PROOF

Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Thursday 13 November 2025

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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Thursday 13 November 2025

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Bills

Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Mental Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Statewide Treaty Bill 2025

Royal assent

The PRESIDENT (09:33): I have a message from the Governor, dated 13 November:

> The Governor informs the Legislative Council that she has, on this day, given the Royal Assent to the under-mentioned Acts of the present Session presented to her by the Clerk of the Parliaments:
>
> **43/2025** Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Act 2025
>
> **44/2025** Mental Health Legislation Amendment Act 2025

I have another message, dated 13 November:

> The Governor informs the Legislative Council that she has, on this day, given the Royal Assent to the under-mentioned Act of the present Session presented to her by the Clerk of the Parliaments:
>
> **45/2025** Statewide Treaty Act 2025

Petitions

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 981 signatures:

> The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the dramatic rise in payments required by ratepayers under the proposed Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund.
>
> **The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to immediately cease the introduction of the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, ensure the current Fire Services Property Levy remains in place for the foreseeable future and commit to a genuine consultation process, which includes CFA and SES volunteers, farmers, emergency service workers and other interested parties, to develop a fairer way of funding Victorian emergency services.**

Drivers licences

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 47 signatures:

> The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that Victoria is the only state or territory in Australia that still requires probationary driver's license holders to be aged 18 years or over. In Victoria, young people living in rural and regional areas with limited or no public transport are disadvantaged, and not everyone has a friend or family member to ferry them around. Reducing the minimum probationary driving age to 17 years in line with other states will remove barriers for young people and open doors for educational and employment opportunities.
>
> **The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to reduce the minimum probationary driving age to 17 years and provide incentives for learner drivers to do professional driver training, like those offered in New South Wales.**

Youth crime

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 1412 signatures:

> The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the urgent need for real action to address the youth crime crisis and make our Victorian suburbs safe again. Car thefts, aggravated burglaries and home invasions are now daily occurrences in many suburbs. Despite recent

bail law reforms, the system remains broken. Offenders, including many repeat youth offenders, are slipping through the cracks, reoffending within days, and facing minimal consequences. Families are frightened, frustrated and angry. Communities feel abandoned and their confidence in the justice system and police response is rapidly eroding.

We cannot afford more delay. As Parliament stalls, communities across Victoria are left to deal with the consequences, including daily crime, trauma, emotional distress, and a growing sense of being failed by the very systems meant to protect them. Every day without action is another day trust is eroded, safety is compromised, and more lives are affected. Clear and immediate consequences for serious and repeat youth offenders, including breach of bail, supported by rehabilitation and education is needed. Police capacity needs to be rebuilt with increased resourcing, recruitment and operational reform to improve presence and responsiveness. State and local government funded CCTV in residential areas is required to deter crime and assist in prosecution. Systemic failures in the justice and police system, including court delays, inconsistent bail decisions, and lack of follow-up on repeat offences need fixing. A whole-of-government strategy is needed to address the root causes such as family violence, school disengagement, trauma and housing insecurity. Early intervention and prevention programs need to be increased to support and engage at-risk youth before they offend. Victorians want our safe suburbs back!

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to act on the youth crime crisis now by introducing immediate consequences for serious and repeat youth offenders, rebuilding police capacity, installing CCTV in residential areas, fixing systemic failures in the justice and police systems, developing a whole-of-government strategy to address the root causes of youth crime and increasing early intervention and prevention programs to support and engage at-risk youth before they offend.

Nick McGOWAN: I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Climate Change Act 2017 – Victorian Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report 2023, under section 52 of the Act.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament –

Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996 – No. 117.

Domestic Animals Act 1994 – No. 116.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule No. 116.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

Bills

Victorian Early Childhood Regulatory Authority Bill 2025

Social Services Regulation Amendment (Child Safety, Complaints and Worker Regulation) Bill 2025

Early Childhood Legislation Amendment (Child Safety) Bill 2025

Cognate debate

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (09:41): I move, by leave:

> That contingent on the following bills being introduced in the Council, this house authorises the President to permit their second-reading debates to be taken concurrently:
>
> (1) Victorian Early Childhood Regulatory Authority Bill 2025;
>
> (2) Social Services Regulation Amendment (Child Safety, Complaints and Worker Regulation) Bill 2025; and
>
> (3) Early Childhood Legislation Amendment (Child Safety) Bill 2025.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (09:41): I just want to indicate the opposition will support the cognate debate, but I just want to put on record some concerns we have. The first is in the lower house – the failure of the government to bring these bills forward in a timely way to enable people in the lower house and our parties to look at these bills in a way that provided sufficient opportunity and ability to consult with community groups and so forth. This is terrible legislative practice, and I do want that on the record.

The second thing I indicate is that there is obviously a cluster of three bills coming through. The reality is they are interlinked. We accept that, and Mr Mulholland has made that point very clear. But in the debate, the effect of the cognate debate will be to crunch the speaking time of many people. With three complex bills there would normally be 45 minutes – 15, 15, 15 – for an individual to speak. I am happy to note that I have just had a conversation with the government, and there may be some ability to work with the government to provide perhaps an additional bit of time for some people where there is additional complexity on those three bills.

The third thing is that the opposition is concerned about the congestion at the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel with drafting of amendments and related matters. Now, this is not parliamentary counsel's fault. In fact, I have the highest regard for Jayne Atkins and the work that her people do. It is the government's legislative program that has got huge congestion at this end of the year. So I am appreciative of the minister and the Leader of the Government's discussion just now. We may need assistance to be able to ensure that the drafting of amendments that we would seek to do can occur. It is not parliamentary counsel's fault, and it is not our fault. It might be that it is over in the Premier's office; I do not know the insides of the government. But I just want those things on record, and I thank the Leader of the Government and the minister for the discussion I have just had and the understanding that we support the cognate debate – but with those points.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (09:44): I too would like to express my deep concerns around the very little time that we have had to look through these pieces of legislation that the minister has put forth to the chamber. These are huge pieces of legislation, one of them 450-plus pages, and for us to be expected to scrutinise and engage stakeholders widely to ensure that we are doing our due diligence as legislators in this house of review is deeply troubling. We have tried to find some common ground so that we can be given ample time to go through this legislation, because it goes without saying we all want the same thing in ensuring that the legislation in relation to child care will strengthen the sector and, more importantly, keep children safe. But I feel there is a barrier here for us to be able to do that in a full capacity and in a well-balanced way when we are expected to

go through huge pieces of legislation in a really, really tight timeline. I just want to put that on the record.

Also, the Social Services Regulation Amendment (Child Safety, Complaints and Worker Regulation) Bill 2025 – the 450-plus piece of legislation – has a big portion around disability. We have been unable at this point to engage stakeholders in relation to the Social Services Regulator, which is a huge part of the bill. Then, on top of that, there are the childcare reforms. So I just want to also put that on the record as well – our concerns around this. We do want to work together with the government to do the job that we are meant to do in this chamber, but it is important that we are also given appropriate and adequate time to do our job.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (09:46): On behalf of Legalise Cannabis, I would also like to echo the comments from Ms Gray-Barberio and Mr Davis. To have some 800 pages of legislation dropped on us at such short notice, and particularly to have sliced into it the recently torpedoed disability bill, sort of beggars belief. I just do not know how the government can expect the crossbench members, with very finite resources, to be able to do justice to the legislation. In that context, one has to question whether or not you want to move that legislation forward. Notwithstanding the primacy of addressing the childcare regulation issue, it is the baggage that has gone with it that causes us great concern. I know that is a concern that is shared by a number of union affiliates as well as other stakeholders who are all just trying to get their heads around it now.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (09:47): I will just speak briefly on this as the representative shadow on two parts. I would like to thank the minister and the department for the briefings on the Victorian Early Childhood Regulatory Authority Bill 2025. For that bill we were able to have the appropriate amount of time to consider, to consult, to pore through the bill and to get the sort of legislative advice on that bill. But for the other two bills – the Social Services Regulator and the national law – we did not. We know the rapid review promised that many of the things in those bills would be tabled by October. There should be no greater priority for the government than to keep our children safe, and the government has acknowledged that without these reforms children are at risk. While children are at risk, it is unacceptable that the government has not met its own deadlines over the last month. The Premier has been very quick to put on a hard hat when she should have been at work keeping our kids safe and meeting the promised deadlines for this to be tabled in October. If it all had have been tabled in October, instead of giving us less than 12 hours to pore through hundreds of pages of legislation, then we could have done the work to better consult on this bill. As other colleagues have said, it only took us about a day – but longer than we had.

There are issues with at least one bill, and I have been copping it, as has my colleague Tim Bull, from a lot of the stakeholders, particularly in the disability community, about elements of this bill. Regardless, I thank the government for their briefing and consultation, but it was, I think, too poor a limited amount of time in practice. I hope that can be improved in the future.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (09:49): I appreciate the opportunity to respond and at the outset thank particularly those who are prepared to support the cognate debate. As the Leader of the Government and I have just committed to Mr Davis, we are more than happy to work with the chamber in ensuring that people have enough time to speak to the issues in these bills if they are debated cognately, bearing in mind that there will be separate committee stages for each of the bills, so still the opportunity for consideration in detail for each of the three bills.

I would just note in relation to the Victorian Early Childhood Regulatory Authority Bill 2025, the bill to establish an independent early childhood regulator, as Mr Mulholland said, this was introduced as per the government's commitment to introducing this legislation by October in accordance with the recommendations of our rapid review into child safety. That was introduced a fortnight ago. I appreciate Mr Mulholland's remarks that there is sufficient time in relation to that bill for due process to go as it would usually go.

In relation to the national law bill, the content of the bill has been considered by two ministerial councils of education ministers around the country and has had to separately go through each of the cabinet processes within each jurisdiction for us to be able, as the host of the national law, to bring that bill. While I would have ideally liked to have been able to bring in that bill in October, it had to go through the cabinet processes in every other jurisdiction, and I thank the other jurisdictions, because that has also been a very truncated process. Everyone has diligently worked to that truncated process in the interests of being able to further these child safety amendments. As the host of the national law we do have to wait for those approvals from each of those jurisdictions. As I said, there will be the opportunity to go through that bill in the committee stage in detail.

In relation to the social services regulator reforms, we say these – and I appreciate that I think the chamber agrees – should be debated cognately on the basis that so many of the issues around the working with children check, the reportable conduct scheme and the child safe standards that go to the issues we have in relation to early education, to which the other two bills respond, are interlinked. If we were to have three separate debates, they would really be three separate debates about all three bills.

I appreciate the concerns that have been raised in relation to disability measures in the Social Services Regulation Amendment (Child Safety, Complaints and Worker Regulation) Bill 2025. These are not new. These are provisions which were introduced into the other place previously and had been on the notice paper for a very long time. When the rapid review made the recommendation that we need to keep children safe wherever they are, wherever they learn, wherever they play and wherever they grow, the rapid review made specific reference to the fact that there is a particular concern around child safety in disability settings and that we need to ensure that our system is interconnected. It spoke to the very reforms the government had already proposed through those amendments, which have already been introduced into the other place, in relation to the social services regulator. In responding to the rapid review it made absolute sense to take those reforms that were already on the table and put them into the social services regulator bill and for it to be a holistic bill that will address child safety more broadly.

We have over the recent weeks been talking with many interested parties and many in this chamber about all of these reforms so that people could be as briefed as possible prior to them coming to the chamber, because – exactly to Ms Gray-Barberio's point – we appreciated that particularly the social services regulation bill is a very lengthy document indeed to cover off on all of those matters. Those conversations have been ongoing. They did begin earlier than they would otherwise usually begin when the government is briefing on bills, because I am absolutely committed to making sure that people are as fully briefed as possible to take on these important reforms. As the Leader of the Government and I have just committed to Mr Davis, we are more than happy to continue to do that and to continue to facilitate briefing meetings and briefings with our department that will explain those reforms. I just would also remind the house that those additional reforms that have been referred to in the SSR bill are not new. They were introduced into the other place some time ago, and they are absolutely interlinked and relevant and part of what we are trying to do to keep children safe wherever they learn, wherever they play, wherever they grow.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Remembrance Day

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (09:54): On the 11th of the 11th I attended Mornington Secondary College's remembrance service. I have been fortunate enough to be able to attend every year since I entered Parliament, and I thank principal Linda Stanton for including me and other local members of Parliament in the service. It was a bit different this year. It was moved inside due to the rain, but they took the hundreds of students and guests inside and it was a sensational service. They had attendance from the local RSL, Rotary and Lions. As always, it was absolutely sensational. The school has been doing it for years, decades I believe, and the students have an incredible respect for

the service. The maturity they approach it with is very, very impressive. I do not know if I would be able to sit still at their age with such focus, such an understanding, but I think that comes from year-on-year experience with the Anzac Day service, Remembrance Day service, the avenue of honour and understanding that in World War I, 60,000 Australians gave their lives. They recognise, with plaques, the locals in Mornington who gave their lives in World War I, the values that were fought for and the opportunities they have afforded all of us and the students in Mornington. I want to acknowledge the 2025 school captains, Ethan and Carter, who delivered really impressive speeches. Best of luck to all the year 12s, who are finishing their exams and will go off next year. And it was great to meet Chloe, Larni and Luka, who are going to be the 2026 captains. I look forward to working with them next year.

Road maintenance

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (09:56): Regional Victorians are sick and tired of being told to slow down rather than the Allan government actually maintaining and fixing our broken roads. Over the past five years there has been a 45 per cent reduction in road maintenance. This underinvestment means that the government, rather than having people travel at capacity on roads at a normal speed, are slowing people down to 60, 70 and 80 kilometres an hour. This not only impacts productivity, but it means more of our family spending more time on dangerous roads, rather than this government fixing them. I call on the minister to finally actually focus on the regions, focus outside the tram tracks, and fix our regional roads.

Sex worker safety

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (09:57): I rise to extend my support and solidarity to sex worker Dallas Rayne as she commences legal proceedings against a deeply sexist and misogynistic online platform. For decades this website has allowed a culture of stalking, harassment and defamation towards sex workers to thrive as users leave revolting reviews and have discussions about Australian sex workers without them knowing or their consent. During its existence it has failed to moderate hate speech and has allowed personal information leaks and doxing, personal attacks and online gendered and sexual violence against women to thrive. For too long sex workers have been victim blamed, told that their mistreatment is just part of doing business, that it is what they are getting themselves into or, worse, that they should even expect it. Rayne's action calls this narrative out and says that enough is enough. It marks a significant moment in the conversation about safety of women in the adult industry. I extend my love and support to her as she embarks on this battle on behalf of many, and close with her words:

> For too long, sex workers have had to accept being publicly humiliated and dehumanised just for existing. That ends now.

Coburg RSL

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (09:58): Last weekend I joined the Minister for Veterans and the member for Pascoe Vale from the other place at the Coburg RSL for this year's Remembrance Day service. It was a thoughtful and moving occasion, bringing together veterans, families and community members to reflect on service and sacrifice. Coburg RSL is one of Victoria's and Australia's oldest sub-branches, a place that has been a part of the local community for more than a century. It continues to be a space where people come together to connect and to remember those that have served.

Following the service the RSL's new accessibility ramp was unveiled. The ramp was supported through government funding championed by the former member for Pascoe Vale Lizzie Blandthorn. It is dedicated to Jillian Doyle and the late Glen Doyle, both national life members of the RSL, who devoted so much to supporting veterans and volunteering for the RSL community. Their work has made a lasting impact, and it was so moving to see their contributions recognised in this way and continue to be championed by the now member for Pascoe Vale. I want to take this time to acknowledge and thank the committee, volunteers and members of Coburg RSL for their work and

acknowledge RSLs across Victoria for the important role they play in supporting veterans and bringing communities together.

Regional Victorians

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (10:00): The Allan Labor government keeps making big promises then letting Victorians down in the small print. In May 2023 the headline read 'Free rego for Victorian apprentices' – sounds great at first. Country kids are car-reliant because they do not have good public transport options, and free car registration would help a lot of young trades apprentices. But look closer and the reality is a let-down. You only get free rego if you drive between multiple job sites during the day. An apprentice working at a single site like a motor mechanic in Wodonga will not qualify. There are so many examples like this of Labor red tape failures. Applying for the CFA volunteer exemption from the emergency services levy is so convoluted that one Bullioh volunteer with 40 years service spent 4 hours trying to complete it online only to be told by the helpline 'Sorry, I can't see the portal so I can't help.' Or consider the power saving bonus. You can only apply online, which is a big barrier for older people who may not be confident in using the internet. The member for Benambra tells me they have helped around 500 people struggling to apply for the bonus. Some did not have computers and others were scared of online scams. Now the duck hunting licence is online too, and there are no alternative ways to apply. For many it is effectively a ban by stealth. Country people want to know when Labor will stop with the PR spin and duplicity and start governing for all Victorians.

Waste and recycling management

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (10:01): Residents of Sunbury are deeply frustrated and disappointed that their concerns about the proposed rubbish incinerator in their town remains largely unaddressed – the health impacts, air quality and proximity to homes, farms and Emu Creek, not to mention the dramatic increase in heavy traffic to truck rubbish from around Victoria to make up the 750,000 tonnes of rubbish to be burnt annually. HiQ, the operators, and the EPA tell residents that information will not be available until there is a formal application in place next year. Surely someone at HiQ has more information about technology they claim is tried and tested. HiQ has had many EPA breaches in its name, including one only last month, yet we are supposed to take on faith HiQ's commitment to safeguarding our community's wellbeing. The issue has united the community, who contacted their local member in the lower house, Mr Josh Bull, a Sunbury local who I am sure shares his neighbours' alarm at this proposal. Mr Bull has confirmed his support for the parliamentary inquiry into waste to energy and indicated that he will await the findings of that inquiry prior to taking further action. Accordingly we now look to the government for some assurance that licensing of the Sunbury incinerator will not be finalised prior to the conclusion of that inquiry.

Southern Metropolitan Region housing

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:03): I rise to deliver a member's statement on the upcoming train and tram zone activity centres in my community of Southern Metro. These activity centres will soon be the hubs for new homes for Victorians, so that more people can live near public transport, jobs and essential services. The Allan Labor government is dedicated to boosting housing supply across Victoria. That means for constituents in Southern Metro with these new activity centres they will be able to continue living in the suburb where they grew up as we build more homes and essential services in these new zones. I am excited to see these developments, particularly around Kew, Hawthorn and Glenferrie, helping more Victorians secure the dream of owning their own home.

Community safety

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (10:04): Adult time for violent crime – this is the proposed new policy the Victorian Premier came out with 24 hours ago. But we know at the core it is not about community safety, it is a desperate attempt to cling on to power. All this Labor government seems to be doing is investing in prisons – bandaid solutions, quick fixes – when the

evidence has been clear from the start: invest in education, invest in public schools, invest in teachers, invest in early intervention programs, invest in early childhood and invest in the services in community that work. Let us be clear here: it is misleading for this Premier to say that expanding prisons is going to keep the community safe. Evidence is overwhelming that prisons do not deter crime in young people. I will tell you what does deter crime: it is when you address the drivers of it – poverty, lack of education, employment, health inequity. Let us talk about who these laws are going to disproportionately impact: the First Nations community, black communities, brown communities – my communities. It begs the question why this Labor government thinks that harsher punishments are better than investment in education and wraparound supports. We all deserve to feel safe in our communities, but the answers this government is looking for do not rest in expanding prisons or filling up prison beds. They lie in treating children as children.

Production of documents

Road maintenance

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (10:05): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes the reports raised concerning the deterioration of Victorian roads in the RACV's My Country Road 2024 survey;

(2) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within 30 days of the house agreeing to this resolution:

(a) documents outlining the monitoring process and quality control for contractors building and repairing Victorian roads; and

(b) assessments, examinations, reports and ministerial briefs about the quality of Victorian roads, since December 2022.

I rise today to speak on my short-form documents motion requesting documents related to the monitoring process and quality control for contractors building and repairing Victorian roads.

It is no secret that the quality of Victorian roads is a major concern for my constituents in the Northern Victoria Region. In fact I cannot remember a week when I have not stood in this place and asked for yet another road to be repaired. While I commend the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in the other place for her prompt responses to my constituents' concerns, we now find ourselves with another problem: the quality of the repairs being completed. Almost every week, if not multiple times a week, I receive correspondence from my constituents around repair work not going the distance. In some cases the repairs are failing in a matter of days. The potholes return, new surfaces crumble, rutting comes back worse than before, or in some cases new problems arise from works being rushed and not completed to a high standard. Road users pay their registration every year, somewhere around $800 per year for cars and SUVs. It is expected that their vehicles are kept in roadworthy condition yet, to borrow a phrase from Mrs McArthur, our roads are not carworthy.

All that my constituents and I want to see is that these contractors are being held to account by this government. We want to see that the works are being followed up on and that when these works fail, these failures are caught and dealt with. I ask this chamber to support this motion. Let us be transparent with our constituents and allow them to see that their concerns surrounding road repairs are being listened to and dealt with.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:07): I rise to share a few words on the short-form documents motion that has been brought forward to this house this morning by Ms Tyrrell. In doing so I thank and acknowledge her for raising this issue. One of the very many important issues that we deal with in this place concerns managing, expanding, improving and upgrading our transport networks, and that certainly includes the road network. This is an opportunity to talk about many of the investments that this government is currently making in relation to, for example, the better roads blitz. We have crews delivering thousands of road maintenance jobs, with 70 per cent of all funding

going towards our regional roads, which I am sure will be of great interest to both Ms Tyrrell and Mrs McArthur, who I see in the chamber and who has raised her voice on this subject many times too.

I also wish to acknowledge that it was good to hear in Ms Tyrell's contribution that the responses that she has received from Minister Horne, the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, have been very prompt. That is very good to hear. I certainly have had the same experience when raising all manner of roads issues in my region in the south-east with her. I always do get that fast response, so I am glad to hear that that is an experience widely shared in this chamber.

As part of that better roads blitz, between now and the middle of next year crews will be, and indeed already are, at work on hundreds of roads across our state's road network, with works ranging from road rehabilitation and resurfacing, patching potholes and maintaining bridges to those more fundamental works to address the underlying issues rather than just patches. It also includes upgrading and installing traffic signage. It is not related to this blitz, but I know Mr Tarlamis and I were both very excited to see, just a couple of years ago, the new traffic lights at Kelletts Road and Henderson Road in Rowville being switched on. That has certainly helped to improve road safety in that area, especially as the Henderson Road bridge now connects locals to not just the Ventura bus depot but the other side at Knoxfield, increasing traffic on that local connector road. It is very important that those traffic lights are in place. The blitz will also be targeting the state's busiest travel and trade routes, which will help to get millions of people and hundreds of thousands of tonnes of freight to and from their destination smoothly. The roads statewide in this program have been prioritised based on expert assessments and community feedback, ensuring that upgrades are focused on where they are most needed. As well as repairing some of our busiest roads, crews will also be mowing, slashing and spraying tens of thousands of kilometres of roadsides, and inspecting and repairing thousands of bridges and other structures too.

