensible developments proposed where perhaps young people can buy into the market for the first time. We have seen the Liberal member for Brighton out there protesting consistently. In 2017 he opposed a development in Hampton building 207 new apartments. In 2018 he supported the former member for Brighton's opposition to a new public housing development delivering 300 new homes. In 2021 the member for Sandringham opposed a proposal to build 1048 apartments in Highett, and in 2018 he opposed another development at the former Gas and Fuel site in Highett. So we know what the Liberal Party will do when they are in government. We should believe them. They have no imagination. They are a pretty loose show over there. When they say that they are going to cut things we should believe them. But they owe the Victorian people answers on what it is they are going to cut. We know that young people trying to buy a house will be the losers.

Question agreed to.

Bills

Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025

Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (18:01): Labor cannot manage, and consistently it is Victorians that are paying the price. Never has that been so clear than in this budget, a budget which is clearly titled on its front page 'Focused on what matters most'. And it is very clear to anybody who picks up this tome and the multiple tomes that go with it that what matters to the Allan Labor government is more and more taxes. They want to take more of your money – more of the money that you have worked very hard to put in your bank account; more of the money that you have put aside to pay for energy bills that keep going up, to pay for the groceries every week, to pay to put your kids through school and make sure that they are able to participate in after-school activities and be the best person possible; and more of the money to make sure that businesses have got money in their accounts so that they can employ more people locally, so that they can grow and prosper and expand and show that Victorian industry is not dead, as it is under Labor, but actually can grow and that we can support businesses to do what they do best, which is put their money where they see it is best for the business, best for the community and best for Victoria.

Instead what we see from the Allan Labor government is a lack of trust that Victorians can make the best decisions about how their own money is spent. What we see more and more often are taxes taken by the government and not used in a way that gives people their fair share, particularly those people who live in rural and regional Victoria. What we see is an increasing debt level. I recommend every government member familiarise themselves with the Barefoot Investor, who has strategies in place on how you can manage your debt level to bring it back to a responsible level so you can have more money in your pocket and so that you can achieve all those aspirational goals that you want to achieve.

You can put your plans in place to start your own small business, employ more staff or choose educational outcomes for your children and support them to achieve those. That is what we should see in a government. But instead from Labor what we get are more taxes, more debt and less support on the ground.

Let us just look at the emergency services tax. It is a cruel tax that hits every single Victorian in the hip pocket. Every single householder: if you own a home, you will pay twice as much tax under this budget. You will pay twice as much tax if you are a renter in Victoria under Labor's budget. All businesses will pay twice as much tax in Labor's budget. But it is the farmers that will be the hardest hit. They will pay triple the amount of tax under the Allan Labor government's budget, because those opposite are 'focused on what matters'. They are focused on just grabbing more and more taxes, taking money out of rural and regional economies in particular – out of our communities, out of people's back pockets and out of businesses – and it will have a catastrophic impact on the economies of our rural communities into the future. This emergency services tax is a huge amount of money. In fact it is \$3 billion over the forward estimates – a \$3 billion tax grab by the Allan Labor government. Look at the increases in taxes by LGA. These are small rural LGAs. They do not have large economies. They have massive road networks; they have got a lot of public infrastructure that they have to manage. We are seeing money stripped away by Labor to put into the budget black hole which we all know as the Suburban Rail Loop, which will not deliver any benefit for the people who live in my electorate of Lowan. We do not get our fair share back.

More importantly, taking those millions of dollars out of our communities, out of the pockets of private individuals and out of businesses, means that there is less money for donations to fundraisers; there is less money to sponsor the local footy club, netball club and other local sporting clubs; there is less money to create jobs and support employment in the local area; and there is less money for other aspects of supporting your community and growing your business. It is going to kill rural and regional Victoria. We cannot believe the government when they say this is all coming back in emergency services, because we are not seeing it. In fact there is an emergency services budget cut at the same time as there is a \$3 billion increase. We are not getting any of our fair share back. If you have a look at the budget papers, there is a cut to the roads budget. We have got a cut to the amount of potholes that are going to be fixed. It is a ridiculous cut. We are going from over 1 million square metres to – it is a very small amount; I have not got the number at my fingertips. It is a cut to 70,000 square metres in this coming year for roads, so from over 1 million square metres to 70,000. It is a ridiculous cut.

We look at cuts to agriculture. There is a nearly \$100 million cut to the agriculture budget –

Mary-Anne Thomas interjected.

Emma KEALY: It is in the budget papers. The Minister for Health should bother to read it because she might also work out there are cuts to small rural health services in there. There are cuts to mental health locals in there. The amount of money that has been allocated to mental health locals will not run the seven additional mental health services that have been promised, and there is no money for capital, so how are they going to operate a new mental health service when there is no building to service them out of? It does not make any sense; it just does not stack up.

There are cuts to regional development, including the number of jobs that this government expects to deliver in regional Victoria. This is a significant cut. We are looking at a cut from what they have delivered very recently. In 2023–24 they delivered 1500 jobs – this year, 250. The government is not creating any jobs in country Victoria. They are not focused on regional areas, and this is why the people of Ripon are speaking up. That is why they are emailing me. That is why they are putting messages on social media. That is why they are reaching out publicly and saying, 'We have had enough. We elected our member for Ripon to come to this place to stand up for our views.' It is her job to do that. She voted for this massive tax that will take about \$4 million out of just one council in her whole electorate. She could have crossed the floor and voted with the people who elected her to be here. She was silent; she did not speak on the bill. She voted for it. It is an utter disgrace, and that

is why the people of Ripon are angry with Labor – because they have not got a member who represents their views. They have got a member who is just going along and ticking the box, and they are refusing to have anything to do with what this government stands for.

Mary-Anne Thomas interjected.

Emma KEALY: The Minister for Health can say what she likes over the table, with the cheap shots that are so familiar from her, but we know that this government has failed the people of Ripon, who they promised to deliver for. It is a colleague of the Minister for Health who will not be in this place in the forwards. This is exactly the problem: you have got certain people in the Labor government that only care about city votes and do not deliver for country Victoria.

On rural financial counsellors, at a time when we are in extensive drought across rural and regional Victoria and about the only support the government has made available is to push people, push farmers, towards rural financial counsellors, there is a cut to the budget. There is a cut to the budget hidden in the budget papers for rural financial counsellors. Not only that but we have also now got a situation where they are completely inundated. There is over a six-week wait, and this is about the only mental health support that is available to farmers in my electorate who are facing critical drought conditions. This is what we see from Labor. We see more taxes and more and more and more debt. In fact the consequence of that debt is that the government is spending \$29 million each and every day on interest payments on that debt alone. \$29 million of taxpayer money is paid to the big banks each and every day on interest on the growing debt in Victoria.

Let us put this into perspective. What was not in the budget papers was funding for By Five. By Five is a project which was funded through the Wimmera Southern Mallee partnership. It has had incredible outcomes for about a thousand children between the Wimmera and up to the border, up to the Mildura area. These are children that are at risk of falling out of the education system, of not getting appropriate health supports. These are vulnerable children. They are only asking for \$3.5 million over the next four years. It is 3 hours worth of interest payments. These are children's lives –

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Emma KEALY: Three hours of interest payments could have instead gone to support children. I hear quite often that Premier Allan and this Labor government are all about children, all about families and all about supporting women. Well, you have let down so many children in the north-west of the state. You have let down parents and women, who have no antenatal services between Mildura and Horsham. This service delivered upon that. You have cut off access and supports for teachers and for nurses to link into other services through the Royal Children's Hospital – that has been axed. That is the cost of bad decision-making by the Allan Labor government.

Mary-Anne Thomas interjected.

Emma KEALY: I again hear the Minister for Health. She should be coming in to bat for this. She should be coming in to bat for By Five, because it has had significant outcomes. It has been reviewed. It has been researched. It has peer-reviewed papers that are available. We have got comments on the record. In fact I think the Minister for Health, when she was Minister for Regional Development, spoke about how good the By Five project was. But in this government, when we can see a government that is 'focused on what matters', it is not children in rural and regional Victoria – they are not important. It is an utter disgrace that this government would try and pitch themselves as being for families and for women and for children when they are cutting an amazing program. I urge the government to find \$3.5 million somewhere hidden in this budget. We know that there are slush funds in there. We know that there is talk of programs for antenatal services for areas which do not have equitable access – that is the Wimmera Southern Mallee. I urge the government to immediately fund the By Five project, because it is utterly disgraceful that they would cut a program that makes such a difference to so many children's lives and so many families' lives. As Dr Felix Ritson has said, it has saved lives. That is worth every single dollar. It is not a lot of money – find it, fund it.

I need to go to the drought, and today we have seen the Victorian Farmers Federation put out a statement about expanding the drought supports for our farmers, who are doing it exceptionally tough. I urge the Premier to take this message very seriously and to immediately match that funding and deliver, because at the moment our farmers do not have funding to put aside for more on-farm infrastructure. They need fodder, they need water, they need to be able to keep their stock going and they need to be able to survive this winter, because our farmers have done it tough. It is not just low rainfall. In vast areas of the state they have been battling fires all over the summer. They are now being sluggish with a massive new tax, and there is barely any drought support provided by the government. In fact less than one day's interest has been allocated to supporting farmers in drought relief. It is essential that we support our farmers.

I have not got a lot of time, but I would like to just read out one small passage. This is from a letter that was sent to me in my electorate, and I have got so many examples of these:

A drought is very challenging financially and mentally, but we knew we would have to deal with the possibility of it, when we become farmers, and we try our best to plan accordingly.

But it's the human instigated actions that hurt the most.

Not, because it may be good for my country, or myself, but regularly there are actions, that are help to someone in a bureaucratic department, or maybe a way to get some money from someone who has an asset, but doesn't have a voice.

It hurts, it's tiring, it's depressing, I feel forgotten and I feel used.

I condemn the government.

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (18:15): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024

Council's amendments

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer) (18:15): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration immediately.

Message from Council relating to the following amendments considered:

1. Clause 11, omit this clause.
2. Clause 12, line 9, omit "section 3.8A.13A" and insert "sections 3.8A.13A to 3.8A.13C".
3. Clause 12, after line 11 insert –

“3.8A.13A Direction for player accounts

- (1) The Minister may, by instrument, direct the monitoring licensee to ensure that a person cannot play a game on a gaming machine in an approved venue unless a player account has been established for the person.
- (2) A direction under subsection (1) must be –
 - (a) given to the monitoring licensee; and
 - (b) published in the Government Gazette.
- (3) It is a condition of the monitoring licence that the licensee must comply with a direction under subsection (1).

- (4) A direction under subsection (1) may apply on different days in relation to different geographical areas, different venues or different gaming machines.

3.8A.13B Tabling and revocation of direction by Parliament

- (1) The Minister must cause a direction under section 3.8A.13A to be laid before each House of the Parliament within 10 sitting days after the direction is published in the Government Gazette.
 - (2) A direction under section 3.8A.13A is revoked in whole or part if –
 - (a) notice of a resolution to revoke the direction is given in a House of the Parliament on or before the 10th sitting day after the direction is laid before that House; and
 - (b) the resolution is passed by that House on or before the 12th sitting day after notice is given under paragraph (a).
 - (3) If a direction under section 3.8A.13A is revoked under subsection (2) –
 - (a) any provision of a previous direction under section 3.8A.13A that had been revoked by the direction comes back into operation from the beginning of the day on which the direction is revoked; and
 - (b) any provision of a previous direction under section 3.8A.13A that had been amended by the direction takes effect without that amendment from the beginning of the day on which the direction is revoked as if the amendment had not been made.
 - (4) The Minister must publish a notice of the revocation of a direction or part of a direction under subsection (2) in the Government Gazette.’.
4. Clause 12, line 12, omit “‘**3.8A.13A**’ and insert “**3.8A.13C**”.
 5. Clause 12, lines 15 and 16, omit “referred to in section 3.8A.2(1A) is in force” and insert “is in force under section 3.8A.13A”.
 6. Clause 16, page 9, line 10, omit “3.8A.13A(3)” and insert “3.8A.13C(3)”.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (18:16): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

The Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024 continues the work of the Labor government in reducing gambling harm while ensuring that community clubs, RSLs and hospitality venues remain an important part of Victorian life. In particular I want to acknowledge the work of my colleague in the other place, member for Northern Metropolitan the Honourable Enver Erdogan, who is not only Minister for Corrections but also the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. I want to thank him for his work in negotiations with those in the other place to bring these reforms to the Parliament, particularly with regard to reducing gambling harm and the precommitment and carded play policy arrangements.

What I should touch on in this matter coming back to the Assembly is with regard to the house amendments. The house amendments ensure that the minister’s direction is subject to parliamentary oversight, just like other regulations in the bill, and give the minister the tools to manage the rollout carefully while keeping decisions transparent and accountable.

It is an opportunity also to acknowledge in my own electorate the West Heidelberg sub-branch of the RSL, which is better known as RSL on Bell, where I have been a member, I notice, for 20 years this year. Time does fly. We had a very significant event there for Anzac Day. It has been a gathering point for people across our community for decades and decades. I just want to thank the volunteers who make it happen. They are places of belonging, a place for people in our local community to get together to have a relatively cheap meal and some social occasion. They also raise funds of course for the community and particularly for veterans and welfare services. They do a great job. It is hard work to make it all happen, but they should know on that volunteer committee about a lot of the obligations, which are very important, and about the significant regulation of the gaming industry. But they provide broader work for veterans and a place to call home for so many in our community who want to

socialise and come together to do that in company with others, and I really do value the work they do. It is a great club, the RSL on Bell in West Heide.

On our other many community clubs and hospitality venues, I just want to say they are massive employers in our community. We know that across the sector, across our state, much of it engaged with my portfolio of racing, they are also a great combination with many of our race clubs, which also provide these services and drive great opportunities for economic development as well as employment opportunities.