This is a significant investment. In fact it is the most significant investment in this state's history when it comes to maintaining our road networks. But it also comes on top of a further $964 million in the last financial year, which was until this year the largest single investment. That is cumulatively a figure that is very close to approaching $2 billion over two years being invested into this critical maintenance work, noting as well that this government has spent on average $781 million per year in our time in office maintaining roads, compared to just $493 million under the last Liberal–National government.

It is a topic that comes up for conversation, and I always appreciate when constituents raise road issues with me. It is an opportunity to try and fix issues, sometimes at the smaller end, sometimes at the bigger end. Indeed it came up in a family conversation just over the weekend too when I had some in-laws who drove down from the Central Coast in New South Wales and were commenting to me on the condition of roads, and I thought, 'Oh, here we go, let's have a good chat,' but to my delight I discovered that they were in fact praising Victoria's roads.

Renee Heath interjected.

Michael Galea: They were praising Victoria's roads, Dr Heath, saying that compared to those roads in New South Wales and the freeways in and around the Central Coast and Sydney, we are actually far better – feedback I was not expecting to receive, but delightful feedback nonetheless. But that does not take away from the fact that even if people in New South Wales are saying that our roads are in far better shape than theirs – notwithstanding that – there is a lot of work to do. We have a minister who is dedicated to getting this work done, and the $976 million better roads blitz that is now underway is helping to make those works happen.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (10:12): I rise to support this documents motion in Ms Tyrrell's name. Every day thousands of Victorians drive on roads that look like an obstacle course rather than a way to get from one place to the other. I always love listening to Mr Galea's speeches. I love that guy. He is a good friend of mine but, sadly, he speaks and he spruiks about the conditions of the roads and Labor's commitment to roads; however, the facts unfortunately tell another story. All of us from

time to time will gild the lily, but I think a statement like that absolutely pole-vaults over the borders of truth.

The RACV My Country Road survey says it plainly: only 38 per cent of regional motorists rated their roads as good or excellent. That is down from 51 per cent just three years ago. That is a massive, massive decline. I would love to see how Mr Galea can marry those two up: the incredible talking points and the incredible commitment that Labor shows to roads, but then the actual facts – sometimes they are just so vastly different. Anyway, three quarters said they have to regularly swerve to avoid potholes. One in three reported damage to their cars. We saw this play out just last week, and I am sure all of you in this place would have followed Jacqui Felgate and all the different stories. Hopefully my colleague Wayne Farnham – if you do not follow Jacqui Felgate, hopefully you follow him. But the reality is that on the Princes Highway near Nar Nar Goon, a single pothole – just one of them, there are heaps and heaps, but let us just talk about one, zone in on one for a minute – damaged twenty cars in one day. Twenty families were stranded on the side of the road. I drove this –

Sonja Terpstra interjected.

Renee HEATH: I am just picking up on Ms Terpstra's interjection there, who says, 'How do you know?' All right. Just a public call for the 20 families that were stranded on the side of the road: please email Ms Terpstra or me, and I will collate it and pass it on. Twenty families were stranded on the roadside paying for tows and repairs. Imagine being the poor roadside assist guy in the RACV – which one would you pick to help first? This is adding so much stress to already struggling families who are really limping through a cost-of-living crisis. There is even a Facebook page dedicated to potholes – 'Beware of potholes on roads from Melbourne' – if you want to look it up. Go and join and support it. Among the deluge of comments from four days ago by the Traralgon community, one said:

> We just saw 9 cars pulled over near the Shell Service station (outbound), all with hazard lights on changing at least one tire each.

I am sure Ms Terpstra would like the proof of that too. So that is somebody that maybe –

Sonja Terpstra interjected.

Renee HEATH: They are people paying their taxes, paying their registration, paying their insurance, yet getting slugged again and again because of the repairs that their cars now require, because of Labor's absolute inability to do one of their basic jobs: to maintain roads. But when roads fail, there are even more hidden costs. It is a cost to communities, a cost to our time when, as somebody said before – it might have been Ms Bath in her members statement – people are asked to slow down, rather than Labor just fixing the roads.

I am just going to jump ahead. In Gippsland we have seen a real disheartenment of different people, especially in tourist communities that have one road in and one road out, and places that are hard to get to, like Walhalla, Woods Point and Aberfeldy where, if the roads have terrible potholes, if they have to be cut to be fixed, these communities suffer incredibly. I commend Ms Tyrrell's motion to the house, and I hope that all of you, in good conscience, if you have a good conscience, will vote for it.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:17): Again I only get 5 minutes to respond to a lot of this. As is the wont of the chamber at the moment, government should be gagged and not have the same amount of time to respond to these things. Nevertheless I want to thank Ms Tyrrell for bringing her motion to the house on road maintenance and note the sentiments therein. What I want to do is use the time that I have left, which is a small amount of time, to actually talk about the facts of these matters.

What we just heard in Dr Heath's contribution – and I think there is a really strong propensity at the moment for the Liberals to become social media stars, because what we see is anything that gets talked about in this house all of a sudden ends up on social media with grabs from 3AW or Jacqui Felgate or whoever.

Members interjecting.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Yes, the echo chamber, and the creation of fake Facebook groups and all of that, just so we can get the rage bait going and the social media outrage. What I can say is that in regard to the video that Jacqui Felgate posted, what I saw was cars pulled over on the side of the road, but I did not actually see any potholes on the road. I was waiting to see what it was that caused these people to pull over. In fact I went and drove on that road the other week – because I was going to get some chickens, actually – and I did not see any of the stuff that you reported or that Jacqui Felgate reported, so I do not know. Magically, there is all this outrage around it; I want to see facts.

The good news for Victorians is that the Allan Labor government is spending $976 million, the largest single investment in road maintenance in the state's history, because with a road network, the government actually does not have responsibility for a great majority of it – councils do. And we fund councils to fix these roads. But where there are problems, there are ways to get them fixed. For example, we have invested $976 million, and might I say that in my electorate in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region, the Albanese Labor government and the Allan Labor government have committed $25 million to looking at upgrading the Five Ways at Warrandyte, and we are starting consultation on that really, really soon. The fantastic Labor members – the Labor federal member for Deakin and the Labor federal member for Menzies – are fantastic advocates that we have now got in federal government to help partner with us to get things done.

What we have found happens is that the community expect us to act and we do. What I can say is that if there are people who have experienced damage to their car, drivers who have sustained damage may be entitled to compensation. I am not creating social media outrage like those opposite, but I encourage people who have legitimate claims to lodge a claim with the department through the Transport Victoria website. There are practical solutions for people who have sustained damage. Dr Heath, keep texting away to you 3AW mates and make sure they get this on social media. Keep it going, because I want to see this. Come on. Do not let us all down. I am sure Jacqui is watching us and so is 3AW. I am sure I am going to get a pile-on, which always gets created by those opposite – as if we do not know what you do.

But do you know what, the bottom line is that people do not vote based on social media outrage. What they do is they look to a government to actually get things done, and like I said – $976 million. Might I just say on this that when I sat on the floods inquiry, what we saw – and this was evidence based – was that when we have heavy rains and severe weather events, our road network gets damaged. Those opposite actually do not understand what it is like to govern. When you are in government, you have got to continuously upgrade your road networks because they get driven on a lot by heavy vehicles every day –

A member: You should be doing that.

Sonja TERPSTRA: We do. That is the thing, and I talk to constituents about this. I say, 'Hey, if you want to actually see where we are upgrading roads, this is all publicly available information. Go to the VicRoads website and you can actually see where we are upgrading road networks. It is actually publicly available, and there are a lot of roadworks going on at the moment.' Again, like I said, it is a constant thing where we have to keep upgrading, because when we have weather events, potholes do appear. Those opposite are saying, 'Oh, they never upgrade and invest in roads.' But we continually do that because our road networks continually need repairs and upgrades. It is not a static thing. Those opposite do not actually understand that.

Again, there is a $976 million investment from this government, plus the Albanese Labor government has committed $25 million in Warrandyte, in my electorate, to upgrade an intersection and for the planning around that so that we can make it better for people. Our investment includes multiple resurfacing jobs on the Princes Highway between Nar Nar Goon and Longwarry as well.

I just want to commend Ms Tyrrell for bringing this motion. As I said earlier, we do not oppose these documents motions. We are quite happy to share factual information with people in this chamber, and I note that when we do, they never do anything with it. They never do anything with it because it completely eviscerates their argument. When they see we are actually doing things, they do not want to talk about that.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (10:22): I rise to support Ms Tyrrell's motion. I am very pleased to rise to support Ms Tyrrell's motion. I have not heard such a load of rubbish from the other side in some time. Do you know what, the problem is that you have got no quality control over your road building or your road maintenance. I once asked the head of VicRoads what his guarantee was on his road building. He said, 'We don't have one.' I said, 'What? So my toaster has got a better guarantee than your road building.' It is shocking. We are in a situation where we do not have potholes out in country Victoria, we have got craters. We live in a constant situation of 'Slow down' signs. You cannot fix the roads, so you put a 'Slow down' sign up. That pothole in Dr Heath's electorate has now got a camera. You are actually fining people for tripping over a pothole. You do not fix the pothole, you put a camera up. Ms Tyrrell is absolutely right: outside the tram tracks we are devastated. Our school buses are in trouble. Our farmers are in trouble. We cannot feed you in metropolitan Victoria because of the shocking state roads.

You criticised the councils. Let me tell you, most local road building is first class. The local roads are fine; it is your state roads that are hopeless. You have got built-in redundancy. You have got contractors that build roads badly. You do not fix the drainage and you do not fix the shoulders – and, guess what, they have got to go back and repair them. It is a wonderful model for the absolute waste of government money and a waste of taxpayers money. You cannot build a road in this state and you cannot maintain it properly; you are wasting taxpayers money, and the citizens of Victoria are paying the price. I agree, there are potholes now in metropolitan Melbourne. I do not know how you are not tripping over them on your motorbike, Sonja. Honestly and truly, it is a shocking state of affairs. Let alone the roadsides – they are just a disgrace. We have got graffiti everywhere and we have got weeds everywhere. We have got broken down wire rope barriers never to be fixed. They cost about a billion dollars for no good reason at all. Ms Tyrrell is absolutely right: roads are a disgrace in Victoria, especially in country Victoria.

A member interjected.

Bev McARTHUR: I will tell you what we did: we gave a million dollars to every rural council for roads and bridges funding, which they could look –

A member interjected.

Bev McARTHUR: You took that away. You cut it. You are busy –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Please. Mrs McArthur wants to do future contributions as well. She needs to save her voice a bit.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you, President. It is a real struggle here sometimes. The interjections are just writ large. It is absolutely provoking. I am being provoked all the time, Mr President. Look, we need these documents. We need the assessments, the examination, the reports and the ministerial briefs – now, that will be fascinating; let us get them – about the quality of Victorian roads. Thank you, Mrs Tyrrell, for bringing this to our attention. It is critical we learn exactly what they are not doing in Victorian roads.

Motion agreed to.

State Electricity Commission

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:26): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes that the State Electricity Commission (SEC) 2024–25 report was tabled on 30 October 2025;

(2) further notes that the SEC is a state-owned company led by an independent board of directors, with the Premier and Treasurer being SEC shareholders;

(3) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within four weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution:

(a) the agendas and minutes of all SEC board meetings held since the SEC was declared a state-owned company under the State Owned Enterprises Act 1992 on 14 November 2023;

(b) the agendas and minutes of the audit and risk committee meetings held since 14 November 2023; and

(c) the agendas and minutes of the investments and assets committee meetings held since 14 November 2023.

It is a very simple motion. The SEC is a very secretive body. It is a private company. It is not able to be FOI-ed and it is a body that deserves much more scrutiny. Even the old SEC was able to be FOI-ed, but this one cannot be, and that is why this documents motion is so important. The documents can be directed to be provided to this chamber by a motion of this chamber, and that is what we will seek to do through this motion. We need to see the decisions that are being made by the SEC, the basis of those decisions and how they are being proceeded with.

It is clear that the SEC is not the SEC of old. I mean, it had 28,000 employees. This one is a much more modest body, with just a small number of people in the Latrobe Valley. In fact in the Latrobe Valley they actually work in the GovHub when they are not working at home. There is a very small number of people, less than a handful, and that is fine. That is a very modern way of conducting themselves. It is not the SEC of old with 28,000 employees down in the Latrobe Valley, but it is a body to which government money has been committed – significant government money. It has begun to make some investments, and it is important to investigate and scrutinise the decisions that are being made there.

The body has now taken on the role of providing electricity for all government entities – the whole lot. Every school, every hospital, every government office, every park rangers hut – everything that is run by the government – is now being provided with electricity by the SEC. Goodness knows how much more they pay for that. There is a real question here. I am a former health minister; we actually got huge deals by going out to market and using Health Purchasing Victoria to crunch some of the energy providers and get very cheap deals, which helped our hospitals have more money. The opposite process is now occurring with the SEC. There is no competitive process. There is no competitive neutrality. What is happening is every government agency is forced to go via the SEC, and they are paying more. But there will be assessments of that. Some of that will come to the board no doubt, and we want to see exactly those sorts of pieces of information – what processes the SEC has gone through in its planning and in the steps going forward.

This is a motion that is heavily in the public interest. You cannot FOI this private company – it is a publicly owned private company – through normal FOI channels. However, we can get to see these documents through a documents motion in this chamber. For that reason it is particularly pertinent that this motion comes before us today and it is particularly pertinent that those documents are provided. It is in the public interest for us to scrutinise the enormous expenditure of public money and the decisions that have been made to mandate every single government agency going through the SEC.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (10:31): Many in this place have been eager to see results, and rightly so. The SEC represents one of the most significant reforms in Victoria's energy landscape in decades – a return to public ownership, a recommitment to affordable energy and a major step

forward in our transition to a renewable energy future. Let me say from the outset that we will not be opposing this motion, Mr Davis. We welcome the opportunity to highlight the extraordinary progress that has already been made. I am not going to talk down public ownership. We are getting on with building the SEC. We are putting power back in the hands of Victorians and accelerating our transition to cheaper, cleaner and more reliable renewable energy.

Construction is underway, for the benefit of the chamber, on the SEC's first two major projects, both right here in Victoria and both publicly owned. The Melbourne renewable energy hub will become one of the world's biggest batteries, with 600 megawatts of capacity and 1.6 gigawatt hours of storage, enough to power over 200,000 homes during the evening peak-hour period. It will be the first publicly owned energy asset connected to Victoria's grid since the 1990s. The second is the Horsham renewable energy park, the state's first 100 per cent publicly owned renewable generation project since privatisation. This is a 119-megawatt solar farm, a 100-megawatt battery and a $370 million investment by the SEC. It will power 51,000 homes and deliver jobs and investment in regional Victoria.

In fact the SEC is not just about building projects; it is also powering the state. Mr Davis is right that the SEC is powering many, many public assets. Since 1 July the SEC has been supplying 100 per cent renewable electricity to all Victorian government operations, powering our schools, our hospitals, trams, trains and even right here in Parliament House. When the Metro Tunnel opens in early December, it will be powered by the SEC. Through the SEC's one-stop shop – one that I have spoken about in this place a number of times and one that I am entirely excited about – over 14,000 households have already received support to electrify their homes and cut power bills. That is what public ownership delivers: clean, affordable energy and really trusted advice, which I know is so vital as we make the transition.

That is what this is all about: making clean energy accessible, affordable and achievable for every Victorian household. The SEC is becoming a trusted partner for families and communities looking to take control of their energy use and cut costs at the same time. As has been mentioned in this place a number of times, we are backing the transformation of the Victorian energy grid with serious investment, including the Victorian government's commitment of an initial $1 billion to deliver 4.5 gigawatts of new renewable energy and storage projects – enough to power 1.5 million homes. This investment will secure jobs across the state, attract private co-investment and ensure Victoria remains a national leader in renewable energy and climate action.

We cannot talk about the SEC without addressing its history, because, as Mr Davis has said, the SEC was around in its previous iteration many years ago – 30 years in fact. Thank you for familiarising the chamber with some of the extraordinary statistics of the time of the previous SEC. Thirty years ago the Liberal government, under Jeff Kennett, sold off the SEC, and with that they also sold off energy security. What happened was that prices went up, workers were sacked and private energy companies made billions while ordinary Victorians paid the price. The generators alone made $23 billion in profit at the expense of Victorian households. In the Latrobe Valley more than 7000 jobs were lost, with thousands more across the state as our linesmen, maintenance crews and support staff were shown the door. Thirty years later they have still got some lessons to learn across the aisle, I have got to say. What I have heard from the Leader of the Opposition is an open declaration to tear down the SEC, if elected.

David Davis interjected.

Sheena WATT: No, I said the Leader of the Opposition, not the leader in the chamber. Imagine that – there is a commitment there to tearing down a publicly owned energy provider at the same time that it is helping thousands of Victorians to save on their energy bills and driving the biggest renewable energy build in our state's history. Victorians deserve better. They deserve a government that is standing up for them, protecting their assets, creating jobs and bringing power back into public control.

We here on this side will continue to look forward, to build up the SEC to, power Victoria's future and prove once again that when Victorians own their energy everyone benefits.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (10:36): I am very pleased to rise to support Mr Davis's motion 1141 in the house today in relation to documents for the SEC. It is a state-owned private company and therefore cannot be FOI-ed, so I believe it is very pertinent to Victorians that this chamber has the ability to scrutinise the SEC and investigate whether the SEC is living up to expectations.

My office is in Traralgon. I love the valley. It is a place I spend a lot of time. If you went down to the valley during the campaign in 2022, I remember at the time the Premier Mr Andrews and the minister for energy, Minister D'Ambrosio, popped down there. They stood in front of the closed old Yallourn power station frontage – it is a very old building – and they spoke about bringing back the SEC. While they were doing that they were handing out little show bags, calico tote bags with 'SEC' on them, and a whole level of paraphernalia that they thought was a winner. Clearly it was not a winner. My colleague and our member for Morwell Martin Cameron produced a hat of his own. We will call it a gimmick. He paid for it out of his own pocket, but rather than SEC standing for 'State Electricity Commission', it was 'Soaring energy costs', and that got a huge run. The people in the seat of Morwell in the Latrobe Valley viewed the gimmick, the stunt that is the SEC with cynicism and with a shrug of the shoulder on most occasions.

What they are not shrugging their shoulders at is that over the last 11 years this government has overwhelmingly abandoned the Latrobe Valley. I could give you a list as long as my arm of promises that were made and things that were broken. But the major thing about the SEC that was sold – the Premier, and we still hear it today, was selling – as creating 59,000 jobs and being a boon in the area of the Latrobe Valley. Let me explain to you that as of this week the figures are out, and only 4 per cent of the revamped SEC workforce is based in the Morwell office as at June 2025.

A member interjected.

Melina BATH: The GovHub – in fact, if you wanted to take a tray of coffee in to the SEC workforce, you could do it with one hand. This is very disappointing because we have heard government members in this place and all over the place talk about this, and there are really not the results on the board. In 2023–24 the Melbourne-based staff were 44; the Latrobe Valley staff was one single person. In 2024–25 the report says that there are 119 staff in Melbourne and five, apparently, in the Latrobe Valley.

This government has overseen the closure of many things in the valley. The unemployment rate is unfortunately one of the highest unemployment rates in the whole state. What we see constantly is this government throwing money at themes without the results. I will be very interested, because I am very sure that the Latrobe Valley Authority that has now come and gone was apparently a fabulous idea. Initially it had a purpose, which was about transitioning those workers from Hazelwood into new careers and into new jobs. They did a lot of retraining. I know one specifically was on becoming an ambulance driver for transport, and they did all the courses and then there were no jobs in the area whatsoever. We have heard promises from this government. We have heard from the Latrobe Valley Authority; it has come and gone – $300 million – at the end of its tenure and at the end of its space. Go and look it up. There is a brochure; it is a glossy brochure. There is no pathway for this government that has a direction for our people in Latrobe Valley. It was all aspirational. It was all the vibe. This is what this SEC is. Our people deserve better. I will be very pleased to see the ins and outs of these reports when they are tabled in Parliament.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:41): I am pleased to rise to speak on Mr Davis's short-form documents motion seeking various documents and board minutes from the SEC. I am not sure what is more of an anathema to the Liberal Party, public ownership or renewable energy, because they are opposed in equal measures at different times to both. We know that they are

opposed to the public ownership of energy assets here in the state of Victoria, because they sold them all off when they were in government. The rampant privatisation agenda of the Liberal Party under Premier Jeff Kennett sold Victoria's energy assets, and Victorians paid the price over decades.

We know that the Liberal Party and the National Party are opposed to renewable energy. They are opposed constantly in this chamber, beating a path to the door to denigrate and argue against renewable energy projects across this state and the infrastructure that makes them possible. I think members of the community can legitimately be confused and concerned about what the Liberal Party in particular stands for. I think it is pretty clear where the National Party stand on renewable energy: they do not support it. I think they are particularly concerned, particularly at the moment, about what the Liberal Party thinks about renewable energy in this state and in this country, because they are witnessing from the Liberal Party federally and at a state level an opposition to renewable energy. They are opposed to projects that are delivering cheaper forms of energy with lower emissions to Victorians.

Perhaps through this documents motion, through access to various minutes that Mr Davis seeks, the material that he hopes to gain might elucidate for him a path forward and might explain better why it is that investments in renewable energy in the state of Victoria are exactly in the interests of Victorian households, because we know this government is pretty clear that a renewable energy future backed by a publicly owned SEC providing renewables into our grid is better for households because renewables are cheaper, it is better for the environment because there are fewer emissions and it is creating jobs right across this state. That is what is driving Labor's agenda on energy. That is what is driving Labor's policy – to have cheaper power across Victoria backed by a publicly owned SEC.

We have got no idea what the Liberal Party believes in. We have got no idea what the Liberal Party really thinks. All we hear is their opposition to renewable energy. All we hear is their opposition to renewable energy projects. All we hear is their opposition to policy frameworks that seek to reduce the pollution that comes from our energy production sector. I think it is perfectly reasonable for Victorians to be absolutely confused by what they stand for and concerned about what might come next, because there is no plan from the Liberal Party about what comes next. They do not have a plan about where future energy supplies in this state or in this nation are going to come from. They are just opposed to what Labor is doing. As I said, I do not know if their opposition stems from the fact that they are against public ownership or from the fact that they are against renewable energy. But whatever it is, whatever the reason behind their opposition to publicly owned renewable energy in this state – and maybe these documents will help clarify that for them – what we really want to see and what Victorians deserve to see is a very clear articulation about what their plans are for the future. Is it more privatisation? Is it more pollution? Is it less renewables? That is what they need to clarify to Victorian people about the future that awaits them.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Private members bills

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:46): I move:

That this house notes that:

(1) the Allan Labor government has a policy of never supporting private members bills;

(2) this policy undermines democratic parliamentary processes and prevents non-government members from fulfilling their essential duties;

(3) where they support the principle of private members bill, the government will often introduce an identical bill in their own name months later, wasting Parliament's time and resources;

(4) some of the most important pieces of legislation in Australia were the result of private members bills, including marriage equality and compulsory voting;

(5) no other jurisdiction in Australia shares this policy, by comparison, in New South Wales there have been 35 private members bills passed between 2001 and 2022;

and calls on the Victorian government to end their policy of not supporting private members bills.

Private members bills give non-government members and backbenchers the opportunity to put forward proposals to change the law to be considered by the government. In an ideal world, where these bills would improve the lives of Victorians, the government would offer their support for them to be passed. But in the last 40 years only two private members bills have passed the Victorian Parliament. The last time we passed a private members bill was all the way back in 2001. You will of course be asking yourself what the Bracks Labor government considered so important that it was willing to break with tradition and pass a private members bill. If you guessed a bill to provide for the pooled investment of trust funds for the benefit of Scotch College, to minimise administrative costs and increase investment income, you would be correct. This bill was introduced by the shadow health minister and former teacher at Scotch College Mr Robert Doyle. It passed the Assembly after being ruled a private bill but treated as a public bill, and the fee deposit was paid. My colleague Mr Davis and I were having discussions about private members bills compared to private bills yesterday, and in this instance, because this bill was treated as a public bill, we will discuss it more in the context of private members bills.

Interestingly, in Victoria's Legislative Assembly the promoter of a private bill has to pay the Department of the Legislative Assembly a deposit, which at the moment is $1000, before the second reading. I did not know that fact either. Unlike the Legislative Council, the Legislative Assembly standing orders also require the promoter of a private bill to reimburse all expenses for preparing the bill, including drafting, printing, circulation and the costs of any select committee appointed to consider it.

Despite it being over 20 years since Mr Doyle's successful private members bill, no other private members bill has passed in Victoria since. The Allan Labor government have explicitly stated that they have a policy of never supporting private members bills. As outlined in this motion, their policy comes with significant consequences. Not supporting private members bills undermines democratic parliamentary processes and prevents non-government members from fulfilling their essential duties. It also wastes Parliament's time and resources, not just in the time and effort given to crafting bills that are inevitably set up to fail but also in the government's tendency to introduce an identical bill in their own name months later if there is support for that bill. In August 2015 former member of this place Fiona Patten introduced the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Safe Access) Bill 2015, and then in October 2015 the Labor government introduced a bill with the exact same name, which was later passed into law.

These bills were designed to create safe access of 150 metres around reproductive health clinics in order to protect the rights of people accessing a legal medical service to do so without fear of intimidation and harassment. The substance of these two bills was largely identical, but thanks to the government's failure to even consider passing or amending Fiona Patten's bill, the commencement date of these changes was delayed by several months. While laws were eventually passed to protect access to reproductive health services in Victoria, they did not need to be delayed simply because this government refused to support a private members bill.

New South Wales later passed very similar laws, and they used a private members bill to do so, allowing these changes to commence as soon as possible. Maybe Victoria should be more like New South Wales. There are real consequences to the Allan Labor government's blanket ban on not supporting private members bills in all cases, but especially where bills are intended to address serious risks of people being harmed, like safe access zones for abortion services. It is shameful that the Victorian government's pride would stand in the way of passing these laws as soon as possible.

In the time since we have been elected, Legalise Cannabis Victoria has introduced private members bills to allow medicinal cannabis patients to drive if not impaired, establish standalone industrial hemp legislation, expand vicarious liability laws to give victim-survivors of institutional child abuse better access to justice, decriminalise begging and of course regulate the adult personal use of cannabis. For

many of these we had support from the government for the principle but never for passing of the bill. There is so much we miss out on because of this government's stance.

Upon reflection, some of the most important pieces of legislation in Australia were the result of private members bills. The Marriage Amendment (Definition and Religious Freedoms) Bill 2017, the legislation that finally made marriage equality a reality for Australians, was a private members bill. If you want to look back even further, compulsory voting was the result of a private members bill. Introduced in 1924 by Senator Herbert Payne – one of mine – it responded to low election turnouts, which were threatening the ability of democracy to represent the interests of all Australians. This included a turnout rate of just under 46 per cent in Senator Payne's home town of Tasmania. Once passed, the legislation had a profound effect, and by the next election in 1925 turnout was over 91 per cent. Our compulsory voting system is something Australians absolutely treasure. It has helped to protect our democracy and ensure that no voter is disenfranchised, and without it I doubt I would be standing before you today as an elected member of Legalise Cannabis Party.

The point of this brief walk through history highlights that private members bills show you that when a government is a victim of cowardice, private members bills can be the mechanism for history-making legislation. They provide an arm's length approach to lawmaking when the government does not have to stamp its name on that legislation. But here in Victoria we do not have that same opportunity. For whatever reason, this government has chosen to have a strict policy of never supporting private members bills and without exception. This policy is unique to Victoria. Nowhere else in this country will you find such a stubborn government that is so willing to waste Parliament's resources and make sure that it gets to stamp its own name on every bill that passes through this place.

By comparison, in New South Wales there have been 35 private members bills passed between 2001 and 2022. Another walk through some historical highlights of private members bills in New South Wales will show you that these bills included decriminalising abortion, addressing modern slavery and the earlier mentioned bill to provide safe access zones around reproductive health clinics. Earlier this month there was even talk of extending sitting days in the New South Wales Parliament to allow additional time to pass private members bills in an effort to woo the crossbenchers. Unfortunately, while our Legalise Cannabis colleague Jeremy Buckingham is getting wooed in New South Wales, we get the cold shoulder. The private members bills they are considering in New South Wales are diverse, reflecting the diversity of Parliament and a willingness to engage in good working relationships across the political spectrum.

Across all jurisdictions, political parties, majority and minority governments we are consistently seeing a willingness to consider passing private members bills, except here in Victoria. We have run the numbers and, on average, just over 10 per cent of private members bills outside of Victoria are supported in all other Australian states and territories. By doing so, these governments get a more representative and vibrant democracy that deals with issues that have otherwise been put in the all-too-hard basket. Between Legalise Cannabis Victoria, the opposition, the Animal Justice Party, the Greens, One Nation, the Libertarian Party and the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers – imagine the vibrant and wideranging legislation that could pass given the chance. That is why my colleagues and I are calling on the Allan Labor government to end their policy of not supporting private members bills.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (10:56): I will start my remarks this morning by acknowledging that every member who steps into this chamber does so because they care deeply about the people they represent. We may come from different parties, different perspectives and different life experiences, but we are united by a shared commitment to improving the lives of Victorians. This motion raises an important question about how ideas from non-government members are handled in this Parliament. It invites us to reflect on how we can balance the responsibilities of governance with the opportunity for all members to contribute to public policy.

There are a range of issues that constituents bring to my attention. However, I must say that the question of private members bills is something that has not come up often. If I am reflecting just on

the last couple of weeks and conversations I have had out and about in our community, folks are talking to me about their daily lives. They are talking about cost of living, they are talking about housing, health care, transport, jobs and education. I have got quite a few parents who have recently met with me and discussed challenges around getting the kids to school safely. We have got older residents talking to me about access to health care, and some of the young folk are talking to me about housing. To my mind, those conversations that I have had over the last couple of weeks are fairly reflective of the things that matter to Victorians, and those are the things that this government is in fact entirely focused on delivering.

It is important to remember that in our system governments are elected to govern. They introduce laws, they manage budgets and they deliver services. That responsibility carries with it obligations to make sure that every law passed by this Parliament is workable and in the public interest. The checks and balances of our laws make sure that when a law passes, it can be implemented in the real world and beyond just the debates here in the chamber. That is why, as I understand it, successive governments have reserved the formal introduction of legislation to the executive. It is not to exclude anyone, as I understand it. It is to make sure that every law has been properly tested and vetted to ensure that it is ready to serve the people of our great state.

That said, though, I will affirm that good ideas come from many, many different places, from our communities, from our experts, from our advocacy groups and peak bodies and from people working every day on the ground to deliver services. When a good idea comes forward, this government has shown time and time again that it will listen and develop it further so that it can be implemented in a way that is responsible and consistent. It is entirely committed to that collaboration, and it is how the system should work.

Here in Victoria we hold ourselves to a very high standard of legislative quality. That is why our Parliament has been able to deliver some of the most significant and progressive reforms in Australia. As we heard this morning, we are the lead Parliament on a range of national bills, and that is for a reason. There are, of course, some reflections on some other pieces of legislation that have passed through here recently, including the establishment of treaty. There is massive transformation of our education system; investments into infrastructure; reforms in renewable energy, which I spoke about a moment ago; equality; education. These changes have been built upon with careful consultation, strong evidence and a strong sense of purpose, and that is what good governance looks like.

I want to take the moment, if I can, to acknowledge that members across the chamber have contributed thoughtfully to the development of legislation through their advocacy, committee work and engagement with the issues that matter to Victorians and that this Parliament functions best when debate is genuine, respectful and focused on the shared goal of improving the lives of our communities. The motion before us suggests that allowing more private members bills would strengthen democracy. I would say that democracy is more than the number of bills introduced; it is about the quality of the debate, the integrity of the process and the respect that we all show each other in our roles. There are many, many ways for non-government members to put ideas on the record: there are motions, adjournment debates, constituency questions and parliamentary inquiries, and it is worth noting that many of these processes can lead to real change. I am thinking of the many inquiries and committee reports that have shaped government policy, sometimes quietly but with genuine impact. These outcomes remind us that collaboration often achieves more, and sometimes it is not put in the spotlight but nonetheless is worth celebrating.

When I think about what brings people to support us to come into this place and their expectation of us, I am reminded that it is to deliver practical outcomes – and I go back to those conversations that really have shaped my thinking over the last couple of weeks. I again thank those members of the community that want to see improvements and upgrades to our hospitals. They want to see more schools for our growing, thriving communities. They do want to see more secure jobs and more safe jobs, and they want to see opportunities for their kids. They want to know that their government is focused on the delivery of all of that, and that is why our energy as a government remains focused on

delivering for Victorians through our investments in health, education, transport and housing. And there has been, to that end, enormous investment.

In Northern Metropolitan Region, if I am just to pick my particular region, I will say that we have the Metro Tunnel opening ahead of schedule. We have got upgrades and improvements to hospitals right across the region, including the new virtual ED services happening that were recently announced. There is some cost-of-living support aimed at addressing the needs of households across the state. These have all happened because of really disciplined planning and a clear line to the priorities of our state. We are also able to do that because we have a very structured, coordinated approach to legislation, one that ensures that every law we pass is sound and it is sustainable. I believe that the current approach strikes the right balance between inclusion and responsibility, and it allows every member to raise ideas but also ensures that the government can deliver them effectively. The balance really is at the very heart of responsible government, and that is why so many Victorians have such esteem and confidence in the institutions of our state.

Of course I want to take a moment to conclude my remarks by thanking and acknowledging Ms Payne for bringing this motion forward, knowing that with it comes an important opportunity to prompt discussion and have some time to reflect on how we serve the people of this state here as members of the Legislative Council, and reaffirming that at the end of the day we are all here to serve our communities. For those of us here on the government side, we are very firm on what those priorities are, and they are those that I have already listed. But I can say it again: it is getting our kids a quality education, affordable energy, a transport system that serves the needs of our community, as well as a real focus on getting the job done. That is where our focus will remain. We will continue to listen to really good ideas, to work respectfully with all members of this chamber and to keep delivering the services and infrastructure that matter most. And that is the kind of Parliament that Victorians expect: one that works together, stays grounded in the community and keeps people at the centre of everything that we do. I look forward to actually following more of this motion as it passes its way through our chamber today. I will just conclude my remarks by thanking Ms Payne for bringing this to me. It is an opportunity to reflect again on the good functioning of our chamber.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (11:06): I thank Ms Payne for bringing this important motion to the house, one that we will certainly be supporting. I understand that every government has its own agenda, and you can rest assured that when we turf these guys out of government, we will come with our own agenda. And it should be a strong agenda; it should be a vision for the state. But I really agree with Ms Payne in that the government's bizarre policy to never accept bills that are non-government ones is, I think, an undermining of the democratic processes. We have crossbench members here and we have an opposition here who also have been democratically elected with a job to do, and it is upsetting that rather than looking at every bill on its merit, it is a straight-out no when the person that is presenting the bill does not have the title of Labor MP. The reality is that even when a private members bill is carried in this place, as soon as it goes to the lower house here it is struck off before even the first reading, and that is a reality. Even when it is carried in here, it will not be debated in there. We were standing out in the hallway just a few minutes ago, talking about when the last time a private members bill was in fact debated in the lower house in Victoria, and we think it was around 2001. So the fact that as soon as a private members bill gets over to the lower house and is struck out, that actually makes the lower house in Victoria the most restrictive chamber in Australia – let that sink in. That is unbelievable.

There are a few things that I wanted to highlight just in the short time that I have, something that is mentioned here in point (3). It says:

> (3) where they support the principle of private member bill, the government will often introduce an identical bill in their own name months later, wasting Parliament's time and resources …

The first time that I saw this happen was in May 2023, when the coalition brought forward the Corrections Amendment (Parole) Bill 2023. That was a bill designed to ensure that serial killer Paul Denyer would never see the light of day again. He was a murderer that hated women and had three

victims: Elizabeth Stevens, Debbie Fream and Natalie Russell. I remember that day so clearly, because I remember looking up and just above the clock there was seated one of the victim's sons, and he never really got to know his mother because of this violent killer. I remember thinking the arguments were so good from both sides, the speeches were so good. And I just remember looking up at him as a division was called, and then the people that wanted this law passed stood in their places. All of a sudden, 'Oh it's a violation of human rights. It's this. It's that.' came from the government side as they stood in their places. Seeing that kid burst into tears and walk out broke my heart.

But what was, in my opinion, not only extremely heartless and hypocritical was in November 2023, just about six months later, when the government brought in their own identical bill called the Corrections Amendment (Parole Reform) Act 2023. Then it was like it was flipped. We supported that bill because it is on principle and merit. But of course all these speeches were completely flipped, and all of a sudden the government completely supported it. I just think that that is worth pointing out because it is absolutely correct, in my opinion, that bills in this place should be debated on merit and not just on deals and then coming back later and pretending that you were the architect of this fantastic idea and realising that people have been hurt in the meantime.

The second thing I want to raise that relates exactly to this private members bill is the fact that the coalition brought bills forward here in this place four times to ban machetes, and the government's speaking points every time were completely about how stupid we were and how the coalition just does not get it – you know, their same talking points. We hear them for hours and hours every second week. But then seeing Premier Jacinta Allan come out and say 'We're banning machetes' and saying all the things that just a few weeks before in the four times they rejected these bills they did not believe in I think was entirely wrong.

We saw it last week where we were trying to use a private members bill to ban face masks at marches. It was staggering to me because I had the December 2024 media release up where Jacinta Allan promised to ban face masks at protests. I was literally looking at this and looking up and hearing all the guys on this bench saying how wrong it is, how disrespectful it is, how unfair it is and how it is a breach of human rights to ban face masks at protests. Fine. If that is what you are really believe, argue it. But we know the fact is that in order to fulfil that promise, those same people that said that are going to be standing up to support the banning of face masks at protests very soon. You know, sometimes these are uncomfortable realities, but this is the reality of a Labor government. I could go on about many more, but time does not permit that because there are a few other things I want to talk about.

Of course we cannot avoid the whole bail question, can we? In the last two years bail has been changed. And I laughed. I wrote down actually, when Ms Watt was speaking, something that she said. She said why they could not take the bills of lowly crossbenchers or opposition members was because 'we hold ourselves to a very high standard of legislative quality'. That is a direct quote. Well, then explain why bail has had to be amended four times in this place in the last two years. If the legislative quality is held to such a high standard that only government members can possibly get it right, because none of us possibly could know or have any good ideas, why then have you had to amend it four times in the last two years? And it has been more than that – we were trying to figure it out – in this sitting of Parliament. Regardless, it is one of the facts that Labor's policy to never support a private members bill, a bill that does not come from their government, has caused us to have some very tough conversations with grieving parents. For instance, I have spoken many times in this place about Celeste Manno's mum. Celeste was a beautiful young girl stalked relentlessly and stabbed to death. The Victorian Law Reform Commission did a huge inquiry into it and gave 45 recommendations that had to be done in order to strengthen stalking laws in this state. At the time Premier Daniel Andrews stood out on the steps of Parliament and he said that the laws would change, that this would happen. The then Attorney-General said the same thing – all false promises, all given to a grieving mother Aggie. Well, that report was tabled on 23 September 2022. We have consistently called for those 45 recommendations to be enacted, but absolutely nothing has been done. In fact to the Public

Accounts and Estimates Committee the then Attorney-General Minister Symes said, 'We have no requirement to respond to this.'

The other time that this happened is when you would have seen Bianca and Boyd come in here, because we all sat here for that debate where they were essentially asking that violent and high-risk offenders not be eligible for emergency management days that take them below their non-parole period. Here is a family who had a sister and a daughter bashed to death with a barbell, but because the murderer – who has shown no remorse, who has not shown good behaviour in the prison system – was locked up during COVID, he has had 427 days taken off his sentence as a discount because he was inconvenienced. When you stand there with those families who have lived through hell and they say, 'Well, what are our options?' the only option that you can tell them is to turf this government out, because the government will not pass a private members bill – they will not accept anything that comes from this side or from there. That is a pretty heartbreaking thing. Thank you for bringing this motion to the house, and I will certainly be supporting it.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (11:16): At the outset I would like to thank my colleague Ms Payne for bringing this important motion to the chamber for debate and shining a light on this critical integrity issue in this Parliament. Nowhere in Australia will you find a government so fundamentally averse to collaborative governance as here in Victoria. Over the years private members bills have brought some of Australia's most important legislative reforms into the Parliament. If we look at our federal Parliament – marriage equality. In 2005 the Same-Sex Marriage Bill was first introduced in Tasmania by then Tasmanian Greens MP – current Senator Nick McKim. It went on to pass the lower house in 2012. Adam Bandt's first piece of legislation was for the presumptive compensation rights of firefighters, which passed with support from Liberal and Labor MPs. Non-government MPs have introduced bills that have gone on to pass federally and create important changes in this country.

But in Victoria it is a different situation, because since the time of the Bracks government in 1999 they have had a formal policy to be blockers of all non-government legislation. As Ms Payne has highlighted, there have been some really important private members bills from a range of different parties. I want to touch on just a few of the bills first introduced by the Victorian Greens which were pre-emptively rejected by a petty state Labor government – not on their merits but based on this mindless policy. This is despite the fact that time and time again, as Ms Payne has said, state Labor has had to eat its words, backflip on its opposition and blocking and adopt Greens policy and legislation, often many years later, with the delays often resulting in dire consequences for Victorians.

Voluntary assisted dying, for example, began as a private members bill introduced by Victorian Greens MP Colleen Hartland in 2008. It took another nine years for the government to get on with the job and get that legislation passed. I introduced my own private members bill to improve these laws earlier this year. I am really glad the government has adopted many of these reforms with the bill that we are currently debating. In 2019 the Greens joined with the Animal Justice Party and Legalise Cannabis Victoria – and I would have to say this is an instructive example of cross-party collaboration – to introduce the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing Pilot for Drug Harm Reduction) Bill 2019. Tragically, at least four additional coronial recommendations were made in the time between that bill first being introduced and state Labor reversing its opposition to pill testing and introducing similar legislation. Even Greens legislation for the most logical and popular policies has been rejected by Labor on multiple occasions, seemingly out of spite than any actual logical reason. We first introduced container deposit legislation in 2009, but Labor did not concede we were right on this policy for another 11 years, leaving Victorians as losers, compared to every other state, for over a decade.

Our legislation for a parliamentary integrity commissioner to improve politicians' behaviour, in 2018 and 2022, was vociferously rejected by state Labor in this place as not needed, until all of a sudden it became urgent after one government MP scandal too many. Our 2022 integrity bill proposed mandatory diary disclosures of ministers, which was finally adopted, while our bill to give IBAC real

teeth to fight political corruption was summarily prevented from being introduced into the lower house despite receiving rare unanimous support of all non-government members when passing through this place. We have also introduced the most important but difficult legislation that the government has been too timid to touch. In 2021 the Greens introduced an incredibly important evidence-based bail reform bill, the Bail Amendment (Reducing Pre-trial Imprisonment of Women, Aboriginal and Vulnerable Persons) Bill 2021, which preceded by years the government's own legislation aiming to reduce Aboriginal deaths in custody and the overincarceration of women. Of course this was before the government backflipped, yet again, on bail to its current populist position.

The Greens' Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Raise the Age) Bill 2022 set the agenda on raising the age, pressuring Labor to introduce its own weakened version of the legislation, once again after changing its position on the reform several times. Importantly the Greens' bill also sought to ban the solitary confinement of children in youth detention – clauses that were subsequently adopted word for word by the government years later in its Youth Justice Bill 2024. I raise this non-exhaustive list to illustrate the incredible, disproportionate contribution the Victorian Greens have made to legislative reform in Victoria, time and time again setting the agenda and leading the state on the most difficult but important reforms that are then blocked and delayed by the state Labor due to its policy of blocking all non-government legislation.

I could compare Victorian Labor's policy of blocking legislation with the less petty New South Wales Labor, who worked across party lines to pass, for example, Greens MP Amanda Cohn's abortion bill earlier this year. The Victorian Greens have our own important abortion legislation that we have introduced to this place to protect the rights of women in this state, but because Victorian state Labor are unique in Australia in being blockers, who knows how long it will be before we see that kind of reform happen here. We are the lucky ones in this place, because we have general business time. In the Legislative Assembly, which has been dubbed the least democratic parliament in Australia by the Centre for Public Integrity, they do not get non-government business time at all. You cannot even get to a second reading of a piece of legislation. You are lucky if you can even first-read it.

Private members bills are such an important and collaborative part of our parliamentary systems across Australia, but this government's policy over the last 25 years not to support them, despite the merits or legislative value, puts us to shame. This government's policy is petty and the antithesis of a healthy parliamentary system. It undermines the Parliament's ability to serve its representative function. 201 private members bills were introduced to this place between 2003 and early 2024, and not one has been allowed to pass into law. In New South Wales, by contrast, from 2004 to 2024, 35 have passed. South Australia has passed over 80 since 1992, and the ACT has passed over 179 since 1993. New Zealand, our cousins across the aisle, have passed 80 members bills since 1999, all of which have been drawn for debate in their ballot system – out of a biscuit tin by a member of the public. In this place, however, where almost two-thirds of the chamber are not government members, not a single private members bill gets to pass.