I would also like to acknowledge the constructive work of the Australian Hotels Association and their engagement with the government and also with colleagues and the strong advocacy they put towards the work that is done to support employment and economic opportunities for so many Victorians. The government will continue to support the work that they do in an industry that is highly regulated, for very good reason, and also provides support for so many families not only to come together and enjoy each other's company but to provide the great job opportunities and the economic prosperity that occur through the many services that the minister has the opportunity to regulate. I commend the house amendments to the Assembly.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (18:20): I am just going to say a few words on this amendment, which the opposition is supportive of. Indeed it was one of the four issues that we raised in a reasoned amendment in this place, where we opposed the bill at the time. But I am pleased to advise that there have been some good discussions with the government and the minister in the other place and that this amendment did address one of the issues we had, which was the lack of parliamentary oversight of directions. One of the criticisms we had of this bill was, firstly, we were never convinced and remain unconvinced that mandatory carded play will do what the government thinks it will do in terms of addressing gambling harm. But we were also concerned that the bill provided a head of power for the minister, and this particular amendment addresses our concern that the ministerial direction to implement mandatory carded play was not a disallowable instrument. Now we have that through these two amendments. They effectively do the same thing, so we are supportive of that. That addresses the parliamentary oversight aspect. We raised our concerns about the evidence behind mandatory carded play actually delivering on preventing harm; that remains a concern for us.

On two other issues that we raised in our reasoned amendment, one was the potential impact on border clubs, which the minister has indicated can be addressed by clauses that allow the minister of the day to make directions on a geographical basis so there can be a different rule for different parts of the state. More particularly I am somewhat comforted by the timing arrangements. The minister has indicated that effectively the full implementation of this will not occur before the new monitor is appointed in 2027. That is a good thing, and that was always a sensible arrangement. Why would you not actually just wait until we got a new monitor in place with potentially new technology and new innovation? So I am pleased to have got the minister on the record that that is the case. That being the case, that lessens the potential impact on border clubs and those in rural and regional Victoria, because this will not actually happen until after the election now.

The fourth thing, which is also related, is the minister's interest in looking at alternative technologies, whether that is facial recognition technology or whether that is automated systems that are used in South Australia. I am pleased that the minister also gave an undertaking that he and his department are looking at what has been done in South Australia and what now New South Wales appears to be looking at as well, because if we can harmonise with those states, it does remove some of the issues for our border clubs and pubs. So I am pleased, and I thank the minister for his engagement on this issue. As I said, we are not particularly enamoured with the idea of mandatory carded play and whether it will actually work, but I am pleased that the minister has shown some flexibility and will look also at emerging technologies. With those words I end my time as the Shadow Minister for Liquor and Gaming, which actually technically finished some time ago. But I started with this bill, and I hand it over to my good friend and colleague the member for Ovens Valley and will let him say a few words as well.

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (18:23): I would like to take the opportunity to say a couple of words around the work that is being done in precommitment and carded play and particularly the gambling legislation amendment. I would also like to pay credit to the work that has been done in the other place but acknowledge in particular the work that has been done by the previous minister for gaming. We have spoken a lot about the late, great Peta Murphy, the late member for Dunkley. I know her close personal friendship with the previous minister for gaming and the importance of the work in areas like mandatory closure periods – knowing that between 4 am and 10 am gaming areas will be closed – and mandatory carded play for pokies at Crown. I also would just like to bring to the attention of the house that whilst many community clubs make a contribution to local communities, I look forward to seeing the contributions being expended appropriately for the broad benefit of all in our communities. That is something I will be looking for in my community, and I know that many members will also be looking for that. Otherwise, I look forward to the passage of these amendments.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (18:25): I also want to make a brief contribution, as others have, on the Council's amendments to the Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024, better known as the carded play bill. We raised in both chambers that the Liberals and Nationals always want to support the reduction of gambling harm, but at the same time we certainly understand that gambling is a legitimate pastime for many. We want to be clear that, even after these amendments have gone through, this is not our policy. The amendments certainly improve what came through this place the first time around. However, the changes were made in good faith in both houses.

I note that the government still intends to do a trial later in the year. I am not sure how that will roll out. I do not think the government is even sure how that will roll out and how it will be effective, but I note that that will still occur. We on this side of the chamber will always stand up for our local pubs and community clubs. It is really important that we do so and make it as fair a playing field as we can.

I also want to acknowledge the advocacy of the Australian Hotels Association. Certainly we know that the greater parliamentary oversight that has occurred between the two houses, as I said, is a positive step. We did oppose this bill the first time it went through the Assembly, but we are now not opposing it. I commend the Council's amendments to this place.

Motion agreed to.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house's decision.

Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025

Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motions of Danny Pearson and Mary-Anne Thomas:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (18:27): I am so pleased and proud to be able to rise on my feet today to speak on this great Labor budget, a budget that was handed down only one week ago by the Treasurer Ms Symes in the other place and one that focuses on what matters most to the people of Victoria. That is writ large in the budget, given the \$11.1 billion investment that is being made in Victoria's world-class public healthcare system. I want to again acknowledge the work of the Treasurer and the Premier in bringing this budget to this place and sending a very clear message to our healthcare workers that the work they do every day is very much valued by this Allan Labor government. That is why we will continue to invest in the public health services in which they work. I am so pleased that I have been able to talk to health services about this – that every health service will receive an increase in funding this year.

This year we will be investing \$31 billion into our health service system. I have no shame in saying that it is my expectation that right across the health service system this funding will be directed to where it is needed most, and that of course is in the delivery of frontline healthcare services. When you are entrusted with that much taxpayer money, then it is incumbent on all of us – well, on me as the minister and on the health services in particular – to ensure, as I said, that that money is being used to deliver the world-class care for which the Victorian health system is famous. Of that \$11.1 billion, I can report that \$9.5 billion is going directly into our hospitals. Of that money, \$634.3 million will be used to open new and to expand health services right across the state.

The member for Frankston is in the house, and he will be delighted to know that this year's budget delivers the funding for us to operationalise that magnificent new development at Frankston Hospital, one that I know the member has fought very hard for – I congratulate him on that – and one that will deliver the expanded services to meet the needs of his community and indeed beyond, including across the south-east and the peninsula.

There is also funding to bring on the new Footscray Hospital. If you have not been out west for a while – and that obviously excludes everyone on the other side of the chamber – you cannot miss the new Footscray Hospital. I know the member for Laverton is really excited about what it will deliver. Similarly, I know other members from the western suburbs cannot wait to see the new Frankston Hospital. Of course it only adds to what we have been delivering for the people of the west. It was our government that built and opened the Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital out at Sunshine, and it is our government that is building the Melton hospital. So the public health footprint in the western suburbs just continues to expand. And of course the Maryborough hospital is a commitment only made possible by this Labor government. That hospital is now open. The Premier joined the hardworking member for Ripon at that opening not long ago, and this budget includes the funding to ensure that it can serve the needs of the people of Maryborough and surrounds. The budget also delivers for emergency departments at Swan Hill, Albury Wodonga Health and University Hospital Geelong and operationalises community hospitals in Cranbourne, Phillip Island and Craigieburn, and I look forward to having more to say about Mernda very soon.