Over two-thirds of us are non-government members. We have a right to be here. We have a right to contribute and bring our ideas into a merit-based debate. Collaborative governance is the essence of democracy. At the end of the day it is the people who benefit. I urge this government to rethink their policy on private members bills, because they have so much value to add to Victoria's legislative landscape. I commend this motion to the house.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (11:24): I rise to speak on Ms Payne's motion regarding the government's policy on private members bills, and I thank her for moving this motion because it speaks directly to the heart of democratic accountability. It should not be controversial, but the motion asks for the house to note that the Allan Labor government has a policy of never supporting private members bills. This statement alone ought to shock all Victorians. The government refuses to even consider legislation brought forward by a democratically elected member of Parliament – non-government members – and has lost sight of what Parliament exists for.

It is a government that treats the chamber not as a forum for debate and scrutiny, but as an inconvenience to be managed. Dr Mansfield was speaking about the Legislative Assembly being the least democratic – that is most certainly true. And the changes we saw come into place this term makes it an even worse, undemocratic chamber of Parliament. Again, that place over there is a massive inconvenience, and there is nothing the government hates more than having to deal with pesky crossbenchers and the opposition regarding private members bills, regarding getting through amendments, clauses. There have been some amendments – I think it has only happened once or twice – that I have added to government bills that have been accepted. But even in the case of amendments for government bills, the government's preference – and we saw it last night – is to have an almost identical amendment to what a democratically elected member is putting so that it is the government that does it. Instead of, in the spirit of collaboration, having a tack-on amendment from a Greens member or Legalise Cannabis member or an Animal Justice member, they refuse and just put their own house amendments up that are almost exactly the same, and they do of course the same with private members bills.

Let us be clear what this means. It means that no matter how sensible or necessary a proposal might be, the government will automatically reject it if it comes from the opposition or from the crossbench or from outside of its own ranks. It is a policy of arrogance, it is a policy of waste designed not to improve government, but to protect political pride. It is a government that has grown too comfortable in power and too contemptuous of the democratic institutions that give it legitimacy. The Allan Labor government treats the Parliament as a rubber stamp for its own agenda, and ignores the contributions of those, like in this chamber, who were elected by hundreds of thousands of Victorians to represent alternative voices. There is a reason why this crossbench looks like a *Star Wars* bar scene, because the people of Victoria made it so, and the government ought to reflect on why people have chosen to elect those members, and why the people have chosen not to give the government a majority.

The motion rightly points out this policy prevents non-government members from fulfilling their essential duties. Every member in this chamber, regardless of party, is elected to represent their constituents and to bring forward ideas, reforms and solutions to the challenges facing our state. When the government refuses to even engage in private members bills, it silences those voices and denies Victorians the benefit of diverse perspectives. We have seen this arrogance time and time again. The government's approach is not one of collaboration or respect, but one of control. When a good idea emerges from outside the government's ranks, Labor's instinct is to consider it and copy it. The government waits, introduces an identical bill under its own name months later, then claims credit for it. This is a practice that is cynical and wasteful. It squanders parliamentary time, resources and money, and creates duplication for the sake of political ownership and pride. It is a policy that puts press releases over the good. This is not how a mature democracy should operate. Good ideas do not have party labels. No-one in this chamber is big enough to believe that only the government can come up with good ideas. That is up to everyone. I have had several conversations with Mr Ettershank where we have both agreed on a whole bunch of issues. We also disagree on a whole bunch of issues. But where there are good ideas we should be able to debate them. We should be able to agree on them and agree to disagree on other issues. That is what a Parliament is for – to reflect the multitude of views out there in the community.

Again, the government's policy is petty. It is completely out of step with the rest of the country, as the motion notes. New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania are all places where parliamentary private members bills have been considered and have been passed. The government is showing its contempt for Parliament. It has become a defining feature of its long decade in office. We see the way it rams through legislation with little or no consultation, and we only have to look at what has happened this week, where the government wants to brief us on two out of three bills with less than 12 hours notice. And of course in August this year the opposition moved to introduce in the lower house the Worker Screening Amendment (Safety of Children) Bill 2025, but because of arrogant policy Labor, including Premier Jacinta Allan, voted down this bill – when it included considerable

improvements, almost identical improvements to those the government is making now – back then. It would have kept our children safe.

I actually, a long time ago, in 2023, introduced in this place a bill to ban machetes. Now, I know Mr Galea and others laughed at me and said that I was just after a 3AW interview or a *Herald Sun* headline, and the government refused time and time again to ban machetes. And then under a rush and political panic, like we have seen in the last 24 hours with their political panic about polling, they added what was almost identical to our bill to a terrorism bill. They had to seek to expand the scope of the bill in order to add a machete ban to a terrorism bill. But this is where the government fails to see the light.

Dr Mansfield spoke about an IBAC bill that the Greens passed. We also passed one, and I believe we both supported each other's bills. Both went down to the lower house and could not even proceed from there, even though the entirety of this chamber supported it.

Whether it is the Suburban Rail Loop, whether it is the Commonwealth Games or whether it is the mountain of state debt, the government has one motto, which is to avoid accountability at all costs. Its refusal to support private members bills is an expression of that same arrogance, and we know all of the other states that support them – South Australia, New South Wales, Queensland. I think what this chamber and what the people of Victoria are starting to work out is Jacinta Allan is no Chris Minns, Jacinta Allan is no Peter Malinauskas. She is not a leader. This is a government defined by its arrogance. The government ought to consider private members bills put by the those in the chamber who the Victorian people have put in this chamber to make that very same contribution. The Liberals and Nationals have always believed in the principle of parliamentary accountability. We have supported private members bills in the past, including from the crossbench, when the ideas are sensible and in the public interest, and this motion should be supported.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (11:34): I rise to speak on the motion moved by my colleague Ms Payne. As the motion notes, this government has an aversion to supporting private members bills. In the last 20-odd years non-government members have introduced over 200 private members bills into the Victorian Parliament, and the government has supported exactly none. They are not averse, however, to opportunistically cannibalising private members bills when they see a good idea. They are happy enough to repackage and regurgitate other members' work. Indeed, may I go so far as to say that, given the government's new direction in waste management and the number of waste-to-energy incinerators they have approved, recycling private members bills might be the only recycling this government does. Unfortunately, it is the type of recycling that results in more, not less, waste, as it wastes the Parliament's time and it wastes the Parliament's resources. Victoria, as all speakers have noted, is the only jurisdiction that has an ironclad rule. Every other jurisdiction has passed private members bills except this one. In that same 20-odd years during which the Victorian government disdained to support any non-government members bills, New South Wales passed 35 private members bills, including the Reproductive Health Care Reform Bill 2019, which removed abortion from the Crimes Act 1900, and the Modern Slavery Bill 2018 to combat modern slavery and human trafficking.

Ms Payne spoke of some of the bills introduced into Victoria by non-government members that were then adopted as government policy and introduced as government bills – which, of course, entailed all the drafting, the printing and the circulation of substantially the same bill. Does the Parliament really have the resources and the time to waste on such an exercise? In that context, I think it is worth noting, in terms of potholes in the road to democracy and in terms of the roadblocks that we face, that we have a situation now where, if we want to put up one of those private members bills, we are being told that the earliest the OCPC, the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel, can respond to that request is February of next year. If I may paraphrase an old saying, democracy that is delayed is democracy that is spoilt, and that is what we are facing at the moment.

Aside from undermining democratic parliamentary processes and preventing non-government members – who are, after all, representatives of their communities – from fulfilling their duties, it is staggeringly arrogant of any government to dismiss legislation simply because they did not think of it first. Wouldn't it be so much more effective and efficient to support a bill and, if need be, move amendments to it? That is what the rest of us do. Why would you dismiss good ideas out of hand? It seems needlessly defensive to me. We are all here, after all, to get the best outcomes for the people who elected us. If members are passionate about a policy and do the necessary research, engagement and drafting to get a bill to Parliament, they deserve the consideration of the government. Imagine the range of legislation we could pass in this place – laws that would benefit our communities. Because that is why we are all here – to improve the lives of Victorians. The government needs to get over this frankly absurd and arrogant stance of 'we do not support private members bills'. That is so black and white and so wrapped in hubris that it is depressing, to put it bluntly. It is outdated and it does not serve the best interests of the people of Victoria. They deserve better from this government.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (11:38): I also rise to just very briefly associate myself with this motion and support the words of Ms Payne and my colleagues on the crossbench and also in the opposition about the deep, deep frustration that we all feel with the government refusing to support or even consider our private members bills a lot of the time. The government's approach to private members bills reminds me of that meme of, 'Hey, can I copy your homework?' and it says, 'Yeah, just change it up a little', and it is two of the same picture. So many of us feel so full of obligation, knowing that we are only guaranteed four years in this place to do the things we set out to achieve. Particularly for us on the crossbench, our futures feel, obviously, even less certain. The work that goes into the consideration and the consultation and the drafting of private members bills is something that we do not do for fun. It is something that we do because we care about all of our many issues so, so deeply, and we want to see an outcome. We want to see that engagement. We want to put it on the government's agenda.

Here in Victoria, knowing that we can spend sometimes, as Mr Ettershank said, up to a year doing that work before it actually reaches the Parliament only for it to be knocked back, it is disheartening not just for us but for the communities that we are trying to do this work on behalf of. Whether it be cannabis users, whether it be animals, whether it be the many different constituencies that we represent, they want to see us doing this work and getting those outcomes. I actually have my first private members bill being drafted at the moment, and it is a piece of work that we have spent years working with the government on, being given the run-around, being told they are going to do something, being told that they will explore the issue further and with the minister constantly changing. That is the other problem: you progress this work and then the minister changes. We are going to be introducing that private members bill at the start of next year, in an election year, knowing that the government is probably just going to say 'No, thank you,' after we have done 12 months of that hard work.

As part of a minor party – I am sure my colleagues can relate to this – I often have to deal with very frustrated party members comparing me to my colleagues in other states, who are passing private members bills when they go into work. It is very difficult to explain to the passionate members of the Animal Justice Party exactly why I cannot bring a private members bill to the Parliament and pass it, because the government is frankly not interested and will not even consider the merits of the proposal that we are putting forward or voting in support of it – even if they agree with it, even if it is their own policy, even if it is something that they have told us that they will do. They have to put it in their own name.

I would like to talk about my very, very impressive colleague Emma Hurst in New South Wales. Not only can they pass private members bills, they get eight-year terms in the upper house. She has been doing her job for seven years now, and in that time she has passed five private members bills. She has passed a private members bill that outlaws forced swim and smoking experiments on animals. That is something that I am working with the government on here, but it is moving very slowly because I

cannot bring my own piece of legislation in order to outlaw it. They outlawed convenience killings in pounds. That is something that we have attempted to do here, but of course when we brought it to the chamber in the last term of Parliament the government put it through a taskforce, as is often the solution to these things – put it through consultation, put it through a taskforce, send it to a committee and then eventually we will get to it a few years later. She was able to do that in one day at work – the issue that we tried to solve for years. She has been able to give animals used in medical experimentation a right to be released. Again, that is a recommendation from the taskforce I spoke about, which we had to do here in Victoria in the last term of Parliament, which the government supported and said they will do but they have not done yet. She was again able to do that through a private members bill.

She has created tougher animal sexual abuse laws. Again, this is something that I have spoken about very, very regularly in this chamber. It is a fact that Victoria is lagging behind when it comes to our laws when it comes to animal sexual abuse. Again, this is an issue the government has agreed to work with me on. I could have brought my own private members bill. It is an urgent issue. It ties in with other forms of abuse in this state. If the government allowed me to do that work and pass these laws, they could already be in place by now. But again, we are waiting on them to do it themselves. It is very, very frustrating, particularly when you know at the other end of your work there is someone suffering or there is a victim and we could be solving that in the time that we have allocated to us. She has done all of this on top of the many other avenues that we have to pass legislation, such as introducing amendments or having inquiries.

I think something that my colleagues will be very familiar with is that when you do not have the ability to introduce or pass a private members bill here, even if you know the government is eventually going to do your thing, you have to get crafty and find new ways to do things. Another change that my colleague in New South Wales was able to do, despite me being the first member of Parliament in the country to raise the fact that it was illegal for animals to be buried with their owners due to an old religious law, she was able to fix that first. She picked it up from me. She fixed it first. The only way which I could find to do that change, which of course I appreciated the chamber's cooperation on, was to move an out-of-scope amendment which required me to suspend standing orders.

Of course those things are beneficial and useful pathways for us, but what would be the most beneficial and useful pathway to us is to trust us as members of Parliament to do our jobs. Our staff are working hard to try and solve our issues in the four years that we have here. We have one year left. There are so many things that we still want to achieve, and importantly there are still so many things that the government have said they would do in relation to all of our fields and portfolios of work and issues and areas of advocacy. We could take some of the work, we could shoulder some of the work, bring those issues to the chamber for debate and work with the government. Of course, as Mr Ettershank mentioned, the government would be welcome to amend our bills, just like we amend their bills to make this Parliament the most productive, collaborative place possible – the way that it was designed to be, particularly in this house.

So in closing I encourage the government to look to the parliaments in other states and to turn their minds to the many examples. Of course when we think about effective legislators on the crossbench I am sure many of us think of Fiona Patten. Before this debate, as I was listening to other contributions, I had a look at the number of private members bills that she introduced which ultimately did become law, but it took a long time. It took many of those pathways, consultations and inquiries only for the government to often introduce the same or a very, very similar piece of legislation. We could have saved a whole lot of time and kept on legislating in the other areas that we also need to focus on. So I encourage the government to consider what Ms Payne has put forward today, to change their policy on private members bills and to let this place function the way that it was meant to function and the way it was designed to be. I commend the motion to the house.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:47): I just want to thank everyone in the chamber today for your contributions. What has been evident throughout this debate is the sheer frustration of the lack of collaboration the government has with, as Dr Mansfield pointed out, the two-

thirds of the chamber who are non-government members. We are all capable, we are all elected to be here and we have opportunity to put forward legislation that is just met with a blanket ban of no. How can we fulfil our duties and get the best outcomes for our communities that we represent if we cannot put forward private members bills? Ms Ward, in her contribution, outlined that we are all here to serve our communities. But I think what Victorians expect us to do in this place is to get on with our jobs. And when our jobs are incredibly limited, based on the fact that there are internal policies that have to be met, it is really hard to have those conversations with our constituents and for them to understand what we are trying to achieve in this place when it is met with processes.

Dr Heath, I appreciated your contributions in this space, and I think it is really telling when someone like Celeste's mum Aggie is met with that frustration as well – putting forward a private members bill and explaining to someone like Aggie that unfortunately this will not be supported but this is a mechanism for us to try and push the government to act. It is really telling as to how we treat our constituents more broadly. Dr Mansfield indicated that this is a critical integrity issue, and I could not agree more. The government is very averse to collaborative governance. An example used there was the fact that the Legalise Cannabis Party, the Greens and the Animal Justice Party came together in a collaborative way to put forward a private members bill on pill testing. Now, eventually we saw the government act on that mechanism, but it took that collaboration and that push to make it happen. In the meantime, as the coroner's reports identified, more and more lives were lost. We have not got time to waste here. Those people that we represent, our communities we represent, do not understand the mechanisms of this place. All they understand is that we are standing before them putting forward what they see as reform that they want to see in this place, and yet it is met time and time again with an obstructionist view of wanting to have complete control over what is coming through Parliament.

Mr Mulholland pointed out that it is about democratic accountability. Again, I could not agree more. We have lost sight of what Parliament is for if we are going to continue this policy. Mr Ettershank highlighted that time and resources are wasted. We all use the same drafters. The Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel does a fantastic job, and they should be commended for the work that they do. But when we are putting forward legislation and it is inevitable that it will be rejected based on the premise that it is a private members bill, I think is telling for how we treat the resources that are the Parliament and the processes that we all must go through. As Mr Ettershank pointed out, democracy delayed is democracy spoilt, and I could not agree more.

I want to thank Ms Purcell for her contribution. I also find that in this place, where we represent minor parties, we have colleagues in other states that tend to get more of a say in how they collaborate with government. It is really hard to tell your membership base, 'We are putting forward this bill' and they ask, 'Well, will it come to a vote?' What would be the point of us taking it to a vote? If it did even pass the upper house, it would not even be read in the lower house – how undemocratic. I will leave my comments there.

Motion agreed to.

Charitable organisations

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:51): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

(a) the *Foodbank Hunger Report 2025* estimated that 3.5 million households experienced food insecurity in the past 12 months;

(b) The Salvation Army's *Red Shield Report 2025: Struggling to Survive*, surveyed almost 3600 community members who accessed assistance from the Doorways emergency relief services in the past year and reported that:

(i) 90 per cent of respondents found that it was difficult to afford essential living costs, such as housing, groceries, medical care and utilities over the past 12 months;

(ii) 53 per cent of respondents were unable to afford public transport or fuel for their vehicle;

(iii) 85 per cent of respondents experienced some form of food insecurity in the past year;

(iv) 62 per cent of respondents with children admitted to going without food so their children could eat;

(c) charities are reporting increased operating costs at the same time as they are experiencing increased demand;

(2) acknowledges the important work of many charities and non-profit organisations who provide relief for people struggling with essential needs, such as food and housing; and

(3) commends the generosity of tens of thousands of Victorians who donate time, money and resources for those in need.

Today in south-east Melbourne and probably every other electorate, thousands of people are sitting down to food provided by charities and clothing their kids with donated goods. I am pleased to take just a little time to acknowledge the generosity of donors and the vital role that charities play in Victoria. Charities have existed for as long as people have helped each other. In Victoria the first legislation regulating what were then known as friendly societies was passed in 1855. Interestingly, prior to the Great Depression, Victoria was actually one of the world leaders in friendly societies and had a thriving number of friendly societies. Indeed, before I was elected to Parliament, I worked for a company that was historically a friendly society. The one that I used to work for was the Independent Order of Oddfellows (IOOF), and they were originally set up to provide for widows that were left destitute if their husbands passed away in the goldfields. Friendly societies evolved further, considering that at the time there was very little welfare from the government. But certainly welfare did exist.

What people used to do is they would have a friendly society, often related to their trade – although in IOOF the OF stands for Oddfellows, and they were people not related to a specific trade – and they would be democratically allowed into the friendly society. The other members would decide on whether or not to allow people into the friendly society, whether they were in good standing. Then if they lost their job, the other members in the friendly society would provide them with a payment. In current-day terms, if you take into account inflation, what they got from their friendly society is actually more than what you get for the dole these days. Of course the other members of the friendly society were incentivised to find them a job because they would have to pay for their benefits until they got a job.

Also, friendly societies used to provide doctors and many other services, including pensions for widows, and many other things in Victoria, and it was a thriving thing that happened. Unfortunately, what happened during the Great Depression was there was a massive expansion of the role of the state in providing welfare, but many of these friendly societies continued on and they evolved. They existed in the spaces where government did not provide welfare, so things like retirement plans, life insurance – those sorts of things. Ultimately, many of these companies still exist today. Indeed, the company that I used to work for primarily does financial advice and superannuation and that sort of thing. Some of the other ones evolved into life insurance companies and they still exist to this day, although with a very different role from what they were originally set up for. But life insurance is quite similar, I guess, to what they were doing in providing for destitute women.

But if you want to see the effectiveness of voluntary giving in action, I recommend that you spend a little time at a place called BK 2 Basics in Narre Warren in my electorate. Years ago Kelly and Craig Warren noticed many people in their community were struggling to feed their families and started providing them with food out of their garage. Demand for their services pretty soon outgrew their garage, and a generous person stepped in to provide a shed in an industrial estate. With more generous help from corporate donors like Costco, Kelly and Craig work their fingers to the bone providing the basics to over 7000 people every week. They tailor help for people, for example, by providing a special pack for domestic violence victims so that they can set themselves up from scratch in a safe house. Many times, it is the very practical things needed when someone is escaping domestic violence, for

example. It is very expensive if you have fled a house to get all the basic stuff that you need, like shampoo and soap and toothpaste and toilet paper and nappies and all the other basic stuff that you need to survive. Many people in these situations do not have the cash to pay for all that, so I think it is a wonderful thing that we have organisations like this that are helping out our fellow Victorians who are hitting a rough patch in their life. They also hold special events so that nobody misses out, for example, on a Christmas party. They provide much more than groceries; they provide community and dignity for people who are doing it tough. I think it is worth mentioning that government has been less a help to BK 2 Basics in recent years than a burden. In particular the red tape from Casey council threatens their very existence and provides Kelly and Craig with enormous stress. But to their credit, Kelly and Craig are powering through because they know how important their work is.

The charities in my electorate are also quietly working with youth at the front line to divert them from a life of crime. They provide bottom-up solutions by helping young people address drug and alcohol dependency and providing diversion programs, introducing them to more sensible things like sports and these sorts of things. Governments at all levels should recognise the enormous benefits they provide by getting out of the way, providing tax breaks and cutting them just a little bit of slack at a local government level. The charity sector is an enormous force for good in Victoria that is supported by great people and powered by actual heroes, and I commend this motion to the house.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (11:57): I thank Mr Limbrick for bringing this motion forward, and I have enjoyed the process of reflecting on the balance between the private and public charitable sectors and the role of the state. Even your phrase about a historic thing called 'destitute women' made me immediately think of the Whitlam government and the changes that were made that allowed women to get divorced, and then the Paul Keating government that split the welfare system so it was not from a family household perspective but from an individual perspective, so that a woman in her own right would receive a pension or a payment relevant to her needs, rather than being able to access payments only through her husband or partner. That is what I would call, historically, the state-sanctioned destitution of women. So yes, there are a lot of things to think about when I reflect on your motion.

Increased cost-of-living pressures mean that many families are doing it tough and increasingly seeking food relief and emergency support. My own electorate in Western Victoria is not immune. The ongoing drought has added to the pressures on not just our farming families but the businesses and communities that rely on farmers for their income. I will go into a bit more detail on that after the delights of question time. The Warrnambool *Standard* reported on 3 June this year that 200 tonnes of emergency food is expected to be distributed across the region this year by Western District Food Share. This is an increase of 187 tonnes from last year, and that is why our government invested $6 million in the 2025–26 state budget to support the operations of the state's six regional food shares, of which the Western District Food Share based in Warrnambool is one. That investment was part of a total of $18 million allocated to continue strengthening food security across Victoria.

Business interrupted pursuant to resolution of Council of 29 October.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Greyhound Adoption Program

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:00): (1117) My question is for the Minister for Corrections. Since 2007 greyhounds that have retired from the horrors of the racing industry have been sent to minimum-security prisons across Victoria. This program has helped greyhounds prepare for adoption and people in the justice system prepare for life after incarceration. While it is clear that I have been in fierce opposition to the government's approach on youth crime and incarcerating children, which I am sure will be debated fulsomely in this place very soon, in the event where it does occur, there are clear benefits to having relationships with animals. Such relationships have been proven to reduce recidivism and provide mental health benefits to prisoners. Minister, given the clear

benefits, will you consider introducing this program at the soon-to-be-reopened Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:01): I thank Ms Purcell for her question and her ongoing interest in programs that do support rehabilitation and positive outcomes in custodial facilities. We just had a debate in this place about good ideas from the crossbench. Well, this is a good idea. I think programs such as the Greyhound Adoption Program, as you have recognised, have made a real difference at Tarrengower in terms of helping people with their rehabilitation. Obviously the announcement for Malmsbury was quite a recent announcement, and that planning work is underway. I do not want to pre-empt the work of the department, but I will say that I am happy to organise for them to meet with you, your office and your team to see how we can adopt this practice which happens at Tarrengower at Malmsbury, because as you know, relationships with animals are key. We do want to run a modern corrections system and a modern youth justice system that is focused on rehabilitating people, because we know that will make us all safer in the longer term. I look forward to seeing if this idea can be progressed. Obviously its operational environment will be different. We are committed to making sure that the Malmsbury facility will have a different approach to what it was in the past. It will be focused on rehabilitation and will have a cohort that is getting ready for reintegration back into the community. I will make sure the department reaches out to you to see if we can make a real difference to the young people and their lives and to all Victorians.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:02): Thank you, Minister, for your response. I am glad that you raised the Greyhound Adoption Program, because currently all the dogs involved in this program in the prison network come through the GAP. We know that GAP, as a greyhound industry–funded program, often uses programs like this as a way to offload unwanted dogs. However, it is the community-run greyhound rescue groups who are bearing the brunt of the industry's own overbreeding crisis and are rehoming more dogs than the Greyhound Adoption Program despite it receiving constant government funding and industry funding as well. Will any future programs implemented in Victorian prisons consider using dogs from groups that are based with non-industry-aligned rescue organisations?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:03): I thank Ms Purcell for her supplementary question. It is a really good question, because I am a fan of the current partnership we do have with Greyhound Racing Victoria. I would say on that point we probably differ, but I think we should be open to partnerships with every organisation that wants to do that rehabilitative work in our custodial facilities. That is something that I will take back to the department to consider. If you have got suggestions, I am happy to hear them.

Regional infrastructure

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:04): (1118) My question is to the Minister for Regional Development. Minister, the independent Parliamentary Budget Office has found that despite regional Victorians making up 25 per cent of Victoria's population, only 12 per cent of the infrastructure spend goes to regional communities. Will the government guarantee an increase on this percentage next budget to address the backlog of needs in the regions?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:04): I thank Ms Bath for her question. At the outset, considering you have posed the question as to whether the government in the next budget would increase an amount which you have claimed to be 12 per cent to higher, I am pretty sure I can absolutely guarantee that, because the 12 per cent figure this year is not an accurate figure; it is cherrypicked analysis that does not include projects that we are delivering in regional Victoria. Ms Bath, I am sure you are aware that we are delivering social housing, regional worker accommodation, upgrades to community centres. The Tiny Towns Fund is not included in this analysis. We have allocated more than $47 billion while in

government for regional Victoria. That is around $4.3 billion a year on average. It is not only the investment in living in regional and rural Victoria; we are also supporting thousands and thousands of jobs by the investment. So our Big Housing Build – I am sure Minister Shing would be more than happy to take you through all of those projects – is not included in the analysis from the PBO. We are building homes in Horsham, Wodonga, Colac, Shepparton, Ararat. I was in Wangaratta earlier in the year with the minister in relation to investment in that community. So Ms Bath, I am more than happy to talk to you about the investment in regional Victoria. I have had a look at the report. It is not a comprehensive report. As I said, it is cherrypicking and not a full picture of the investment in regional Victoria. It does not include a lot of the schools that we have been investing in.

A member interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: No. In fact I will take up that interjection. I am not ignoring the PBO, because I have just explained to you that I have read that report and it contains some relevant information, but it is not a conclusive analysis of the investment that is going into regional Victoria. I think I have provided you with some examples that have been omitted from the report to make that very clear to you.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:06): I thank the minister for her response. Minister, on a per capita basis, infrastructure spending per person is 57 per cent less in the regions than in Melbourne. Why?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:06): Ms Bath, that is incorrect.

Ministers statements: Victorian Multicultural Health Survey

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:07): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is building a stronger, fairer and more inclusive health system for all Victorians. Every Victorian deserves health care that is safe, respectful, culturally responsive and inclusive, no matter where they are born, what language they speak or the community that they belong to. Yet for many of Victoria's multicultural communities, navigating the healthcare system can be confusing, frustrating and intimidating. On Tuesday I was proud to announce the Victorian Multicultural Health Survey at the National Multicultural Health and Wellbeing Conference. This survey gives Victorians from multicultural communities a direct and meaningful way to share their experiences and suggest practical solutions to make our health system stronger, fairer and more inclusive. Feedback will be collected through the Engage Victoria online platform, community forums and consultation with key organisations. Survey insights will guide the future of Victoria's health system and inform the upcoming multicultural strategy, a key commitment following Victoria's multicultural review. The survey builds on the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and the recently released diverse communities mental health and wellbeing framework and blueprint for action. The survey will open in early 2026, and I encourage all Victorians from multicultural communities to have their say. Your voice matters, your experiences matter, your ideas matter and you matter.

Corrections system

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:08): (1119) My question is to the corrections minister. The government's new bail laws have led to the entirely predictable outcome of having our jails overflowing with prisoners on remand awaiting trial. They have also led to an increase in remand prisoners missing their court hearings. The overcrowded cells at the Magistrates' Court are forcing corrections staff to prioritise who they transport in from police stations and remand centres from around the state. Non-priority prisoners are having their cases adjourned and ending up spending longer in jail. Magistrates are increasingly frustrated with this situation, complaining about:

> … people not being taken from prison [or] police cells to court.

I ask: what is Corrections Victoria doing to address the unacceptable situation of remand prisoners missing their court hearings because of the overcrowding of custody cells?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:09): I thank Mr Ettershank for his question and his interest in this matter. I do note, Mr Ettershank, I think it was Ms Copsey that asked a similar question yesterday in this chamber, in this place, and I do understand there is a large public interest in this matter. What I will say at the outset is that police cells are the responsibility of Victoria Police for providing service to people held in their custody. That is just factual. I know people might not want to accept that. From the corrections side, we are making significant investments to scale up our system, so we are doing that work to make sure we can scale up, because there is clearly a bottleneck in the system at the moment. We are confident that a lot of that will be alleviated in due course. In the meantime there are a number of ways that people can appear in court. Every prisoner can appear in court in person, but there is also technology via video link, which is available at many of our facilities. We have made significant investments in this space. There have been a lot of benefits from the pandemic; we were able to scale up the technology in this space so that people can attend court. I encourage the courts and Victoria Police to make use of video links to enable prisoners to attend in this format, where appropriate.

I hear a lot of interjections from that side. I know you did not back our tough new bail laws because you want to keep those criminals on the streets, but we are not going to make apologies for taking them off our streets. Community safety is always a priority of this government. We will continue to introduce laws that keep Victorians safe.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:11): Thank you, Minister. If we can move beyond that 'it's a police sort of problem', a recent inquest heard evidence that prisoners on remand are regularly shuffled across jails and police cells across Victoria, where it can be difficult to access medication, mental health support and other vital services, and there is no access to rehabilitation programs. They are typically housed in those cells for 23 hours a day. This can lead to tragic outcomes, particularly for First Nations people, who as we know are over-represented in those police cells. Victoria Legal Aid criminal law executive director Kate Bundrock noted that:

> … clients used to spend two or three nights on remand in a police cell. Now it is common for them to spend up to two weeks and in some cases even longer …

while they await their hearing. Now more people are completing their entire sentences in prison cells. I ask: what is Corrections Victoria doing to address the housing of prisoners on remand in police cells?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:12): I thank Mr Ettershank for his supplementary question. Similar to the substantive question, Mr Ettershank, that question really should be directed to the police minister in the other place. Police cells should be a temporary solution, and police are responsible and have established processes for supporting prisoners in their cells. If there are issues with the treatment of people in those cells, that is a question really to be directed to the police minister. I will ask for some direction from the President in relation to that issue.

The PRESIDENT: As I have said before, members have got the right to ask any minister a question. A minister has the right to say that that question should be directed to another minister if they believe it is not within their remit.

Murray–Darling Basin Agreement

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:13): (1120) My question is for the Minister for Water. At a water forum in Bendigo in August 2024 the CEO of the Goulburn Broken Catchment

Management Authority warned that federal Labor's water buybacks are increasing the risk of more impacts on the ecological health of the river. He said:

> We can't have the Goulburn River treated as a sacrificial lamb to downstream needs.

Yesterday you told this house that the federal Labor government has announced further buybacks of 130 gigalitres. Minister, can you rule out any of the 130 gigalitres of federal Labor buybacks being purchased from the Goulburn system? And if you cannot, how are you going to protect the river from bank slumping, erosion and declining native fish populations?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:14): I thank Ms Lovell for her question, and I thank her for actually attempting to provide me with a question that is substantive, as opposed to what I have got so far from those opposite, including Ms Lovell, which is essentially whining and whingeing and not actually getting involved in the actual issues. The issue that is confronting those communities along the Murray is substantial, and that is why we have spent so much time making sure that we are talking with those communities and working out the appropriate responses that are very local, that are not responses from capital cities; they are responses that are driven by those communities. That is why we have developed the prospectus, and the prospectus is seen by all as the major vehicle to work out how we handle a response to a whole range of impacts as a result of the federal government's non-strategic buyback approach to the Murray Basin.

As I have said, and as previous water ministers on this side have said, we oppose the federal government's non-strategic buyback approach to the River Murray, and we do so for a whole variety of reasons. We do it because we have already made significant contributions. We do it because we do not think it is necessarily the right thing to do in terms of the environment, because the water does not necessarily go where it needs to be. But of course the other and substantive thing is that it has a major negative impact on agriculture and river communities, because we know that it impacts on the costs and it impacts on the local economies of those that live close to or on the river.

It is a matter of making sure that there is a productive and an efficient agricultural system in this state. We want to work with local communities to have a more strategic response to the Swiss cheese approach that the federal government is taking. We know that the footprint in terms of irrigation needs to be reduced, but we want to be able to do it with local communities, with appropriate funds from the federal government. We are absolutely wedded to that proposition, and we will continue to work with our local communities right along the river to make sure that we can get the best possible outcome in a situation where the federal government is the major determinant in this.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:17): All that did was confirm that you know the impact that this is having on our region, but you are not going to stop it. Minister, in June this year after the last announcement by federal Labor of additional buybacks, I asked if you would lead a delegation of irrigators and community leaders from the Goulburn–Murray region –

Members interjecting.

Katherine Copsey: On a point of order, President, I cannot hear the question.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I will uphold the point of order. There is a lot of noise from right around the chamber.

Georgie Crozier: We said nothing.

The PRESIDENT: I will take up the interjection. That is a fair interjection as far as the question goes, but I mean throughout question time.

Wendy LOVELL: Can I start again, President?

The PRESIDENT: You can. Reset the clock.

Wendy LOVELL: Minister, in June this year after the last announcement by federal Labor of additional buybacks, I asked if you would lead a delegation of irrigators and community leaders from the Goulburn–Murray region to bang on the doors of the Prime Minister and the federal water minister to ensure your federal colleagues understood the damage that Labor buybacks are doing to Northern Victoria communities and the health of the rivers. Your answer was no. Minister, in light of the latest Labor buyback announcement, I ask once again: will you, as a matter of urgency, facilitate this delegation meeting with the Prime Minister and the federal water minister?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:19): I thank the member for her question, because again it gives me an opportunity to actually demonstrate the difference between our approach and that of the opposition. The opposition, all they are about is gloss and fanfare and hopping on planes. We are about making sure –

David Davis: On a point of order, President, this is not a chance to attack the opposition, it is a chance to answer the question. This attack on the opposition is misguided. I ask you to bring the member back to the question.

The PRESIDENT: I understand the point of order. I believe the minister was responding to the nature of the question, so the minister is allowed to respond.

Gayle TIERNEY: The Victorian position is known by all, and as I have just said, we are not into the business of just hopping on planes and then that being a demonstration of action or activity. What we are about is rolling up our sleeves and working with our regional communities. I had a very significant meeting with river communities, with the councils and with peak bodies in Echuca not all that long ago, and from that those groups have also met together to work out their united advocacy so that we have got a uniform position in terms of projects that we want to put to the federal government. In addition to that, I have actually had a meeting with the minister, Minister Watt, in my office here in Melbourne.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:20): I move:

> That the minister's answer be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Ministers statements: child protection

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:21): I rise to update the house on the package of child safety bills introduced yesterday. I note a number of members today earlier mischaracterised a critical component of the child safety reforms, and I want to correct the record. The rapid review into child safety identified key actions for government to protect young children, and we are implementing every single recommendation. The review report noted that perpetrators of abuse will often move between sectors, chasing weak points to access vulnerable people and that some children may be at a higher risk of abuse, including children with disability or those who have experienced maltreatment. The review therefore made recommendation 8 – that a new shared intelligence and risk assessment capability be established. The review recommended that this intelligence and risk assessment capability bring child safety risk information into one place and that it should work together with other regulatory schemes so that there is a common foundation across social services, including disability, to better protect vulnerable people. Indeed the quality assessment and regulation division has noted that the most common sectors other than early childhood where workers are under investigation are the disability and NDIS and aged care sectors.

We are seeking to merge the functions of a number of the disability entities alongside the working with children check, which importantly will include the NDIS worker screening checks in this unit, the reportable conduct scheme and the child safe standards, into social services. As the rapid review

recommended, we are seeking to join up information within the Social Services Regulator to ensure an effective child safety net in its place.

The most recent Commission for Children and Young People annual report found that in the reportable conduct scheme there has been an increase in the substantiation rate for allegations in the disability sector – rising from 15 per cent in 2023–24 to 44 per cent this year. The time to act is now. After child safety allegations came to light I received a letter co-signed by 14 disability organisations in Victoria. In the interests of time I cannot read their full letter, but I want to highlight their key issue:

> In light of recent gaps identified in safeguarding schemes in the childcare sector, on behalf of the undersigned –

14 disability organisations –

> I write to raise the issue of similar gaps in the disability sector …

We must act in the interests of child safety for all children in Victoria, and I look forward to working with others to that end.

Cybersecurity

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:23): (1121) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Government Services. Yesterday in Melbourne the head of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation Mike Burgess spoke at an Australian Securities & Investments Commission forum. His statements represent a stark warning about the risks of malevolent foreign actors targeting Australian computer networks and infrastructure in sophisticated cyber attacks. He stated that certain foreign states are already attempting to penetrate and map our critical infrastructure and there is a risk that targeted attacks could cause chaos. There is a reason to worry that we are desperately underprepared to meet this risk. During the last sitting week a report from the Auditor-General on an audit of the cybersecurity of IT servers of government departments was tabled. This report highlighted that agencies are completely failing to update and monitor their servers and maintain high standards of cybersecurity compliance. What is the government doing to ensure the safety and security of critical digital infrastructure in Victoria?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:24): I thank Mr Limbrick for his question. It is a very important issue that is front of mind for the minister, and I am sure she will be happy to provide you a response.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:24): I thank the minister for passing that on. Whilst I have some concerns about the timeline of proposed responses to the Auditor-General's report, cybersecurity risks are far broader than just accurately accounting for and updating key servers. Mike Burgess presented examples of various attempts, both domestic and overseas, of actions and attempts to hack or sabotage private businesses and critical infrastructure. While I am both concerned and interested in how both the federal and the state governments are acting to ensure we are well positioned to defend against these threats, there is a particular risk next year. Next year Victoria will have an election, and while we retain paper ballots, which is a good thing in my mind, there are various ways that the election could be impacted, including targeting the VEC itself. Given the risks identified by ASIO and failures to maintain high standards identified by the Auditor-General's report, what is being done to ensure that the VEC and any other critical digital infrastructure is prepared for any cybersecurity threats in the lead-up to next year's election?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:25): I thank Mr Limbrick for his supplementary question. I will pass that on to the minister for response.

Commission for Children and Young People

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:25): (1122) My question is to the Minister for Children. The Commission for Children and Young People has been without a full-time principal commissioner for the past eight months since the departure of former head Liana Buchanan in March. In July the Deputy Premier Ben Carroll said the role needs to be filled with urgency. Why has it taken eight months?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:26): I thank Mr Mulholland for his question. Indeed we went to some of these matters in question time in the previous sitting week. I thank Ms Buchanan for the incredible work and tenacity that she showed in her time as principal commissioner for the Commission for Children and Young People and indeed congratulate her on the subsequent role that she went on to. In so doing I note that Ms Buchanan departed from her role as principal commissioner for children and young people early, and so the process for the recruitment and appointment of a new commissioner had not begun at the point that Ms Buchanan decided to vacate the role. That said, the role was ably undertaken for the period by Ms Singh, who was indeed pleased to do so as acting principal commissioner. Ms Singh has now returned to her substantive position as the commissioner for Aboriginal children and young people. The process is underway, and it is exactly that – a process. When it comes to its conclusion, I will be very pleased to, hopefully very shortly, inform the house of the successful appointment.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:27): Eight months. The Commission for Children and Young People is an important body scrutinising services, advocating at arms length for improved policies, regulating organisations that work with children and young people in this state and advocating on their behalf. I am sure you agree it is a very serious and important role. Is it a fact that you think there was independence, true independence without conflict, when you appointed the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing deputy secretary Argiri Alisandratos to temporarily fill the position until an ongoing replacement was hired?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:28): I again thank Mr Mulholland for his question – again a question we explored in the previous sitting week. As I indicated, Ms Singh, temporarily and for a period of time, had been acting principal commissioner and had indicated that she wished to return to her substantive role as the commissioner for Aboriginal children and young people. As I indicated in my substantive answer, the process is well underway and I hope to be able to announce very shortly that we have a new appointment as the principal commissioner in what may be only a matter of weeks. We have asked deputy secretary Argiri Alisandratos to undertake this role. Mr Alisandratos has the appropriate conflict of interest management plans in place. But I would say at the outset, from his frontline work as a child protection worker through to his service across the department, in the child and family services system and now in a role in the department that is not directly involved in the child protection system per se but in a broader Department of Families, Fairness and Housing sense, Mr Alisandratos is somebody of great integrity who will – *(Time expired)*

Ministers statements: the Torch

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:29): Today I want to recognise the work of an extraordinary organisation that I know many members of this place are familiar with and strongly support: the Torch's in-prison program. It is changing the lives of people with a history of incarceration. Led by the extraordinary Susannah Day and Kent Morris and chaired by Benson Saulo, the Torch provides Aboriginal people in custody with opportunities to engage with culture and connections through art.

Recently I had the pleasure of joining my fellow member for Northern Metropolitan Region Sheena Watt at the opening of *Future Dreaming*. *Future Dreaming* is the latest exhibition by the Torch, featuring 235 artworks by First Nations artists currently incarcerated in our state. Held at the Torch's

gallery in Carlton, this exhibition is a powerful example of how culture and creativity can become pathways to healing and rehabilitation. Each work on display is not only a representation of artistic talent, it is also a testament to the resilience, stories and aspirations of the artists behind them. Their brushes do not just paint images; they paint futures – futures of strength, culture and possibility. For many of these artists the Torch's in-prison program is the first opportunity they have had to engage deeply with their culture and to find a sense of identity, purpose and pride. The results speak for themselves. Through cultural and arts-based rehabilitation the Torch is changing lives and reducing rates of reoffending. It is an approach grounded in respect, and it works. I encourage all members of Parliament to pop down to the Torch's gallery on Elgin Street and visit *Future Dreaming* before it closes on 22 November. This exhibition is not just about art; it is about justice, dignity, culture and hope and the power of these influences to transform lives and communities for the better.

Youth crime

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:31): (1123) My question today is to the Minister for Youth Justice. Minister, your government has just announced that you are going to bring in tougher sentences for young people – laws that will lock up 14-year-olds at the same time that they are considered not old enough for a TikTok account, laws that could see children facing life sentences. It is appalling, it is reactionary and it will not make our community safer. Minister, did the government base any of their youth justice policy on evidence or just polling?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:32): I thank Mr Puglielli for his question and his interest in the government's announcement yesterday morning. I do note that our government policy of adult time for violent crime was announced by the Premier and the Attorney-General. When you are asking about the laws, about the criminal justice settings more broadly, I think it is better directed to the Attorney-General in the other place. The legislative changes to the way the system will operate will be elevating these high-level offences and the high-level harm caused by serious repeat offences to the County Court. That is a change to the way the court is structured, and you would appreciate that the first law officer is responsible for the courts insofar as the legislature and the executive go. In terms of this question, you are asking me a question that is better directed to the Attorney-General in accordance with the standing orders. I am happy to redirect that question to the Attorney-General if Mr Puglielli requests it.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, I am just troubled here. The minister says he is not responsible, and yet he was at the press conference. He has to answer questions about his portfolio area and matters with which he is connected. I would argue that he was at the press conference; he was fully in it. He knew what he was doing, he knew what was happening and he should answer questions about the press conference.

The PRESIDENT: I do not think ministers take responsibility for everything if there are multiple other ministers at a press conference.

Aiv Puglielli: Further to the point of order, President, the question was whether this policy was based on evidence – a youth justice policy to the youth justice minister. Surely that would be something this minister is capable of answering. If he is not, he can say so.

The PRESIDENT: On the point of order, as I have said before, members have every right to ask any minister any question they like, but the minister has the right as well to respond that it is not within their remit. Minister Erdogan did offer to pass it on to the AG if you wanted that, Mr Puglielli, but if you want, it can stand with the minister.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:34): Minister, which community legal centres have you consulted with which support life sentences for children and think that they will improve community safety?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:35): I thank Mr Puglielli for his supplementary question, and it is a good question to talk about how sentencing policy is formulated. Sentencing policy, under the general order, is the responsibility of the Attorney-General; I think it is important that people understand that. Insofar as this line of questioning relates to my portfolio, we are planning to scale up our youth justice system in the safest way possible.

Aiv Puglielli: On a point of order, President, the question was very specific. It was about consultation. Which community legal centres have you consulted with?