This is a brilliant healthcare budget, but of course included in our healthcare funding is money to make sure that we are really addressing the cost-of-living pressures that Victorian families are experiencing. That is why our budget includes \$18 million in order to expand the conditions which pharmacists can now treat from four to 22. We will do that in partnership with the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia and with the Pharmacy Guild of Australia to implement this new program of work. The access to that consultation will be free. Other states charge a fee, but we will not here in Victoria, because we want to ensure that for this episodic care we make it fast and easy for Victorians to access that care.

Can I say it is also why we are tripling the capacity of the virtual emergency department. The minister at the table, the member for Mill Park, knows it full well because we have been out together many, many times to Northern Hospital to see this fantastic innovation in action – an innovation that has been backed every step of the way by the Allan Labor government, because that is what we do. We back our healthcare workers, and when they come to us with great ideas we stand ready to deliver. We will continue funding for our urgent care clinics, which of course are now being implemented right across Australia. They were picked up by the Albanese Labor government, but you know where they started – here in Victoria, because that is where innovation in health care really starts. We have been very proud to continue to invest in those services.

The virtual emergency department of course is able to deliver care to Victorians no matter where they live, so it is a particular boost for people in rural and regional Victoria. I know for many families, particularly those with little babies and young ones, that children always seem to get sick at around about 7 o'clock at night or even a bit later. The virtual emergency department is there for you when you need it. Similarly – and I note the member for Melton is in the chamber – the Victorian Ambulance Union were key backers of this initiative, because what it enables our paramedics to do is to resolve issues, particularly for older people in residential aged care, so that they can be left at home rather than

being transported to hospital. This is a win-win for everyone, because the last thing a frail and elderly person needs is to be transported to emergency when they can receive the care that they need by highly qualified, skilled paramedics supported by the virtual emergency department. So the budget really delivers for health, and that is something that we can all be very, very proud of.

I have not yet mentioned, and it would be remiss of me not to, the investments that we are making in our workforce. We are continuing to support the RUSON and RUSOM model in our public hospitals – that is, registered undergraduate students of nursing and registered undergraduate students of midwifery. This was a model that was created back in the days of the Bracks–Brumby government. Indeed it was the former health minister Daniel Andrews who worked with the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation to develop a model that meant that student nurses and student midwives could actually be registered with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency to perform certain duties in our hospitals and do their casual work in a health setting rather than at Maccas or a pub or all the other places that we know that students work in order to support themselves during their university studies. The RUSON and RUSOM model also ensures of course that the young people undertaking this study can be clear that that is what they want to do by having that real-life experience in hospitals – so that they know they have made the right choice – but also they get that real-world experience working in a health service before they graduate. As a consequence of that, often many of them are offered jobs before they even graduate. We are absolutely thrilled to be continuing our investment in the RUSON and RUSOM model. I did mention of course it was introduced by the Bracks–Brumby government. I need to remind everyone that it was then stopped by the Liberal government, by the Baillieu–Napthine government. They cut and culled that program, and then it was brought back by our government.

We will always back our healthcare workforce. It is why there are now 40,000 more healthcare workers in our system than when we came to government some 10 or so years ago. Last year our workforce grew by 6.7 per cent. That is the largest single increase in the health workforce ever, because our government backs healthcare workers. Healthcare workers know that Victoria is a great state to work in, because (1) we have a world-class healthcare system and (2) for our nursing staff we have ratios. Again, I am reminded that we introduced legislated ratios, because under the previous Napthine–Baillieu government, what happened? Mr Davis in the other place tried to bargain those ratios away. So we have protected them as best we can through legislation, and they will remain while there is an Allan–Labor government. Because let me say this – and this brings me to some of the risks that I need to alert the house to of a potential Liberal government: should a Liberal government be re-elected in this place, then I posit that those nurse–patient ratios are absolutely at risk.

What we saw today from the member for Brighton was a very shouty contribution – a lot of people have commented on that already – one that will rip \$4.6 billion out of the Victorian budget. So my question and the question I think all Victorians should be asking themselves as well is: where is this money going to be cut from? I suggest to you that a good indication is to look at what they have done previously when they have been in power. We know that when the Liberals were last in power they attacked our nurses, they attacked our ambos and they went to war with our ambos. We also know, because they have got previous form, that they cut, closed and privatised hospitals. I mean, that is what Liberals do. So today I listened to a speech by the member for Brighton, a speech, I might say, that failed to mention health at all – made zero mention of health. I mean, we have got a budget that invests \$11.1 billion into health. We have got a budget that proudly talks about the fact that we invest 30 per cent of our state budget into health care, and yet the Shadow Treasurer did not mention health once. That sent alarm bells ringing for me, because we know they sold off Mildura hospital and they sold off Latrobe Regional Hospital. Let us not mention the eight or 12 or – well, maybe I will mention them now that the member for Benambra has come into the chamber. They closed hospitals in Eildon, Koroit, Mortlake, Murtoa, Red Cliffs, Macarthur, Clunes, Beeac, Birregurra, Lismore, Elmore and Waranga. What I would suggest is, should they be returned to power, this is what we can expect: hospitals being closed, hospitals being sold off, nurses being sacked and paramedics being sacked. This is what Liberal governments do.

People say if you want to see what people really value, look at where they put their money. So I would say: have a look at our budget. It tells you all about our values: massive investments in health care, massive investments in education, massive investments in public transport, cost-of-living relief for families – a whole range of initiatives that speak directly to Victorian people. Whereas those on the other side have come in here today and outlined that they are going to rip \$4.6 billion out of the budget, and as I understand it, when questioned by representatives from the media about how they will pay for this: ‘Oh, well, we’ve got nothing to say on that right now. We’ll let you know about that in November next year.’ The Victorian people are not going to buy this. The Victorian people want to know where that money is coming from. I will be out there and I will be letting our healthcare workers know that they need to be alert to what those on the other side propose to do should they ever win government in this state of Victoria. This budget is a true Labor budget. It is one that is focused on what matters most to Victorians, and I commend it to the house.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (18:42): In making some comments on the budget, I note, yet again, that this is probably the sixth, seventh or eighth budget in a row where the people of Manningham, and particularly West Manningham in Bulleen, have received very little from the Labor Party, despite schools falling apart, despite roads in atrocious conditions and so forth. But when a budget, as the previous speaker said, is a true Labor budget – a budget that is about taxing, stealing, lying and delusion – I guess we should not be far from accepting that that is what we would expect. There is nothing for any of the schools in my electorate and no increases to any of the maintenance around the parks, which are being left to overrun in native vegetation close to people’s homes. The North East Link is a disaster for people who live near it. It is fine to show up in a hard hat and get your TV opportunity – that is nice. But for a budget that the Labor Party say is about people and caring for people, they could not give a stuff about people who live near the North East Link construction site – about the parking, about the traffic, about the noise or about the businesses that are dealing with dust over and above what are normal rates, which is dangerous to their health and to their staff’s health. All of this has been raised – nothing in this budget to manage it or to deal with it.