The PRESIDENT: Getting back to the response to your previous point of order, you have every right to ask the minister a question. The minister has every right to respond that the remit of that answer should be with the Attorney-General.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:36): I move:

That the minister's response be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Suburban Rail Loop

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:36): (1124) My question is to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. It is a question of financial timing. Can the minister confirm that the third of the SRL project costs that will be, in your words, 'funded through value capture' will be initially paid for by the state through new debt before any of that value is supposedly captured?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:37): Thank you, Mr Welch, for your question and for your interest in the Suburban Rail Loop, Australia's largest housing and transport infrastructure project. As you would have seen, this is a project that continues to have support reinforced for it from both the Victorian and federal governments. As you would know, the revenue forecasts of value capture will be published in the budget in the usual way. The way in which value capture is delivered will be done in accordance with the business and investment case. Do not ask me to table it again, but I have got a copy in my drawer should you wish to see it.

Value capture measures are being worked through by the Department of Treasury and Finance and the Department of Transport and Planning. The Treasurer and I are working very closely, along with our Commonwealth counterparts, on developing and delivering this part of the process for value capture and the funding model as it is set out in the business and investment case.

As you would be aware, Mr Welch, this is not the first time that value capture has been used in the delivery of infrastructure projects in Australia or even indeed in Victoria. The city loop used a levy, for example. But the specifics of value capture will be developed and tailored to each project. We do want to make sure that as we deliver that we are tailoring this in a way that makes sure that we are not just following in a cookie-cutter approach what has worked for one project in respect of this particular project. Enabling more homes and more development across the SRL station precincts, will, as you know, lead to more development and significant benefit to property developers in these areas. It is really only fair that they are being contributed to by –

Richard Welch: On a point of order, President, I have waited patiently for 2 minutes on a question that I clearly prefaced as being a question of financial timing. It is about when. If you are funding it through value capture but the value capture is not yet here, how are you funding it in the meantime? I ask the minister to return to the question.

The PRESIDENT: I believe the minister is being relevant to the question.

Harriet SHING: I will just take you up on the way in which you phrased that point of order. When you talk to the way in which the project is being financed, we are talking about $14 billion, more than enough to be able to get tunnel-boring machines into the ground next year. We are also in the process of negotiating contracts in a way that delivers best value for taxpayers.

If, Mr Welch, you are saying that a coalition government will foreshadow the end result of contractual negotiations for major projects in the budget papers, then it cannot be reasonably concluded that you would be acting in the best interests of taxpayers, which in and of itself is an interesting development. I am looking forward to making sure that as preferred bidders continue their discussions and negotiations with government, particularly in respect of contracts that have not yet been finalised, we do so in a way that delivers that value for money.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:40): Actually I am very glad to hear that you are working closely with the Treasurer, because I am sure in the next budget, or even at PAEC, you will be able to remove 'to be confirmed' from the financing lines of this project. But for the rest of the time, we are going to remain in the dark. Noting your answer, can you now please advise exactly how much money the state government initially intended to borrow to build this project? Is it $11 billion, is it $22 billion or is it more? And I ask, for the benefit of the house, that your answer be coherent.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:41): Thank you, Mr Welch. When we talk about delivering a project, again the business and investment case of August 2021 talks about an envelope of between $30 billion and $34.5 billion. We have a project which is being delivered on time and on budget, and we have ongoing negotiations for the purpose of the awarding of major contracts in order to continue work. We want to make sure also that we are delivering those funding envelopes as that funding is required to be expended. Mr Welch, you would know from your background as a financial professional –

Richard Welch: On a point of order, President, on relevance, I clearly asked that the answer be coherent. The minister has gone nowhere near it.

The PRESIDENT: I think the minister was being relevant to the question.

Harriet SHING: In respect of coherence, Mr Welch, that might indeed be a fault that lies with the person who posed the question.

Members interjecting.

Tom McIntosh: On a point of order, President, I think Ms Crozier should withdraw that comment.

Georgie Crozier: What, 'You idiots'?

Tom McIntosh: Yes.

The PRESIDENT: I am sorry, Mr McIntosh, I did not hear the interjection. I will listen more intently if there are any similar interjections.

Harriet SHING: I would just like to perhaps look to a number of the things that you have said, Mr Welch. If you are saying that the coalition would scrap certain value capture initiatives, you should say so and explain what programs you are going to cut as a result. I think we are up to about $11 billion in coalition cuts now. I am very, very keen to see where and how those cuts will be materialising.

Ministers statements: Tiny Towns Fund

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:43): I would like to take the opportunity to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is providing a big boost to our tiniest towns. Our Tiny Towns Fund is so popular, and it tends to really highlight the best of regional Victoria and some amazing people. That was certainly evident last week when the member for Macedon and I visited the Glenlyon Recreation

Reserve to celebrate the completion of their project and to officially launch the opening of applications for round 3.

Hepburn Shire Council received $37,500 in round 1 of Tiny Towns, which they used for the construction of an accessible equestrian mounting ramp. The ramp is an accessible landing area that assists horseriders of all abilities to participate in the local pony club, adult riding club and Riding for the Disabled Association of Australia activities. We met Helen. Helen relies on the ramp and the assistance of amazing RDA volunteers to mount the very calm horse Jazz. It was lovely to see Helen be able to enjoy her ride, as well as the other enthusiastic riders that demonstrated the importance of this new investment. The Glenlyon project is one of more than 350 successful projects funded under the first two rounds.

Round 3 of the $20 million Tiny Towns Fund is now open for applications. It is about supporting community-driven projects that make a real difference. Grants of between $5000 and $50,000 are available for projects in towns with populations of less than 5000. Whether it is an upgrade to a walking track along the Lake Victoria foreshore at Loch Sport or improvements to the Portarlington Bayside Miniature Railway facility, the Tiny Towns Fund is supporting projects that make a difference to these beautiful communities. The fund is just one of the many examples of our $47 billion investment in regional Victoria since 2014. We are a government that continues to invest in regional Victoria, and we always will.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:45): That ends questions and ministers statements. Can I thank –

Nick McGowan: On a point of order, President, under standing order 8.07(2), I ask you to please review the Minister for Youth Justice's answers to today's questions, in particular the correctional systems that relate to his responsibility for those prisoners on remand awaiting trial and sentencing.

The PRESIDENT: I am always happy to review answers to questions. I am going by the precedence of previous presidents. As I have stated – it is probably boring that I keep saying it – members have every right to ask a minister any question they like, but a minister has the right to respond that that particular question should be in another minister's remit. But I am happy to review it.

Anasina Gray-Barberio: On a point of order, President, I ask if it is possible for the Minister for Children to table the document that she spoke about in her members statement in relation to the letter that was signed by 14 disability advocates.

The PRESIDENT: Yes, if the minister is prepared to do so?

Lizzie Blandthorn: Yes.

The PRESIDENT: The minister is prepared to do so, so that will be tabled right now. And Minister Symes is going to get the answers for Mr Limbrick from the Minister for Government Services.

Constituency questions

Northern Metropolitan Region

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (12:47): (1955) My constituency question is for the Minister for Children. Families in Melbourne's north know that the early years are critical to a child's development. Access to quality early learning gives children the best start in life and supports parents to balance both work and family responsibilities. I am proud to see the recent announcement of $4.7 million into the new integrated children's centre at the Brunswick Early Years Hub on Albert Street, supporting the needs of growing families in Melbourne's north. Once complete, this new facility will provide up to 124 kindergarten places for local children and conveniently brings together early learning and family services under the one roof. This project is part of a stronger partnership between the Allan Labor government and Merri-bek City Council through the Building Blocks

program, which is already delivering modern facilities and expanding access to free kinder for families in Melbourne's inner north. My question to the minister is: how many projects are currently being developed in partnership with the Merri-bek City Council under the Building Blocks program? And when is this new Brunswick Early Years Hub kindergarten expected to open for local families?

Southern Metropolitan Region

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:48): (1956) Today in constituency questions I want to draw the house's attention to the clamour that is coming from so many councils across the state, including in my area. Councils have written to me in recent days in my area, pointing to deficiencies in the Planning Amendment (Better Decisions Made Faster) Bill 2025 that is being put before the Assembly. As we know, there has been a very short process here, and I have previously said in this chamber that this should be treated as an exposure draft to let people see this bill. But the information coming to me from councils shows that it is going to have a very significant impact on local councils in my area and local communities in my area. I ask the government to come forward with a way in which proper consultation can occur, the consultation to enable Stonnington, to enable Whitehorse, to enable Boroondara and other councils to have their say. Monash has not been provided any consultation and the minister should do that.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:49): (1957) My question today is to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. People in Box Hill want to see their green space protected. It is good for the community's health, for their wellbeing and for the environment. There is community concern that through the development of the SRL East project around Box Hill, too much green space, precious green space, could be lost. Minister, the brickworks is a key site in Box Hill, so I ask: will you confirm that on this site green space will be protected while the SRL East project is being developed?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:50): (1958) My question is for the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts, and it concerns the Tiny Towns Fund, a very important project that applies to regional Victoria, as the Minister for Regional Development has outlined in her ministers statement. But also there are a number of communities on the outer fringe of Melbourne, in those interface areas just on the edge there, that are also eligible for this wonderful program of grants of between $5000 and $50,000 for projects that support and enhance the local community. It is, as the Minister for Regional Development has just said, an absolutely terrific fund, and I strongly encourage all of those towns which fall into my region – those being Upper Beaconsfield, Guys Hill and Harkaway in the Shire of Cardinia and the City of Casey – to get together and to apply for these funds and to show why the outer south-east is one of the best places in Victoria to live.

Southern Metropolitan Region

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:51): (1959) My question is to the Minister for Health Infrastructure. As we have seen this week, Infrastructure Victoria released their report and showed that there is a significant amount of money – billions of dollars – required to upgrade three of our major tertiary hospitals. Now, I said at the time that the Premier needs to get out of her hard hat and high vis and get down to the Alfred and see the rats and mice and leaking pipes, and that comment actually ran on news items. I have had a number of constituents raise it with me to ask what the Premier is doing and what this government is doing to fix the Alfred Hospital, a very important part of health infrastructure not only for my electorate but also for Victoria and the country, given its emergency services and everything else that it stands for. They do extraordinary work. So the question I ask of the Minister for Health Infrastructure is: when are they going to fund the Alfred rebuild properly?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:52): (1960) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. My constituent is a resident of Hampton Park. She has contacted my office concerning road safety in the City of Casey. The intersections connecting the South Gippsland Highway with the Cranbourne Homemaker Centre rank as the third highest in Casey for vehicle collisions and near misses thanks to the high levels of traffic and low visibility. From January 2020 to December 2024, 67 crashes were recorded along this stretch of the South Gippsland Highway. While projects have been initiated addressing road safety at other sections of the South Gippsland Highway, this area remains overlooked, so my constituent asks: will the minister prioritise road safety upgrades near the Cranbourne Homemaker Centre on South Gippsland Highway?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (12:53): (1961) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Can the minister outline how the Eastern Freeway upgrades between Hoddle Street and Burke Road as part of the North East Link Program will improve travel times and make life easier for the residents in Southern Metropolitan region? The North East Link is one of Victoria's biggest infrastructure projects. It is going to take trucks off local roads, cut travel times and make our suburbs safer and more connected. The upgrades between Hoddle Street and Burke Road are going to deliver 6 kilometres of dedicated bus lanes, giving commuters, particularly those in Kew, Kew East and Balwyn North who get the bus into town, faster and more reliable public transport. There are going to be new walking and cycling paths, including a new bridge over the Yarra, new lanes in each direction out on the freeway, quieter surfaces and noise walls. The Allan Labor government is committed to easing congestion, improving connections and creating an even more livable city.

Western Metropolitan Region

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (12:54): (1962) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure in relation to connection between the southern and northern sides of Tottenham rail yard in Melbourne's west, separating locals from key services including access to shops, libraries and sporting facilities. A petition with over 700 signatures has been collected by locals, so I ask: can the minister please inform my constituents if there is any plan for a pedestrian footbridge to be installed across the corridor as part of the Sunshine hub project? I would urge the government to use this pending Sunshine hub project as a unique opportunity to address the problem, addressing the future needs of the growing western suburbs and strengthening access to the amazing community in West Footscray.

Southern Metropolitan Region

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:55): (1963) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport in the other place. In early December the Metro Tunnel will open to the public. This city-changing project was built with a core purpose of boosting the capacity in our city loop and allowing more trains to run in and through the city more often. For most commuters this means more trains both on- and off-peak. In my constituency of Southern Metro some of the busiest train lines in Melbourne stretch across the electorate. These include the Frankston, Pakenham and Cranbourne lines, as well as the Glen Waverley, Lilydale, Belgrave and Sandringham lines. Some of these lines will soon be redirected through the Metro Tunnel, with more frequent train services for commuters. My question for the minister is: how often can commuters in my constituency of Southern Metro expect trains to run with the full timetable change.

Northern Victoria Region

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:55): (1964) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Mildura is the only large regional city in Victoria not to be served by a passenger rail service, after it was closed by the Kennett government in 1993. Visitors or locals returning home are forced to pay for costly airfares or take a combined train and coach service.

Mildura is increasingly isolated from the rest of the state. This has damaging effects and is detrimental for residents' access to healthcare services, particularly for those living with a disability. Previous costings done by the Parliamentary Budget Office estimate that resuming Mildura to Maryborough services would cost the state less than $30 million. This has been supported by members of the Victorian Labor Party at state conferences through motions, and as recently as last month some of Mildura's most prominent business minds backed the campaign to bring it back. When will the minister listen and bring back Mildura passenger rail?

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:56): (1965) My question is for the Minister for Emergency Services. Eastern Victoria Region is a beautiful region with farmland, beaches and creeks, and now it is the site for huge battery farms planned at Darnum, Shady Creek and Longwarry. Locals are uneasy. They have seen what can happen. In January a lithium ion battery fire in California burnt uncontrollably, releasing toxic smoke and heavy metals across farmlands and waterways. These batteries are not just infrastructure, they are potential hazards sitting in the middle of Victoria's food bowl, which produces nearly a quarter of Australia's dairy. Our firefighters tell us they still do not have the equipment or training to put out even a single electric vehicle battery fire. My question to the minister is: why has this capability gap been allowed to persist while there are three massive battery installations being approved in our region?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:58): (1966) My constituency question is to the Minister for Education, and it concerns Essendon Keilor College, a terrific school which educates many students from my electorate. Minister, I am informed by constituents whose children attend the school that the decision has been made to close its East Keilor campus. I understand that students will be transferred to the school's Niddrie campus. Minister, at the same time as your government is imposing massive activity centres and development on this community, why are you closing a school and condemning these students, and the ones that will come, with your planning changes to overcrowded classrooms when there is clearly land there ready to be used as a school available and the area is going to need schools into the future? I understand your department has endorsed this decision. I am after a clear answer from you, Minister, as to why you have made the decision and what the land is going to be used for. Is it going to be sold off for more high-rises? We need an answer from the minister on behalf of my community.

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (12:59): (1967) My question is to the Minister for Health, and I raise concerns about the underfunding of essential palliative care services in regional Victoria. Residents have raised concerns about the lack of palliative care beds and services in Northern Victoria, and I read news reports recently about the cuts to palliative care funding and how terminally ill Victorians are being forced onto waiting lists for palliative care or being pushed into overcrowded hospitals, instead of receiving care at home, because of funding shortfalls. Palliative Care Victoria has identified significant gaps in rural funding compared to metropolitan areas, particularly in Loddon Mallee, and found that 62 per cent of people who wanted to die at home were being admitted to hospital instead. A new palliative care adviser has been appointed for six months to refresh Victoria's end-of-life and palliative care framework. What targets and specific regional funding are being provided to ensure that people in Northern Victoria can access palliative care services when they need them?

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (13:00): (1968) My question is for the Minister for Health. Barwon Health's annual report for 2024–25 reveals Geelong hospital has failed to meet its ambulance transfer target for the eighth consecutive year, achieving only 59 per cent of transfers within

40 minutes against a 90 per cent target. That is quite a miss. Most alarmingly, the report shows Barwon Health could not even meet a modest 4 per cent improvement target. They declined to disclose the actual result, stating only that it was not achieved. Page 65 shows admitted patients spent an average of 442 minutes in emergency – that is 7 hours and 22 minutes; that is the average. And non-admitted patients 257 minutes – 4 hours and 17 minutes. Minister, is this not the clearest evidence of a health system in crisis? Can you justify eight consecutive years of failure – *(Time expired)*

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:01): (1969) My constituency matter is for the Minister for Planning, and I would like to thank the minister for finally informing the Blackburn community of her intention to transform Blackburn into a high-rise, high-density activity centre. But I note that rather than the planning department and the minister coming clean on what the actual heights of the high-rise in the activity centre will look like, she decided to simply consult the community on the width of the activity centre alone, which was not done at any other previous centre. Meanwhile she sent her Labor colleague Mr Hamer out to dispel misinformation, which in effect has been an exercise in utter gaslighting of the local community about building heights, the loss of significant landscape overlay protections, the genuine redevelopment plans and the loss of tree canopy. My question to the minister is: does Mr Hamer have a formal role in the planning department? And if not, what insider briefings has he received, and why aren't the same briefings being provided directly to the community?

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

Motions

Charitable organisations

Debate resumed.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (14:02): Recognising the particular impacts of the drought on Western Victoria, through the drought relief package we have provided household financial relief payments of up to $1000. These initiatives would not be possible without the support of the huge network of not-for-profit and charitable organisations, including many volunteers from local communities. When your population is spread across such a huge area, in small communities and on isolated farms, it can be very challenging to make sure people are getting the help that they need, not just because of logistics but also because people are proud and independent and do not want to have to ask for help.

We have an amazing network of community organisations across western Victoria. Western District Food Share rescues surplus food from local bakeries, supermarkets and producers and purchases essential food products with donations. In 2024 they provided meals to around 28,000 children and 44,000 adults. In Warrnambool emergency hampers are distributed through a network of agencies, including the Salvation Army, Anglicare and St Vincent de Paul, and this is the case for many communities and smaller community groups as well. Food share and other community groups also ensure our kids are not going hungry at school. On top of the government's school breakfast club program, they provide lunches, fruit and healthy snacks to schools. That is certainly one of the programs that the Warrnambool neighbourhood house is involved with in East Warrnambool – a wonderful community organisation. Neighbourhood houses in general around our region are a safe and trusted place where people can go to get support. They also distribute food, providing community and school meals.

In the 2025–26 budget we doubled the community food relief program, investing $9 million in programs run by neighbourhood houses, community and volunteer-led organisations, social enterprises and Aboriginal community controlled organisations to make sure help is reaching those who need it the most. The latest round funded several important projects in western Victoria, including installing a walk-in coolroom for the Centre for Participation in Horsham; establishing new

community garden beds to grow fresh produce and support existing food pantry and ready-made meals programs at the LINK Neighbourhood house in Kaniva; cooking and food-growing education, improved food storage and vouchers for culturally appropriate food from local supermarkets for the Warracknabeal Neighbourhood House and Learning Centre; and expanding the food pantry program and running workshops on food literacy, meal planning and cooking skills at the Warrnambool Neighbourhood and Community Centre in Fleetwood Court in the city where I live.

The CWA have taken on the task of distributing household relief under our government's drought relief program, and I thank them for that. That is on top of the quiet work that many of their branches do identifying and supporting people in need in their communities. Across western Victoria there are clubs dedicated to serving their communities. These clubs play a big part in supporting other charities through fundraising and practical help. Depending on each town's history it might be a Rotary club, a Lions club, Apex, the Freemasons, another club or a combination of any of those. Between them these organisations often play a massive role in a local community, and a very recent example was a delivery of more than 16 pallets of toys, clothing and other goods to the communities of Macarthur, Mailors Flat, Simpson, Nullawarre, Merino and Caramut. The delivery was organised by the Warrnambool Central Rotary Club and originated from the Rotary Club of Brighton. As a recent retiree, my husband Francis helped in this process, and it was a very good experience. The president of the Rotary Club of Brighton Colleen d'Offay was quoted in the Warrnambool *Standard* on 12 November as saying she heard on the radio that our government was donating millions of dollars to help drought-stricken farmers:

> I thought, well I'm the president of the Rotary Club of Brighton and we just donated $15,000 to the farmers' relief project, we could do something …

So she got in touch with the Warrnambool Central Rotary Club president Brendan O'Neil, and he organised for the trucks that transport Bega cheese to pick up the donations and bring them to Warrnambool. From there Rotary delivered them all around, and I have to say all but 1.5 of the 16 pallets were distributed quietly and carefully to farming families over one whole weekend, delivered on the Friday to the CWA, and my husband was there with Brendan actually picking up the framework of the packaging and everything on the Monday. That is just a beautiful example of the power of a well-connected and well-networked community helping out. I want to thank the Brighton Rotary Club for their practical initiative. The lovely thing about Rotary is thinking about people other than themselves and what they can do for their own community, and this is just one example of that strength.

Many of the volunteers involved ought to be thanked, and we know that volunteers play a very strong role in charitable organisations and their dedication and skills have a lasting impact on so many people. So I want to say thank you to the thousands of volunteers that are involved in doing good works across all of the communities in Victoria, but particularly in Western Victoria Region and in particular the community that I live in, which is Warrnambool and district. I thank Mr Limbrick for raising the issue.

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:09): Volunteers are at the heart of every community, and my electorate of Ringwood is no exception. I am very proud to work in conjunction with and support very many organisations which day in, day out provide any number of services to our local community. In particular we also have our unbelievable, our valuable and our valued neighbourhood houses.

We have very many neighbourhood houses right across the state of Victoria – in excess of some 400. At the moment neighbourhood houses themselves have a campaign that is run by Neighbourhood Houses Victoria, and that is Keep Our Doors Open. Keep Our Doors Open is an important campaign. It is important because at the moment some 200 neighbourhood houses are at risk of closure. Now, that is not my assessment. That is the assessment of Neighbourhood Houses Victoria, which is the overarching body that represents our valuable neighbourhood houses. I have neighbourhood houses in Mitcham, in Ringwood North, in Vermont South and in central Ringwood. All of these houses

provide an immense service to our local communities. In fact it is believed that for every dollar spent investing in a community house, the return to the taxpayer is something in the order of $21.94 of benefit. But it goes well beyond the economics. We all know that. It actually goes to the services that these organisations provide. These services engage our local communities and bring out the very best that we have to offer. In fact each week in Victoria alone some 185,000 Victorians access neighbourhood houses and all the programs they offer. Keeping in mind that is right across 400 local community neighbourhood houses. There would not be a member of Parliament that is not affected and does not actually receive some sort of benefit for their broader community by the work these neighbourhood houses do. The CEO of Neighbourhood Houses Victoria Keir Paterson said recently:

> Neighbourhood houses are under unprecedented pressure …

And they are. They are fighting for their financial survival in very many cases, and in very many cases, if not most cases in fact, the work they do services the most vulnerable among our community. They service and assist people of low income. They service and assist people who are aged 18 to 24 in particular, our Indigenous community and our migrant and refugee communities as well. Their work is incredibly important.