I just simply say to Labor: you are quite right, it is a Labor budget, because it is about delusion. These boneheads are all about theft, delusion and taxing, and that is what they have thrived on for the past decade. Thankfully, Victorians are waking up to this hallucinatory approach from people like the member for Mill Park, who is just one of these meatheads who gets up in the morning and focuses on nothing else but her own talking points. Let us focus on PT tickets –

Members interjecting.

Matthew GUY: Well, I can, because you talked about my kids before, so we can go for whichever you like.

Lily D’Ambrosio: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I am offended by the member’s naming of me, and I request that he withdraw the comment.

Matthew GUY: I am sorry if the member is offended. I withdraw it if the member is offended.

Lily D’Ambrosio interjected.

Matthew GUY: I withdraw it. I said I withdraw, and I withdraw. I withdraw absolutely. If that is what is required, I will do it absolutely and unconditionally.

I say this again: the glass jaw of the Labor Party – you know, you go to schools, the schools that are unfunded in my electorate, and what you see in every school that you go to up there is the word ‘resilience’. Resilience – it is fine for the Labor Party, isn’t it? They will talk about resilience. When it comes to this chamber there is no resilience in the Labor Party, because they throw mud at everyone. They throw lies at people. They go back 30 years, but they will not cop anything about themselves, because these people are the kings of lies and the kings and queens of spin, and we have seen that in

this budget. So let us go through some of the points in this budget I noted, particularly in relation to public transport.

A member interjected.

Matthew GUY: I hear loudmouth up the back. He has obviously taken one of his pills to stay awake. You have taken one of them to stay awake, have you, mate? So what we have got – and I am being constantly interrupted – is again more issues in relation to public transport. While the Labor Party had a fair policy, particularly in relation to kids – it was actually not bad – there was no rolling stock follow-up, not one bit of rolling stock follow-up whatsoever. Instead we had the Labor minister just before the budget boasting that we were going to be able to tap on to trains with smartphones and credit cards in about three months. The budget was going to be announced, there was going to be money, it was going to be launched in 2026 – and in this budget, yet again nothing. Not only was there nothing, there was another 18 months worth of delays.

But of course let us go back in history. This government talks all about going back in history. Labor has got form with public transport ticketing, because if it was not Tom Roper who was getting scratch tickets back in the 1980s, if it was not Myki –

A member interjected.

Matthew GUY: I am glad the member interjected. Tom Roper actually shut the railway lines to St Kilda and Port Melbourne. The Labor Party not only shut the St Kilda line and the Port Melbourne line, they wanted to shut the Upfield line. They shut the line between Somerton and Upfield as well. And then they walk into the chamber and say, ‘Oh, well, you know we’re the best ones for public transport in the city.’ Well, unfortunately they are the ones who cannot get ticketing right, which is why public transport patronage is 50 per cent lower in Melbourne than it is in Sydney.

The *Western Rail Plan* – and I notice there are a number of members in the chamber from the western suburbs – was abandoned. All the loudmouths who come into this chamber mouthing off – they have got all the words and insults in the world, but they were the ones who promised Melton rail electrification in 2014. What a lie – never happened. In 2018: what a lie – never happened. They promised it to Wyndham Vale. What a lie. They are stuck on three-car VLocitys, which have 222 seats, as opposed to a six-car suburban train that has 1200 seats. But the best the Labor Party can do is say, ‘Well, it’s going to take another \$5 billion to rebuild another station that we promised four budgets ago to rebuild, to enable the promise that we made six budgets ago that is not in this budget at all.’

So why would we believe any of the public transport initiatives – some of which are worthy – in this budget when these people are just simply liars? There is no other word for it. When you deliberately mislead people, you are a liar, and the government runs out and deliberately misleads, time and time again. Three months ago we heard we are going to be able to tap on with our credit cards to pay for public transport ticketing. How is that going? This budget then showed, yet again, another 18 months of delay.

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I think calling the government a liar is unparliamentary language.

Matthew GUY: No, it is when it is one person, not a group.

Michaela Settle: I think using the word ‘liar’ is unparliamentary language.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): The use of the word ‘liar’ is unparliamentary. That is a ruling from Speaker Maddigan. I ask the member not to use that term.

Matthew GUY: When the government engages in deliberate mistruths, what might we want to call that? Well, you can take your pick; I do not mind. But it is deliberate mistruths on the *Western Rail Plan*, on public transport ticketing and on fast rail to Geelong, which was also going to be in this budget. We were told we were going to get fast trains to Geelong – 250 k’s an hour. We were going

to get these trains to Geelong. 'A real plan for fast trains' was the now Premier's press release in 2018; that is what it was. 'A real plan for fast rail' was the then Premier and the current Premier's press release way back in 2018, which would have required funding in this budget. As you know, because of the deliberate mistruth, or whatever you want to call it, it is absent from this budget. Also absent in this budget is funding to fix what was promised, again years ago, and that is the Bunyip rail duplication to increase capacity on the Gippsland line. Again it was a deliberate mistruth from the Labor party to say they would take the feds' money – the Liberal federal government's money – to fix the Gippsland line but then spend it on everything but the duplication of the Bunyip rail bridge.

What are Victorians meant to think when we have got promises such as tap-on, tap-off tickets, which was meant to be in this budget – it is not – and a fare policy that is not too bad but no new rolling stock to follow up with. So you have got people packed into 222-capacity, three-car VLocitys who should be on what was promised seven or eight years ago, which was 1200-crush-capacity six-car suburban trains – not to be – on the Melton line and on the line to Wyndham Vale, or maybe on the fast trains to Geelong. Again, they are not in this budget. This was committed to, having 250-kilometre-per-hour trains from Geelong to Melbourne, by the then Premier and the now Premier. Maybe for Gippsland the fast trains would be able to operate much more efficiently after removing the single-track section between Bunyip and Longwarry, which would be the duplication of the Bunyip rail bridge – not to be. How about the Cranbourne East railway extension? This was also promised by Labor. Again, it is not in this budget. Or how about the Somerton connection, which was promised – I go back further to the Brumby government – under *Melbourne 2030*. It would have been done according to *Melbourne 2030* plans, but under the life of the Allan Labor government it is not funded again between Upfield and Somerton. That rail connection has been scrapped. Or Donnybrook – I am glad the member for Mill Park is here, because she might remember, near her electorate, what was then promised as the Lalor to Donnybrook extension. The government's own developer VicUrban then sold lots of land at Aurora at inflated prices saying, 'You're going to live right near a railway line' – never to be realised. There is no money in this budget for that commitment, which the government made 10 years ago. I simply say: when the Labor Party deliberately misleads people in this manner, what is the average Victorian meant to think? Maybe they have gone AWOL like the 3000 hospital beds that were promised during COVID. Remember those?

Cindy McLeish interjected.

Matthew GUY: Four thousand, says the member for Eildon. ICU beds – 4000 were promised. Or the community hospitals – I am still struggling to find the one on Ryans Road in Eltham. When the community get told these things are going to come but they never eventuate, people do scratch their heads and say, 'Well, come on. Let's be fair. Let's be realistic about this.'

I noted again in the budget whether there would be any new rolling stock for country and regional Victoria given the government's fare initiative, which is not bad and I support. I think it is not a bad initiative. However, there is no use making fare initiatives which vastly increase patronage when you do not match that with increased rolling stock numbers to cope with what will then be a massive use of the system. Any fool can tell you that. Look at Queensland, look at New South Wales and of course look at Victoria, where we had that as a commitment at the last election. Now the government has got three-car trains with a 222-seat capacity. The member for Benambra knows all about this. You can hardly book a train seat from Albury to Melbourne, let alone get on at Euroa or Avenel or Wangaratta or Benalla, because they are full, because the government is not matching this with the infrastructure to service the commitment they have made. I simply say that I looked in the budget for the extra VLocitys or whether we would have five-car CAF trains, like New South Wales, as part of our system – nothing in there.

Let me circle right back to the *Western Rail Plan*, which was the electrification to Wyndham Vale and to Melton. People online are absolutely livid, and yet again complaining that this budget has delivered them nothing but words, because you cannot fit 1000 people on a three-car VLocity train, which is what was operating this morning on the western line trains and the regional rail link. People cannot fit

in them, and the government does not have the VLocitys to service what they are trying to commit to regional Victoria. And they cannot build those trains for one key reason: because they are out of money.

There are consequences for debt. There are consequences for having to service \$1.2 million an hour in interest payments, or \$29 million a day, which would pay for 1½ new three-car VLocitys, or \$200 million a week, which is the value of five new X'Trapolis trains. There are consequences for that, and everything I have mentioned is part of the consequence of having to service the largest state government debt in Australian political history – a government that inherited debt levels at \$18 billion and will no doubt bequeath the next government around \$200 billion. You can point to projects, not mentioning of course that they have overrun by \$48 billion, but the point is, as I said before, there are consequences for bad management.

I note, for members in the chamber who are interjecting – some were before – that \$48 billion could have funded the Melton hospital 60 times, and that is the project overrun, not the project cost of the Big Build. I point out the minister who was predominantly responsible for those project overruns: at Metro, \$6 billion; level crossings, \$6 billion; the western distributor, \$6 billion; the North East Link, \$18 billion – and those are the overruns. The person responsible for all of those is now the Premier. It is no wonder we have got what Labor members say is a real Labor budget, and we would agree: it sure is. It is one of taxes, theft, lies and delusion that is going to cost Victorians for many, many years and potentially generations while we pay off a Labor government that cannot manage money.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (18:57): I am delighted to make a contribution on these bills, because the budget has delivered some great outcomes for my electorate of Footscray in Melbourne's inner west. I am really proud that we have upgraded almost every government school in my electorate of Footscray, because I believe that state schools are the great leveller in life.

With this budget I have been able to work with the school community of Yarraville West Primary School, and I would like to acknowledge the principal, Karen, and the school council, because we have worked together and we are delivering \$493,000 to upgrade the school foyer. This was a priority for the school. Anyone who knows this school knows that the entry to the school is right on the footpath there in Yarraville, so that is a great outcome for the school, and it shows what can be achieved when you have a seat at the table of government and when you can advocate with a community organisation or a school for an outcome and work over a period of time to get a great outcome.

Another great outcome for my community is Maribyrnong College. My dad was the school captain there a very long time ago, and even though it is well known for its elite sporting facilities, Maribyrnong College's academic buildings do need an upgrade. I have been working with the school council there and the principal Michael Keenan on securing some planning funding for the next stage of Maribyrnong College's journey.

It has been a great budget for the residents of Maribyrnong, because one of the things they know is that our SES provides such a vital service. They know that from the 2022 floods, when so many residents experienced just devastating flooding in their houses and in the streets and in the parks. The SES did a power of work, but their home is currently in the Maribyrnong council bus depot, so I was really proud that after a few years of advocacy we had the planning money last budget and this budget we have secured \$14.5 million for a new home for the Footscray SES.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Lowan electorate early childhood education

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (19:00): (1161) My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for the Premier and the Labor government to immediately secure funding for the By Five Wimmera Southern Mallee early years initiative. The By Five program is a very important program for supporting children in some of our most vulnerable communities across the Wimmera Southern Mallee. This project was originally initiated through the Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership. We have heard so much from the government over the years about how important these regional partnerships were in listening to the local community and making sure that we are delivering for what the people need, and what our community said very, very clearly was that we need more supports for children in those first five years.

The By Five project was initiated to support children between zero and five years of age. Over the past eight years that we have seen funding driven towards By Five, we have seen this project develop and we have seen the outcomes locally. More than a thousand children have been supported through this program. There are around 200 health professionals that have been supported through this program – this is for teachers and it is also for health professionals. We have seen the connection with local women and families and children into tertiary health systems. We have seen that children who would otherwise fall behind, who would not be able to get an appointment and who have waited for months and months, if not years, to seek those appointments, have been able to get those supports immediately.

This is not just for children from zero to five years, it is also for the mothers. There is no antenatal care between Horsham and Mildura, and By Five are seeking funding to secure and deliver those important antenatal services. They are also looking at funding to secure the specialist support that has been provided by the Royal Children's Hospital, but recently the funding conditions have amended and they are no longer eligible in my local region.

This project is amazing. I commend the work of all of the people who have been involved with By Five. It includes Jo Martin, Cara Miller, Emily Smith, Hannah Purcell, Tracey King and the fabulous researcher Cathy Tischler, who did an amazing job in actually measuring the benefits that this program delivers. It has been peer reviewed, and it shows that this should be funded if you support families and support children. Dr Felix Ritson, who has been an amazing advocate for the benefits for the children from a health perspective, actually says himself that this program has saved lives. It is a mere \$3.5 million over the next four years. I urge the government to look through every single pocket of the budget that they have, because we simply cannot afford to have this program scrapped. It will make a significant difference and a terrible difference if you do not fund By Five.

10,000 Gigs

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (19:03): (1162) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Creative Industries, and the action I seek is to provide an update on how the 10,000 Gigs fund is supporting live music, musicians and venues in my electorate of Wendouree. The 10,000 Gigs Victorian Gig Fund supports venues to attract artists and provide more gigs to audience, with a particular focus on regional Victoria and outer metropolitan Melbourne. Ballarat is a great place for live music, and we have many great venues that have hosted some huge artists. Last year we had St Vincent play at Her Majesty's Theatre to an adoring audience, and I got to see a very loud Jack White at the Ballarat Civic Hall in front of a sellout crowd. We have also welcomed Smashing Pumpkins, Jane's Addiction and Amyl and the Sniffers at Kryal Castle; Post Malone, Dom Dolla, Lime Cordiale and Ocean Alley at Spilt Milk in 2023; not to mention the huge Cold Chisel Big Five-0 concert, with more than 25,000 at Victoria Park, with The Cruel Sea, Birds of Tokyo and The Superjesus.