But it does not just stop with community neighbourhood houses. Of course there are also, right across not only my electorate of Ringwood but also the whole North-Eastern Metropolitan Region and for that matter the state of Victoria, any number of services, organisations and not-for-profits that provide day in, day out food assistance to our fellow Victorians and those within and among our community. I note from this motion that it says:

> the *Foodbank Hunger Report 2025* estimated that 3.5 million households experienced food insecurity in the past 12 months

That is a staggering figure. In addition to that, the Salvation Army's *Red Shield Report 2025* stated that a number of people were surveyed. Of almost 3600 community members who accessed assistance from the Doorways emergency relief services, which is part of the Salvation Army's program, 90 per cent of those respondents found that it was difficult to afford essential living costs such as housing, groceries, medical care and utilities over the past 12 months. That is some 90 per cent of respondents. That is a staggering number. I think what it highlights to all of us here – most of us know this; in fact I am sure all of us know this by now – is that Victorians are under increasing pressure when it comes to the cost of living. It is not just about putting a roof over their head. As that survey indicates, it is actually about the basics. It is about being able to afford groceries. It is about being able to afford the utilities. If you cannot afford the utilities – you cannot afford the water bill and you cannot afford the electricity bill – then you will go cold, and you will have dire consequences that actually flow from that, both in terms of health outcomes and your nutrition and in terms of the way you are being housed and the way you are looking after yourself and your family.

I see this acutely every day in Ringwood at my office. Like other members in this place, I have a unique opportunity because we are given a community asset, a state asset, in the form of our office. And every day of the week, seven days a week, Eastern Food Rescue, the unbelievable volunteers who have formed that organisation – it is a volunteer-based organisation, a not-for-profit – provide a food relief service to locals. That not only services Ringwood but also of course Blackburn, Vermont, parts of Forest Hill, parts of Donvale, Nunawading, Mitcham, Ringwood East, Heatherdale and Heathmont. From right across our region locals can come seven days a week to my office. Supported by Eastland and through the good work of the volunteers of the Eastern Food Rescue, they provide food that would otherwise go to waste seven days a week. We are not talking about offcuts and the worst parts of food. We are talking about food that has literally been rescued and donated very kindly by a number of organisations and companies, local and further afield. That actually goes back to our community and helps alleviate the pressures that we know too many Victorians are facing at the moment, as evidenced not only in that survey but anecdotally from the conversations we all have as members of Parliament each and every day of the week and any number of other surveys at the moment, which tell us all in

this place that the pressures on everyday, ordinary Victorians – and by ordinary I mean extraordinary – are actually increasing. They are not decreasing.

It is opportune at this point to say that what we actually need to start doing a whole lot more of – I think this is where this motion is headed, notwithstanding that it stands as a tribute to our volunteers and that spirit of volunteerism. Ultimately it is incumbent upon governments of all persuasions to support the good work of our volunteers, because we know that they are giving their labour for free. They are also giving any number of other aspects of their goodwill and donations. In actual fact, like with neighbourhood community houses, they do not run themselves and they can only do so much fundraising. Fundraising in the current environment is a very difficult undertaking. It is very difficult for many organisations. Many not-for-profits are struggling to make ends meet themselves, notwithstanding the fact that they are servicing the most vulnerable among our community. Therefore it is incumbent that governments, including the current one, continue to appropriately fund food banks, food shares and food rescues but also our neighbourhood houses.

As I said at the outset of this contribution today, in the order of some 200 neighbourhood houses right across the suburbs of Melbourne are at risk of closure. I want to repeat what I said earlier: that is not me saying this, that is the neighbourhood houses themselves. At the risk of labouring the point, the benefit that we derive from these community neighbourhood houses is not simply about the services they are providing to those in our community who need it most – and those services range dramatically. I want to remind those here and perhaps listening at home that those services are also targeted at the most vulnerable. Not only are we providing services to our community, not only are we addressing some of the needs of the most vulnerable within our community, but in addition to that the volunteers themselves gain something from their volunteerism, which is what it is all fundamentally about. We are putting all of that at risk because year after year and currently what is happening is a reduction in the funding to neighbourhood community houses, notwithstanding the fact, as I said earlier on, that for every dollar invested what it returns in terms of economic value to the state is something in the order of $21.94. As far as investments go, this is the best possible investment any government in the country could make right now, yet their calls continue to go unheeded.

I want to revert back for just one moment to the Eastern Food Rescue, because, notwithstanding the fact that they deliver this kind of assistance day in, day out, rain, hail or shine almost every single day of the year, they also, in addition to that, do it three nights a week, so that is 10 opportunities every single week. With the assistance of Eastland and the assistance of the Parliament itself, through the opportunity we are given as members of Parliament to have our offices used by community groups and not-for-profits, we are able to assist Victorians. But I have to say, in all honesty, it is the tip of the iceberg. They are the people we see who understand that there is help at hand.

What we do not see and what we are concerned by, of course, is that behind the scenes in communities that we perhaps cannot reach – in neighbourhoods, streets, courts and cul-de-sacs – there are very many people who either do not know how to reach out for help or continue to struggle to the point that it places on them unbelievable financial stress and, in addition to that mental stress, places many families under duress and is often the cause of a number of other serious mental health complaints or issues that arise from that. In addition to that there is also the family disharmony and family violence. We know all of these issues form part of that broader question and that broader dilemma of how we make sure that we are supporting Victorians most appropriately and that those who need the help get it when they are in need of it, notwithstanding the fact they may not know how to access it. For our contribution, it is incumbent upon all of us, I believe, not only to say good things and to support good deeds but to make sure those deeds are supported in funding.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:19): I rise today to acknowledge the critical work that many excellent organisations in my electorate and across the state do to support their communities. Some receive government funding, some do not. I know many would like to and I am very keen to help them with that into the future. Many are operating in a space they have stepped into where the government was not providing sufficient action or support for community. The focus for

my contribution today, though, is to highlight that I have had the pleasure of working with many wonderful organisations in my region who are supporting Chinese diaspora communities around the north-eastern suburbs and beyond.

These not-for-profit organisations and community groups provide so many important services and opportunities to people in my region and across Victoria, particularly for those with connections to the Chinese diaspora. They offer cultural and social connection, an opportunity to showcase arts, history and regional specialities. They arrange wonderful events to mark important dates in the calendar. I really value the opportunity to connect with people and attend events such as Mid-Autumn Festival events held recently, Lunar New Year celebrations, dance and art exhibitions, networking events, provincial showcases, all sorts of engaging and enjoyable events. These organisations support Chinese Australian community members at all different stages of their lives, young and old. They offer fun social outings for international students. I am thinking of Marvin, who runs bushwalking excursions for international students and community members across Melbourne. There are family and children's activities that allow young people to remain connected to language and culture, and to learn new skills. There is just so many different organisations doing so much important work, and that I want to acknowledge.

I would like to take this opportunity to speak specifically about some of the organisations I have had the pleasure of working with, and I certainly will not be able to cover them all. But I would like to shout out to just a few. The Victoria Shandong Fellowship Association is an important organisation in my region, with over a thousand members connected to the Shandong region on China's coastline. They have a badminton club, they have a chamber of commerce, and they recently hosted an excellent Mid-Autumn gala which included folk dances, musical performances and much more. They offer so much to their members and to the broader community.

An organisation that I have enjoyed working with in my region is the Tongji University Melbourne Alumni Association. They were established back in 2017 and, as their name explains, more or less, they are a Melbourne-based alumni group of Tongji University in China. This group fosters connections between past students who are now living in our city and promotes broader education outcomes and excellence across community members and peers in various industries right across our community.

I would like to give a shout-out Burwood Neighbourhood House, which offers so many services to the local community, from support groups to social excursions to sporting events. There are English classes, there are computer and smartphone lessons, they run events and offer social groups. They have a food bank and provide knitted prostheses for breast cancer survivors. This is a community gem. It is run by a committee of volunteers – I would specifically like to shout-out Jia Hu. They are local legends who are committed to serving their community and making sure that everyone has a welcoming place that they can visit.

I would like to note the Friendship and Wellbeing Association, which hosts many activities to promote and enhance the recognition of traditional Chinese culture in my region. From stage performances and lectures on Beijing and Shanghai opera to calligraphy to fan painting activities, I very much enjoyed attending their events and welcoming a group of members recently to a tour of Parliament House.

These community-based and often volunteer-run organisations bring so much to our communities. They enrich our society. They support people in times of need. Thank you to all these not-for-profit and charitable and community-based community organisations in my electorate and beyond. Power to you and I hope you receive the funding you truly deserve.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:23): I rise to also speak on this motion in Mr Limbrick's name, which is effectively talking about the recent *Hunger Report 2025* by Foodbank and the estimated 3.5 million households who experience food insecurity or who have experienced food insecurity in the last 12 months. We do know, I think it is indisputable, that food insecurity is

rising. Many, many people in the community are experiencing food insecurity, and much of this is driven by the increasing cost of living. Of course, our much-loved volunteer and community-based organisations really fill the void to help people get access to food in a much cheaper way.

I think part of the reason why people are experiencing food insecurity – it is not only because of cost of living, but if you look at supermarkets who price gouge, but also put up prices because they are playing to their shareholders. They are about making profit these days. So when we look at those sorts of things, people who really need to access food for basic sustenance are basically battling corporate giants who really have the interests of their shareholders at heart rather than feeding people. I would like to thank Mr Limbrick, first of all, for bringing this motion forward. It is an important motion to talk about. It does not matter where they live across Victoria, whether it is in metropolitan Melbourne or in rural or regional areas, people definitely are experiencing food insecurity. For their *Red Shield Report 2025* the Salvation Army surveyed 3600 community members who accessed assistance from their Doorways emergency relief service. Some of the statistics are quite interesting. Of that pool of people – 3600 people – 90 per cent had found it difficult to afford essential living costs, – housing, groceries, medical care and utilities – over the past 12 months. Again that goes squarely to cost-of-living pressures that people are experiencing. Fifty-three per cent of respondents were not able to afford public transport or fuel. Obviously if you are needing to get to work, whether it is through public transport or your car, these things are pretty important for you to get there and to earn a living or earn a wage. Eighty-five per cent said they had experienced some form of food insecurity in the past year. Sixty-two per cent admitted to going without food so their children could eat.

Particularly on the last two issues – and I will start with the last part first; there is more to that – this is why the Allan Labor government has invested heavily in school breakfast clubs. We know that children are coming to school hungry, and if you are hungry, you cannot learn and retain knowledge, participate in sport – all those sorts of things. And you are tired when you are hungry, you are grumpy when you are tired and it is really hard to learn, so we know the importance of making sure that if they can get to school, kids have full stomachs and therefore can participate in their learning. That is really, really important.

In terms of food insecurity, this is a rising problem, and that is why our government has invested very heavily in this sector. I am going to talk in a minute about the local organisations in my electorate that have received funding, but more broadly, the government has been quite active in this space. Our government has invested not only in neighbourhood houses but also in food relief. There have been a range of coordination grants for small organisations that have coordinated or funded projects for partnerships and collaborations with regional and statewide food relief providers. More broadly, in regard to the community food relief program, in the 2024–25 state budget we invested $4.5 million to run the first round of community food relief programs, and we doubled the support, with $9 million invested to make sure help is reaching those who need it the most. Then there were two streams of grants to support local, regional and statewide food relief; local grants of $15,000 to $100,000 provided to support food relief activities; and other grants are available to neighbourhood houses, community and volunteer-led organisations, social enterprises and Aboriginal community controlled organisations.

On current food relief support, since 2020 the Allan Labor government has invested $74 million to strengthen food security, so as you can see, that is very heavy investment in that sector. In the 2025–26 budget we invested $18 million to strengthen food security across Victoria. This includes regional food shares, $6 million in that area, and Foodbank Victoria, $500,000 through the 2025–26 budget, building on the $3.3 million which we provide annually to Foodbank as well. You can see they are the global investments.

An initiative that my office undertook – and it was quite challenging to get this going, which I found really surprising – is we opened up a food bank operating out of my electorate office. We partnered with CareNet, which is a local food distribution service based in Templestowe. In doing that, we made food available to the community. We also have a small satellite food bank which we leave outside the

office door so that, after hours, if people want to come and grab something they can. It was really hard to get that going. We could not find anyone to partner with. It was very challenging; I found that very disappointing. Some of the large organisations have very strict rules around who they will partner with.

The other thing we did was start a pet food bank in partnership with the RSPCA, because what we learned from the RSPCA was that because people are experiencing cost-of-living pressures the RSPCA was saying that they noticed the rate at which people were surrendering their animals had increased, and when they were talking with those people about the reasons for surrender it was because they could not afford food to feed them. The RSPCA did have a food bank, but having a location in Doncaster for the eastern suburbs, we found that there was a strong demand for pet food as well. We also take our pet food bank with us when we go out to festivals, so it is a mobile pet food bank. People very actively come and seek us out and pick up pet food for their animals, and everyone loves to talk about their beloved pet. Whether it be a cat, a dog or whatever it is – a guinea pig – people love to tell us their stories about how important their animals are to them, and they also tell us what a fabulous thing we are doing. They always think it is very good to provide that food bank service.

But in terms of feeding humans, in terms of feeding people, I can tell you that in my electorate the Banyule Support and Information Centre received $28,076 to provide healthy snacks at homework clubs and playgroup programs, provide culturally specific emergency food relief packs for families and deliver culturally appropriate cooking demonstrations led by members of the Somali community. CareNet, as I said, based at Templestowe, partnered with us to help us get our food bank going, and they received $50,000 to restore food distribution services across Banyule whilst maintaining current support to Manningham and Nillumbik. This includes purchasing food, enhanced logistics, community engagement and new partnerships and related support for local community organisations. There was also the Glen Park Community Centre, which received $38,845 to purchase commercial kitchen equipment and supplies to enhance food relief capacity and safety and deliver a food relief program for registered job seekers, including provision of supermarket vouchers, outreach, volunteer management and fuel reimbursement costs.

There are a few more here: the Greenhills Neighbourhood House was funded to purchase additional culturally appropriate food and deliver it, with cooking demonstrations and social opportunities to build community resilience – $40,000 for them; Knox InfoLink, $42,720, again, installing a coolroom to develop capacity for food relief distribution; Living and Learning @ Ajani, $42,450, partnering with Warrandyte Neighbourhood House, again for the availability of culturally appropriate pantry staples for multicultural and First Nations community members, which we absolutely love as well; and Yarrunga Community Centre received $17,998 for their food relief program.

You can see there is a broad array of community organisations who are absolutely doing the heavy lifting when it comes to dealing with food relief, and I want to thank those community organisations and those volunteers and workers for everything they do every day to help alleviate food insecurity that is being experienced by people who live in my electorate. I want to thank them for the hard work that they do. Of course this government continues to work on providing cost-of-living relief for people who are experiencing food insecurity and other cost-of-living pressures, and we will continue to work on that, and you can see by what I have outlined the investment that our government is providing to help Victorians bring down cost-of-living pressures. So our position is that the government will not be opposing this motion.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:33): I too rise to speak on David Limbrick's motion, which notes that the *Foodbank Hunger Report 2025* estimates that 3.5 million households experienced food insecurity in the last 12 months. It also refers to the Salvation Army's *Red Shield Report 2025: Struggling to Survive*, which surveyed almost 3600 community members. I am not here simply to just shout out to organisations in the south-east. This is a real issue, a real concern, and I have visited personally many organisations, many community workers. Many are unpaid volunteers, some are on very low wages and all of them are doing whatever they can to try to

make a difference to the people in the south-east, which I represent. It is important to note that of this approximately 3.5 million Australian households, about 33 per cent have experienced food insecurity in the past 12 months. Twenty per cent of households experienced severe food insecurity – that involves skipping meals or going whole days without eating – in the year to July 2025. Households with a person with a disability or long-term health issue represent 67 per cent of those with food insecurity. Low-income households – those that are under, say, $40,000 – face a food insecurity rate of about 48 per cent. We find that 48 per cent of renting households suffer from food insecurity. Single-parent households have a food insecurity rate of about 68 per cent, and that is a lot of single households. The severity of food insecurity is rising by 5 per cent. Geographic spread shows us that food insecurity remains at similar levels in metropolitan and regional areas.

Cost-of-living situations remain one of the factors that is cited by many households, about 91 per cent of them, as being a contributor to food insecurity. Households are experiencing tremendous stress. Housing stress is also supercharging, and household living arrangements and situations where people are having to move as a result of rent rises are causing tremendous insecurity and food insecurity. Employment instability is also a factor.

A number of places have improved the services that they are providing, There has been a tremendous improvement – about a 53 per cent increase – in the awareness of food relief services that are being provided. What is holding people back from accessing these services is the embarrassment and the shame that is felt when people have food insecurity. Surprisingly, and people do not know this, one of the things that piqued my interest as a mother when I had four little kids was food insecurity. Surviving on one wage, which yes was a choice, meant that there was a day when I went to my own pantry and opened it up and went, 'What on earth am I going to feed my kids tonight for dinner?' Embarrassing as it might be, I had to play a game, because the one thing I had in my pantry was cereal. You may laugh, Ms Stitt, but it is actually no laughing matter.

Ingrid Stitt: On a point of order, Acting President, I am not even listening to Mrs Hermans's contribution. I was having a private conversation.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): Mrs Hermans, you can continue. They were talking amongst themselves; I saw the conversation.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: It is very personal, and it is very offensive.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): It was not directed at you, so if you could continue your –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): Mrs Hermans, could you continue your contribution, please.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: The abuse has continued, and I would like an apology.

Members interjecting.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Turn it up? Seriously. This is a real issue that is affecting families.

Ingrid Stitt interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): Order! Mrs Hermans, could you please continue.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: I can remember the day that we had $10 and we were still waiting for the wage to come in. It was a once-a-month wage, and it was coming in on the Thursday, and we were in Tuesday. I went to that pantry and wondered what the heck I was going to give my children for dinner. I know for a fact there are families experiencing this as we speak. In my situation we had some cereal in that pantry, and I had to turn dinner into a game. I said to my kids, who were fortunately all

young at the time, 'We're going to have topsy-turvy night tonight. We're going to have cereal for dinner' and made it a game, and they all cheered. My heart was breaking.

At that point in time I made a decision that I was suddenly interested in why as an educated woman in a family in Australia, where we had given out so much in taxes, I should suddenly find myself in a situation where I was struggling to wait for that wage to come in in two days time, that pay to come in, and I was struggling to feed my own family. I know this is happening right now throughout the south-east because I have been and seen the people lining up for food. I have stood there with many organisations and even eaten in some of these soup kitchens with them because I do not want to forget what it is like to be in a situation where you struggle to feed your family in a country as wealthy as this because of poor government decisions, a lack of funding and a lack of resources. My goodness, we always tax the married couples so much and we do not ever get a break, let alone the single families, which are suffering right now from food insecurity. It is no laughing matter. These are real issues. It is no longer that food insecurity is only for low-income or unemployed people. The report shows quite clearly that households with employment are under-resourced and are at risk. With their bills increasing, it makes life incredibly difficult. I was speaking to somebody who provides at these soup kitchens and works at them regularly every day only a couple of hours ago, and she was telling me that in Frankston alone, there are four organisations feeding about 6000 people. It is ridiculous. It is heartbreaking.

I have had the great fortune of going and visiting so many of them, and it is amazing to see the religious partnerships. Frankston Baptists partner with the Sikh Volunteers Australia food van on a Wednesday, with the Sikhs providing the meals and they are providing the parcels of food, the blankets and the food vouchers to help people to get through. I was hearing about how one guy is living in his car because there is not enough accommodation anywhere. He has had to buy an old car in order to sleep in it, because it is too hard to get somewhere to stay, and he cannot use some of the things that are in these food pantries because they require facilities to heat them up and there are no facilities for people to use to heat up food. So then they suggest, 'Come, this is when the Sikh volunteers will be coming with their food. You'll be able to get a hot meal here.' There is the Brekky Club in Frankston. I have visited there, and I have had breakfast there. There are so many different places where you can go to have food.

I wish to call out some of the amazing people that I have met with: Elena Sheldon, Springvale Learning and Activities Centre; Naomi Paterson, CEO of Cornerstone; and Silva Nazaretian at Enliven from the Greater Dandenong Anti-Poverty Steering Committee. They have been amazing. The work they do in the community is incredible. I have been to visit the south-east hub of OzHarvest Melbourne. I have been to Back to Basics in Melbourne and Narre Warren. I have been to see the work that OzHarvest is doing with the feast program, where they teach young people at schools how to cook nutritious meals in both primary and secondary, with a 10-week curriculum-aligned program, which is under-resourced and underfunded in this state, but is booming in other states because of the issues that exist.

I want to shout out to some of the churches that I know are doing an incredible job on a regular basis, with food parcels provided to so many of the people in the community. I know so many of them; I have visited so many of them. I know that Turningpoint church has been doing it for a long time in Cranbourne. I know Berwick Church of Christ has been doing it for a long time in Cranbourne. I know that there are others, like Winepress fire church in Frankston, doing it for a long time providing these meals. Frankston Baptist church, as I said, are working with the Sikhs to make sure that they have all sorts of provisions available for people. The Frankston Brekky Club currently uses the Uniting church in Frankston. We have the Brotherhood of St Laurence partnering for a poverty-free Victoria, providing additional clothes and making sure that people can afford these things. I have been to meetings with SHAC, and I know that the issues with housing are real. I want to thank organisations that are stepping out, like the nutrition education, skills training – *(Time expired)*

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (14:43): I am very pleased to rise to speak on Mr Limbrick's motion about the considerable issues that are facing many in the community with respect to food insecurity and with respect to hunger, and the incredibly important role that many community-based organisations, food relief organisations and emergency relief organisations play in providing necessary and vital support to many in our community who need assistance.

As others have done in the course of the debate, I want to use this opportunity to reflect on some of the truly excellent organisations that we have got in the Southern Metropolitan Region, particularly in the Bayside area, who are dedicated to providing community support and food relief, in particular, to the local community, one of which is BayCISS, which is the Bayside Community Information and Support Service. They are headquartered on Katoomba Street in Hampton East, just back from the Nepean Highway, formed out of a merger of some old citizens advice bureaus in 2006 and stretching back to work that commenced in that guise as citizens advice bureaus in the early 1970s.

One of the reasons these citizens advice bureaus were established, particularly in this part of the world, particularly in that part of Hampton East, was the significant construction and need that was driven out of the social housing being built at the time in that part of Hampton East. As I was informed by a member of the local council recently, with the two new developments that are underway in Hampton East, thanks to the work of the state and federal Labor governments in building more social housing in the area, about 18 per cent of the residents in that part of the world are in some form of public or community housing, in some form of social housing. There is considerable demand often for a range of community-based supports, and food relief is but one of them. There is also financial counselling and other sort of counselling support services that BayCISS offers. They are a fantastic organisation, and I have made visits to their headquarters on a number of occasions and met with the board and the CEO a number of times. We are doing what we can as a state government by advocating to our minister. Minister Spence is also advocating to the Commonwealth government for additional support for organisations like BayCISS.