From mega events to intimate venues, Ballarat has so much to offer as a live music destination, and that is why the 10,000 Gigs fund is so important. The 10,000 Gigs fund is a winner, because not only do musicians generate an income from performing live music but they also gain more experience from playing gigs and grow their audience base and their profile across Victoria. The 10,000 Gigs fund also

supports a sustainable supply chain of live music to a wider range of audiences and allows more Victorians to see live music across the state.

Last year the 10,000 Gigs fund supported live music at Ballarat Trades Hall, Hop Temple Ballarat and Itinerant Spirits, and can I just say what great local venues they are. Ballarat Trades Hall is not only home to Ballarat's mighty union movement but a great venue to see live music. Thanks to a Creative Victoria grant in 2020, the hall received technical upgrades, including an industry-leading state-of-the-art studio and lighting system fitted into the space. Further grants have resulted in 160 new seats and tables being purchased to allow more flexibility for audience arrangements.

I want to give a shout-out to Itinerant Spirits, which is located at the historic Ballarat Goods Shed, for its commitment to showcasing local talent through its diverse line-up of live musical performances ranging from folk to funk. It is a great place to meet up with friends, have a drink and listen to live music.

Finally, Hop Temple serves up great beer, food and live acts. Over the last 10 years Hop Temple has supported local musicians and provided entertainment to around 35,000 patrons per year. The venue hosts around 150 live music events per year, and this provides ongoing employment opportunities to numerous local musicians. In addition, the venue also supports local production companies to supply AV equipment. I look forward to the minister's response.

Polwarth electorate ministerial visit

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (19:06): (1163) My adjournment this evening is to the Treasurer in the other place. The action I seek is that I would love to host her for a visit to south-west Victoria in the wonderful seat of Polwarth over the coming weeks. There are many opportunities that she could take advantage of where she could meet not only farmers but emergency service workers and the local townships, for that matter – and the local businesses, whether they are farm ag supply providers or farm machinery operators.

There is a crisis on in south-western Victoria at the moment. We are experiencing one of the harshest, driest periods in more than 100 years. This drought is causing great hardship to many families. ABC 774 Melbourne will be broadcasting from the wonderful seat of Polwarth tomorrow, and they are coming to Polwarth tomorrow to listen to the community and to hear the voices of farmers, of townfolk and of people in the community who are really doing it tough. They are doing it tough for two key reasons: one is there is a drought, which this government has failed dismally to provide any hope or sustenance for. People are having to truck water. There was a family on Facebook just this week who could not afford more water. They are not able to even shower in their home. They are having to take the kids into the local caravan park in town just to have a shower each day because they are just simply not able to do that at home. That is at the personal level. Of course that has a devastating effect on keeping your livestock and animals. It is a huge cost to the community and to the wellbeing and mental wellbeing of so many people.

But of course it is further exacerbated by this government's callous approach to the emergency services tax, which they are going full bore on, knowing full well that that tax just in my electorate alone will rip some \$22 million out of the community in only a few months time. That is sitting like a massive weight and burden on those families and communities. Not only are they struggling to just have food and water available for the simple processes at home, they are trying to keep their livestock and businesses running, and now they also have to deal with a massive new tax that does nothing for them or their communities. The rhetoric from the government has been appalling. At a time when the government talks about the need for this tax, climate change and the need to keep people safe, what about the people suffering today? What about the families, the businesses and the farms that need support today? Why can't this government, who is prepared on one day to rip tens of millions out of communities, on the next day barely offer them the cost of a water trough? It is simply not good enough. Please, Treasurer, take up this offer and come and meet the wonderful people of Polwarth.

Cost of living

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (19:09): (1164) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. It is exciting to ask the minister to provide an update on the expected shape of an important initiative that was announced in the recent budget: a new round of the power saving bonus program, announced to support households with their energy bills and some cost-of-living relief for eligible families. Since the budget and putting an ad in the local *Bellarine Times* paper, my office has already received numerous inquiries from local residents around this new program and how they will access this support. There is a strong community interest in the importance of this program, particularly for households in my electorate who continue to face some cost-of-living pressures. I look forward to sharing further information from the minister about the rollout of this initiative with my community.

Narracan electorate police resources

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (19:10): (1165) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Police, and the action I seek is that action be taken to deliver additional resources to the electorate of Narracan. I would like to take you to the most recent crime stats, which paint a very bleak picture for my community, particularly in the rapidly growing towns of Drouin and Warragul. The crime stats for Baw Baw rose 18.2 per cent, Drouin went up 14.5 per cent and Trafalgar 28.1 per cent. The problem with my area is that it is growing very, very quickly but unfortunately our police resources are stretched. The town of Warragul has a 24-hour police station. The police station in Drouin was built in 1974, when the population was only about 4000 people. Now the township of Drouin is nearly 20,000 people, and there are no additional services there. Trafalgar in the next couple of years will probably hit a population of about 7000 people. The flow-on effect of these communities growing is additional pressure on the Warragul police station to service these outlying areas.

There has been no significant investment in these townships. In fact the last investment was from the Baillieu government, which built a new police station in Trafalgar that had the ability to be expanded when the population grew, and that has not been done yet. Back in 2018 the former member for Narracan committed to a new police station for Drouin, and rightly so. Drouin is one of those towns that just keeps growing and growing and growing. Police resources are very, very stretched at the moment and our community is getting increasingly concerned, so I am asking the minister – I am urging the minister – to invest in this, to look at these two towns and at least get a 24-hour police station for Drouin and expand the Trafalgar police station so we can have more police up there as well.

Gender equality

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (19:12): (1166) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Women and Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me at a local community discussion in the Glen Waverley district to speak with local residents about how the Allan Labor government is supporting and empowering women both across Victoria and in our local area.

The 2025–26 Victorian budget we have just delivered is another step forward in our ongoing commitment to building a fairer and more equal Victoria, one where women have access to good jobs, quality health care, affordable homes and safer communities. We believe that all Victorians should live in a society where safety, dignity, respect and fairness are universal. We recognise that gender equality is not only a matter of fairness; it is essential to our state's economic prosperity. We also understand that gender inequality leads to real economic and social costs. That is why we are delivering meaningful targeted reforms in this budget, from investing in women's health and alleviating period poverty to supporting early childhood education and continuing to take strong action to prevent family violence.

Victoria is leading the nation on gender equality, backed by sustained, enduring and measurable action. I thank the minister for her continued leadership and what she and her team have done to support

women and girls across Victoria and in my electorate of the Glen Waverley district. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Yambuna air pollution

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (19:13): (1167) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Environment, and it is for him to have the EPA make a priority of the case concerning the offensive smell at Curr Road, Yambuna. 73-year-old Gayle Plattfuss and her son are long-term dairy farmers on Curr Road, Yambuna, and they are having to live with an extremely offensive smell from the neighbouring farm, which is receiving B-double loads of whey, which is a by-product of cheese manufacturing. This extreme smell has been occurring since January this year and has made the Plattfusses' lives hell. The smell has been that bad at times they have not been able to hang the washing on the line because it absorbs that smell. In the hotter weather they could not turn on their evaporative cooler because it sucked the smell into the house, meaning long sleepless nights in hot weather. The smell has been that bad that family and friends no longer visit Gayle because they cannot bear the smell. I have personally visited Gayle's farm and can attest to how bad the smell gets. When you get out of the car at the house, the smell literally makes you gag, and that is what they have to live with for days on end. Even the neighbours, who live a further kilometre away, have rung my office saying how bad the smell is. The EPA has made several visits to the district and spoken to the offending property's workers about the issue and, despite assurances, the smell continues to impact on the Plattfusses' and their neighbours' quality of life. The question they are asking is: why should this farm continue to receive dairy waste and impact on their standard of living? That is why I am asking the minister to have this case made a priority for the EPA to resolve.

DPV Health

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (19:15): (1168) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me at the wonderful DPV Health in Broadmeadows. DPV Health is more than just a health service, it is a lifeline for so many people in the cities of Hume and Whittlesea. With 20 sites across these areas, DPV Health is constantly evolving to meet the increasing demand for care, ensuring that no-one falls through the cracks. In recognition of their outstanding work, DPV Health were named the Victorian Premier's primary care service of the year in both 2023 and 2024, an extraordinary achievement that speaks to the commitment, passion and care they put into everything they do. Their range of services is truly comprehensive, supporting people of all ages. Whether it is medical, dental or mental health care, family violence support or disability services, DPV Health is there for our community every step of the way. They also provide much-needed support for children and older Victorians, ensuring that every person has access to the care they deserve, regardless of their circumstances.

I am very pleased that the federal government will deliver a Medicare mental health centre in Broadmeadows, and I would like to explore and discuss options for a federally funded Medicare urgent care clinic in Broadmeadows as well. Minister, I would be honoured if you could join me in visiting DPV Health to meet with the dedicated staff, hear directly from the community members whose lives are being transformed by these services and see firsthand their extraordinary service and capacity for expansion to ensure that DPV remains a cornerstone of health and wellbeing for our growing communities.

Prahran electorate roads

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (19:17): (1169) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I am seeking is the urgent and timely repair of dangerous potholes on major roads running through the Prahran electorate. The state of disrepair of our roads is a serious issue that local residents raised with me during the recent by-election earlier this year, and it continues to be a serious concern for my constituents and the thousands of other Victorians who drive through my electorate on a daily basis. The roads that we are covering are Dandenong Road, Kings Way, Queens Road, St Kilda Road, Punt Road, Toorak Road, High Street, Commercial Road,

Williams Road, Malvern Road and Alexandra Avenue. These roads are the gateways to Melbourne. They carry a lot of traffic every day of the week. With this heavy traffic load, the wear and tear on the roads is significant. There are cars, trucks, buses, trams, e-bikes, pedestrians and regular bikes. The electorate is one of the most densely populated as well.

Victorians, including the people of Prahran, rightly expect that the state government will maintain these major roads in a safe and usable condition, especially given that Victorians are paying the highest taxes in Australia and our state has a debt fast approaching \$200 billion. Instead our roads are in a terrible condition, with drivers having to dodge potholes on almost every main road that they drive on. Potholes do not only cause inconvenience, they can cause damage to cars and trucks, adding further costs for families already struggling with the cost-of-living crisis and Labor's ever-increasing taxes and charges. There is even more danger for cyclists and motorcyclists, with the potential for serious injury to these vulnerable road users. They are also a trip hazard for pedestrians.

The people of Prahran recognise that this is not just a local issue – roads are in bad condition across the state. Given the high taxes and the mounting debt imposed on us by this government, the public rightly expect the government will prioritise delivery of essential services, including regular and timely maintenance of our roads. Instead we saw in last week's budget that the government did not allocate money to fixing our roads. In real terms the budget cut road maintenance funding, which only fuelled the fears of Victorians that their already crumbling roads will get even worse rather than better under this government.

Locals are telling me that potholes continue to appear on our roads faster than they are being repaired, which just makes our roads more unsafe for everyone. Some potholes are not even properly repaired; they are covered off with a blue metal plate which protrudes above the road surface and creates a further risk to road users, especially cyclists. The minister might say that this is just a temporary fix, but if the temporary fix to potholes at the intersection of Williams Road and Malvern Road is any guide, then the use of that word is very misleading. This temporary fix was put in place in January this year after I raised it as a concern during the by-election. Four months later the supposedly temporary plate is still there. Minister, all Victorians deserve better.

State Electricity Commission

John LISTER (Werribee) (19:20): (1170) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for the State Electricity Commission, and the action I seek is an update on how the plan to power our government facilities and infrastructure through the State Electricity Commission will benefit our community in Wyndham. While it is getting late and I do not want to keep the lights on in here longer than we need to, I am excited to hear about the government's initiative to power places like this one through the SEC. I welcome the announcement today by the Allan Labor government that from 1 July 2025 we will be powering schools, hospitals, museums, trains, traffic lights and more with clean, renewable, publicly owned renewable energy. This equates to around 5 per cent of our energy use across the state. In our community in Werribee this means the power our government facilities and infrastructure use will not be supplied by corporations intent on profit for their shareholders. This is an exciting move, because the SEC shareholders are all Victorians.

Responses

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (19:21): I do note it is unfortunate that we have only just recently had some visitors enter who are only seeing the last couple of minutes of our session. The member for Lowan had a matter for the Premier and sought for her to respond to the member's advocacy for the By Five Wimmera Southern Mallee program, of which the member is a strong supporter. The member for Wendouree sought for the Minister for Creative Industries to give her an update regarding the 10,000 Gigs fund and how it has benefited her community, notwithstanding the amazing amount of bands who have actually come and performed in her electorate. The member for Polwarth asked the Treasurer to visit his electorate over the coming weeks. The member for Bellarine sought for the

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Minister for Energy and Resources to give advice regarding the newly announced power saving rebate, for those who need it. The member for Narracan's question was for the Minister for Police, seeking additional resources for his community.

The member for Glen Waverley sought for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence and Minister for Women to visit his community to talk about the work the Allan Labor government is doing to support women in his state, and I thank him for his advocacy. The member for Murray Plains had a matter for the Minister for Environment, where he is seeking that the EPA visit and examine odour along the road in his electorate that is believed to be coming from cheese manufacturing. The member for Broadmeadows asked the Minister for Health to come with her to visit DPV Health. The member for Prahran asked the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to come and repair the potholes in her electorate. The member for Werribee asked the Minister for the State Electricity Commission for an update on how the SEC's work will benefit his community. I will pass all of those on to the relevant ministers.

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

House adjourned 7:23 pm.