I want to particularly shout-out to the member for Bentleigh in the other place Nick Staikos, who runs an annual food drive that benefits BayCISS. He is a long-term supporter of their work, from when the electorate of Bentleigh covered that part of Hampton East. Even though his border has gone to the other side of the Nepean Highway, he is still very dedicated to supporting this organisation because of the support that it provides to communities both on the Bayside City Council side of the Nepean Highway but also on the City of Glen Eira side of the Nepean Highway and down into the City of Kingston.

The other really important organisation in the Bayside area that I want to particularly commend is Bayside Community Emergency Relief, which is a 100 per cent volunteer-run, community-driven charity founded after the Black Summer bushfires. It started as a Facebook group of locals in the area who wanted to do something to help those communities, particularly in eastern Victoria, who were fire ravaged as part of that devastating Black Summer. They launched a Facebook group, which led to an outpouring of community support from parts of the Bayside community who wanted to be able to give to those who needed help. Obviously we went from the Black Summer into the pandemic, and BCER as it is known, Bayside Community Emergency Relief, really went from strength to strength and grew and expanded its operations, providing really significant support services throughout the course of the pandemic.

Since the end of the pandemic and beyond BCER has been providing tangible support – food packages, other forms of support – to community-based organisations in and around the Bayside area. I have had the opportunity to go down and pack some volunteer bags with Deb Brook who runs Bayside Community Emergency Relief. The bags that we packed that day were going to provide emergency supplies to women and children fleeing family violence. They are connected with shelters and emergency accommodation providers and are providing support to them in the form of tangible support packs to assist those who are fleeing family violence. Both BayCISS and BCER do an

incredible job at providing support in our local communities, and I really do want to commend their efforts.

There is another thing, though, I do want to do just in the last few minutes of my speech. People have given a lot of really moving contributions about the great work that volunteer organisations, emergency relief organisations and food relief charities have done in their communities, but I want to pick up on a thread I think that we touched upon in the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into food security in Victoria which we completed some time in the last couple of years – you will forgive me if I do not have the date in my head, Acting President. What we did in that inquiry was look at what the symptoms were of food insecurity and at increasing numbers of people needing food relief, emergency relief and financial support.

The way we solve this problem in this country is to ensure that individuals and families have adequate wages from their employment so that we do not have a working poor in this country. That is why it is so very important that governments support things like increases in the minimum wage, which is what we have both in this state but also at a federal level. Since the election of the federal Labor government in 2022 we have actually had a federal government that has supported wage growth for the lowest paid in our community.

If we see the symptoms of people who have jobs turning up and needing food relief, the fundamental solution to that is to make sure they get better pay in those jobs – they have greater security in their employment and they have better pay when they go to work – so that we do not have in this country what we had under the previous federal government. Low wages and wage suppression were key features of the economic architecture under the former federal coalition government. What we have seen since a change of government at the federal level is both advocacy in support of increases for those on the lowest paid wages but also – in economic statistics, both nationally and here in Victoria – real wages growing again. In the last four quarters here in Victoria real wages have been growing, and that is one of the ways that we are going to fundamentally change the way that we provide everyone in our community with enough money to put food on the table. That is how we fundamentally do it.

The other way – and I do not have long – is to make sure we have got a robust and fair social security system, because that is the other really important piece of the architecture to support those in our community who have the least. Social security, unemployment benefits, parenting payments and pensions all need to be doing their bit in terms of making sure that those who rely on those payments have enough to put food on their table, have a roof over their heads and keep warm in winter. Those are the fundamentals about economic security that need to be mentioned in the course of this debate, not to discount or diminish the excellent work that so many community-based organisations and charities do in providing food relief in our community. We have got to have our economic architecture supporting those who need it most, those on the lowest pay, with pay increases every year through the minimum wage decisions and through the provision of allowances, benefits and pensions that keep pace with the cost of living to make sure that everyone in our community is able to live with dignity.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:53): In the short time remaining I wish to make a brief contribution on this splendid motion that has been put forward today by Mr Limbrick and acknowledge him for raising this important matter in the chamber, as it is both an opportunity to talk about and to acknowledge the incredible community groups that I think all members have now mentioned in their contributions and indeed an opportunity to talk about the very real issues and what is being done through this government and other governments as well to address these issues. When it comes to food security, as Mr Batchelor mentioned, the Legal and Social Issues Committee has recently done an inquiry on that, and I know it is also something that has been of keen interest to our Treasurer. I note that this year's state budget features a very strong emphasis on supporting some of our state's most prominent food banks so that they can do the work to meet the increase in demand that they have seen as a result of cost-of-living pressures over the past couple of years.

Those cost-of-living pressures have come through a multitude of ways, be it through interest rates or as a result of the historically low wages that, again, as Mr Batchelor was referring to, are the feature – not a bug but the feature – of nine years of chaotic coalition government that set out to outright leave workers worse off. We are already seeing that turn around as a result of the current federal Labor government and the considerable work they are doing to unpick that damage and to actually support the rights but, more importantly in many cases, the pay of lower paid workers as well. We cannot have an egalitarian society if we have people who are working – doing hard, honest work – and then not able to pay their bills. There is something inherently broken in any system that allows that. I also note as part of that the abolition of the dodgy practices that some employers were using to divide their workers. The enablement of multi-employer bargaining has been a significant reform to counter those sorts of companies, such as Qantas, who were using multiple different entities to rip off their workers in many cases. It is very good to see the laws that have come into place reflecting the reality of that situation up in Canberra.

There are many, many wonderful organisations doing many important things, and I would like to briefly take a moment to acknowledge just a very small number in my electorate, be it OzHarvest or be it the incredible team at BK 2 Basics in Narre Warren. The Feed One Feed All group up in Scoresby do incredible work, and it was a privilege to join them a little while ago to see what they do behind the scenes – get the hairnets on and the gloves on and help them prepare their daily orders. It would be remiss of me not to mention the incredible work that Sikh Volunteers Australia do, with many of them coming from my electorate in the south-east. They are a proud part of our south-east community. Whether it is a major event or whether it is a major bushfire or a crisis anywhere in this great nation, invariably you will see Sikh Volunteers Australia ready to lend a hand to provide much-needed and very delicious food to people in some of their hardest times, to the support services and to the amazing emergency workers who also flock to the scene of whatever crises we may face. They are an incredible group too.

On the question of food security as well, I think it was through a Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry, the education inquiry, we had a very impressive presentation from a group called Eat Up Australia. We had the founder and CEO Lyndon Galea – no relation – come and appear before us and tell us about the amazing work that they do. I have since had the opportunity to meet with Mr Galea a few times at various functions, including at the Arnott's factory in –

David Davis: Galea meets Galea.

Michael GALEA: Yes, it was a triumph for the Maltese, Mr Davis. It was a great chance to catch up with him fairly recently at the new Arnott's plant in Rowville and hear more about the work that they are doing as well. In 2013 he realised that a number of kids were going to school hungry in his hometown of Shepparton. He founded, through literally just things in his cupboard at the time, an incredible organisation that is going from strength to strength. They are taking lessons but also exporting those lessons not just across Victoria and Australia but across the world. He is truly a remarkable Victorian. I would love to continue acknowledging many of the great people in my region and in this state doing that work. But I will leave my remarks there.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:59): I would like to thank everyone that participated in this debate today. I think that we all acknowledge and appreciate that the government cannot, and probably should not, take care of all the welfare of Victorians and that there are these remarkable organisations that step up and do whatever it takes to help out their fellow Australians. The thing that makes me sad, I suppose, and maybe gives us some ambition for the future as a Parliament, is the fact that so many of these organisations are necessary at the moment and there are so many people doing it tough. My vision is for a more prosperous Victoria. Lots of people talk about the causes of poverty, but in reality poverty is the natural state of man and what we need to really think about is what causes prosperity and wealth. We already know the answer to that – it is trade. The more that we can accelerate trade and allow businesses to develop, that causes more jobs, that causes better wages, that causes prosperity. We know that from right back to Adam Smith. We know what causes

prosperity. I would encourage everyone in this Parliament and the government to do whatever it takes to try and increase economic growth, which will increase the opportunities for Victorians to increase their prosperity and decrease the requirement for these charities. They will always be required somewhat, but my vision is one day we will not need them because we will be rich enough that people will not be going hungry in Victoria.

Motion agreed to.

Economic policy

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (15:01): I move:

That this house notes:

(1) the large number of annual reports tabled, or rather dumped, in the Parliament in the 28 to 30 October 2025 sitting week;

(2) that at least 103 agencies were reported as being in deficit, reporting a collective net loss of $3 billion dollars, which includes, amongst many others:

  (a) three state departments;

  (b) 57 health services;

  (c) five arts and creative industries agencies and bodies;

  (d) Victoria Police;

  (e) sports centres and agencies;

  (f) transport, port and tolling agencies;

  (g) training agencies, stadiums, sport and event authorities;

  (h) eight water authorities;

  (i) five catchment management authorities;

  (j) the Victorian Ombudsman;

  (k) Breakthrough Victoria and the market authority;

(3) the removal of key transparency and financial data from the reports, particularly the cash reserves in health services;

(4) the scale of the Allan Labor government's mismanagement of Victoria's finances and the direct consequences of the mismanagement of these agencies in the form of poorer services and higher charges; and

(5) Victoria's net debt is growing by more than $2 million per hour and the general government sector's net debt is projected to grow to a record $194 billion dollars by 2028–29.

This motion deals with the annual reports that were tabled, or rather dumped, in the Parliament between 28 and 30 October, last sitting week. It is important to deal with these because there are a range of points to be made. There were about 267 reports tabled in that week, 103 agencies were in deficit, 38 –

Michael Galea interjected.

David DAVIS: I am pointing to the tawdry state of the reports and the problems that are in the reports. 103 agencies, a loss of more than $3 billion across those agencies. Some of these are whopping amounts of money, Mr Galea: the Department of Family, Fairness and Housing, $469.7 million; the Department of Transport and Planning, $408.9 million; the Department of Justice and Community Safety, $232.2 million. These are very, very significant deficits that are being reported by three state departments, 57 health services, five arts and creative industries bodies, Victoria Police, sporting groups, transport and tolling agencies, water authorities, catchment management authorities, the Ombudsman and Breakthrough Victoria. In the case of many of the hospitals, some key transparency data has been pulled out so the details of cash reserves are harder now to discern, and that is, I think, a big problem.

The scale of the Allan Labor government's mismanagement of Victoria's finances and agencies has a consequence in poorer services and higher charges. We know that debt is growing by about $2 million per hour. The general government sector debt, net debt, is projected to reach $194 billion by 2028–29. These are huge increases, huge and significant problems for the state. I look closely at a number of these, and when I work my way through a number of these agencies, some are in my portfolio area – the shadow arts and creative industries portfolio – and I will come to those in a moment. But even when I look at the SEC, that is $6.8 million down the tube.

Some of my local hospitals – if you are a person who lives in Ashburton, for example, you might go to Monash Health. That hospital, our biggest health service – and as a former health minister I understand the importance of Monash Health – is $80.5 million in deficit. That is a very significant amount of money. It is an amount of money that puts real pressure on that health service. Eastern Health – and I am obviously very fond of Box Hill Hospital; a hospital that we rebuilt – is $54.8 million down the tube. The Royal Children's Hospital is $29 million down the tube. These are very, very significant impacts on these hospitals. They are not being funded properly, they are not being managed properly and the consequence for patients is significant. The consequence for some of these other agencies is also very significant. Ports Victoria made a loss, Dairy Food Safety Victoria made a loss, V/Line, the convention centre – all of these services made significant losses. 103 of them in that week made significant losses.

It is interesting to look at some of the arts and creative industries ones, and I am conscious of time here. I am not going to take my full time, in fairness to others, so that they can have a decent go. Museums Victoria was $10.4 million in the negative. The Melbourne Arts Precinct Corporation was $15 million in the negative; Docklands Studios, $1.37 million; and ACMI, the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, $4.86 million. These are very significant figures that we see in our arts and creative industries portfolio. I look at some of the issues here, and I look at Museums Board of Victoria and Museums Victoria and the self-generated income. The 2024–25 Museums Victoria self-generated income was $44.7 million. This is a decrease of $8.664 million, or 16 per cent, from the previous year. They point to the fact that they had had a big exhibition before that, but nonetheless that is a very significant fall in the revenue coming through. Government funding has increased between 2023–24 and 2024–25, but self-generated income has not increased.

It is interesting to look at the reporting against their output measures. For example, the number for attendance has fallen from 14.36 million down to 12.33 million. These are significant falls in the performance outcomes. The performance measures – and this is on page 50 of the annual report – look at memberships. There is not an increase there over two years, and I think that that is a problem. Attendance is down. Website visitation is up compared to last year, but not compared to 2023–24. Visitor satisfaction is down, and the collection stored by industry standard has also slipped significantly. These are significant output measures. I am picking on the museum as one of the portfolio areas that I actually do care about and want to see be very successful. But this is not a success story in this year. It is a story where there is a significant deficit, where the attendances have fallen and we are down on a number of the other key metrics. The institution has not performed as well as it should have.

I say that this is this state government – they have not got the focus on many of these areas that they need. They need to actually sharpen their approach to many of the arts and creative industries portfolio areas. These are matters that I think are quite significant for Victorians. These cultural, creative and arts institutions actually play a big role in our state, our identity and our future, but they also play an economic role in bringing people into the state, bringing people into the city and actually being able to help and support tourism in a constructive way. The consequences of some of our creative institutions not firing on all cylinders are actually an outcome that is not ideal for the state. I look at these and I think this is a pattern across a number of our cultural institutions, our creative and artistic institutions. The pattern that is there is that the state government is not focusing on these sufficiently. They are not understanding the importance of these institutions in the broader spectrum for the state.

They are not understanding that in fact we need to make sure that these institutions are able to provide the outcomes that Victoria wants: big visitation, financial security and independence for the institution. They are always going to have very significant government subsidies – of course that is the case – but that does not absolve the institutions of the responsibility to perform well in delivering the best outcomes for Victoria.

I just want to also pick up a number of the other key points that I think we see as important here. Stadiums are doing poorly – you know, Kardinia Park. The Melbourne Recital Centre, I should have mentioned earlier, is $3.3 million down the tube as well. That is an important recital centre that should be playing a stronger role, should be able to deliver more for Victorians. It should be able to do the work that is required for our state in a cultural sense but also with the economic importance of such institutions as well. The botanic gardens are also in deficit. I mean, this is a sea of red ink right across many portfolios – a sea of red ink. There is VicPol, $37.1 million down the tube.

These are very significant outcomes for Victoria, where the state government has failed. It just seems that the state government does not care about the financial results and does not respect the fact that you have got to run institutions properly. They have got to be run in a way that enables them to be robust and secure in the long run. They have got to have sufficient financial viability to be able to map their course into the future, and that means looking forward, saying, 'What can we do to position our institution into the future?'

Ms Crozier no doubt will have a lot to say about health services, but they are an area where the performance has actually been absolutely appalling. The state government has lost control of many of these health services, and they are careering into significant financial difficulty. Even the departments – I do not understand how it is that the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing can be $469.7 million down the tube. How is it that the Department of Transport and Planning is $409 million down the tube? How is it that the Department of Justice and Community Safety is $232 million in the red? What is going on in our state, where the state government across this huge front appears to be unable to keep organisations in a financial position where they are able to deliver proper long-term outcomes, proper planning, proper financial and regulatory performance? That is the question. Why is the state government so unable to do that? I think it is because they do not care about the finances. They do not mind if the deficit blows out. They do not mind if debt grows astronomically. We have heard the Treasurer here in this chamber; she will not come clean on the Silver review.

Michael Galea interjected.

David DAVIS: Well, she is not doing a very good job, and the budget deficit is blowing out of control. She has not been able to constrain the budget deficit, and you know that she has not been able to do what is necessary to get the state back on track.

We debated a motion in this chamber a little while ago, and this was about the debt constraints that were put on by the Brumby government; 6 per cent of gross state product was the guideline. That was accepted by Bracks, Brumby, Baillieu, Napthine and initially by Andrews, until 2018 when he and Tim Pallas pulled the pin on the grenade and said, 'We're going for it now. We're going from 6 per cent of GSP to 12'. But at the same time they were signing contracts around the countryside, unconstrained contracts, contracts without proper cost control, and the costs were careering out of control. They said, 'We're going to 12 per cent of GSP', but of course, never forget that on 31 December 2019 – BC, before COVID – the budget was in deficit. Before COVID the budget was already in deficit. It is true there were borrowings during COVID, but the Auditor-General has pinged the lie. He has pinged the lie that the debt that the state has is due to COVID. About 18 per cent of it, he says, is due to COVID – just about 18 per cent of it. The rest of it, more than 80 per cent, is due to the state government's own mismanagement, and it began in that period as they signed up large project after large project without proper cost control – crossings, roads, the works and no proper controls.

Michael Galea interjected.

David DAVIS: Well, we would have kept them under control. We would have kept them within their budgets. We would have. That is right. We would have. We would not have started on the North East Link at $10 billion only to have it now at $26 billion or $27 billion. That is a huge blowout. We would not have started. More than $50 billion is the blowout, and that blowout is added to every year with these cost blowouts. If you look at the list here, the list here is a huge one. The cost of these cost blowouts and the outcome of these cost blowouts is more and more and more debt for the state. The Treasurer and the Premier do not seem to be able to control the spending of Victoria. They seem to take more and more taxes, and they waste –

Enver Erdogan interjected.

David DAVIS: They are not investing it, they are squandering it; they are wasting it. If you think about the North East Link as the example, we all think it is a good project at $10 billion, but is it a good project at $27 billion, another $17 billion?

Michael Galea interjected.

David DAVIS: The Metro was a good project at somewhere around $9 billion, but is it a good project at $15 billion?

Michael Galea interjected.

David DAVIS: Well, it would have been built a long while ago actually. We would have had an airport rail as well, and we would have had a transport node in Fishermans Bend. But leaving that aside, the government's own Metro project has benefits. We have never said that there should not be a Metro. In fact on the contrary, we have said that there should be a Metro, but the Metro costs should have been constrained. We do not think the government should have allowed an extra $6 billion of cost. That is where it went. The money has all just been – I was going to use some vernacular – something against the wall. That is what has happened. The money has been squandered by inappropriate cost control. That is what has happened.

This motion is actually a straightforward motion. It notes the tabling of the reports. It notes that 103 of them are in deficit, and it notes a number of other points here that are factual and understood, I think, by the broader community. We need to keep this government on watch, and we need to try and drag them back into proper fiscal management.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:17): I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak on Mr Davis's motion. Look, he did keep to his word. He did go a little bit short of his time. I think it was at least 4 minutes short there. I acknowledge that and his keen desire for us all to have a go, as it were, on this motion.

Yesterday Mr Davis brought into this chamber a prop – he brought in a wooden spoon – and today what he has done is he has brought in the cherry picker. He has brought it into the chamber. It is right there with him, the big cherry picker. We know they are not very good at construction projects. They are not good at actually delivering anything, but a cherry picker, insofar as Mr Davis can conceive it, he has brought into the chamber, and he has presented it to the house in this motion today, because the list in his motion is a highly cherrypicked list from all random spots. I do not think the overall performance of the state of Victoria is going to be in huge peril because five arts and creative industries agencies and bodies reported an operating deficit, Mr Davis. You cannot just cherrypick reports that you do like, reports that you do not like, throw the ones that you do not like that do not suit your preconceived narrative out of the way and then present what is left to the chamber. That is not a fair and reasonable discussion to be having.

Mr Davis, you could have made reference to the annual financial report, but I do not actually believe you did. If you were to – through you, Chair, for Mr Davis – look at the annual financial report, you would actually see, if you were to give the aggregate figures a bit of a looking into, that many other agencies have performed strongly and in fact the overall picture is actually positive. We know that, for

example – it is right there on page 2 of the AFR, Mr Davis – the net operating cash surplus was $3.2 billion, which was $2.6 billion higher than the revised estimate in the budget earlier this year. It does not fit Mr Davis's narrative, and it conspicuously did not make its way into Mr Davis's contribution, but I would suggest that for his benefit Mr Davis may wish to actually look at the annual financial report. It is a substantial document, but if you only go to the first couple of pages, just to the executive summary, Mr Davis, you would see that the overall picture is far removed from what you have tried to paint in this chamber today. You can get it from the tables office. I would be happy to table it for your benefit, Mr Davis, if you would like, but I am sure you have the means to find it.

David Davis interjected.

Michael GALEA: You printed it. You do have a copy. You have got a copy. Excellent. Well, Mr Davis, I highly encourage you to go through to page 2. Through the Chair, I would encourage Mr Davis to go to page 2, where he will see again – I think it is an important point to note – a net operating cash surplus of $3.2 billion. That is an increase – not of a small amount, mind you – of $2.6 billion above the estimate in the May budget. But that is not all that you will find in there. What about net debt to gross state product, which is currently, as at the end of the last financial year, 23.7 per cent – lower than the revised estimate in this year's budget of 24.5 per cent. What if we look, though, at the broader –

Tom McIntosh interjected.

Michael GALEA: It is killing them, Mr McIntosh. We know that they always talk Victoria down, whether it is the delivery of projects, of infrastructure, which is actually setting up the next generation of Victorians. They talk down the housing aspirations of young Victorians and they talk down the very strong in fact business investment that we have seen in this state. We have seen that business investment solidly continue to grow. We have actually seen – Mr McIntosh, I know this will interest you – that goods exports have recorded solid growth once again, driven especially by food and agriculture products, especially beef. We know that Australia has far and away the world's best beef, and perhaps there is no better place than Victoria to find that beef in. We know that beef exports from Victoria grew very sharply in the previous financial year. It is one of many symptoms of an economy that is performing strongly, and that is important not only because it delivers better balance sheets and better results in the annual financial report – that is not really why it matters – but because it provides good jobs, it provides better wages. Again – page 2 of the report – Victorian wages grew by 3.3 per cent in 2024–25, and we know that this happened at a time when employment growth continued to be strong and the unemployment rate remained at historically low levels. That is what happens when you have a government that invests in the state's economy, when you invest in the state's infrastructure and when you invest in the state's people.

We know that they do not like to hear it – it drives them wild – but they should consult the annual financial report. I am glad to hear that Mr Davis has a copy of it himself. I do not know if he has read the copy. I do not know if he made it past page 1. How far did you get, Mr Davis? How far did you get? I do not know if the other cheerleaders on the bench over there have actually read the annual financial report or not, but I would highly recommend it to all members of this chamber. It is very important that we do have the facts of the situation that we are in for the state that we are legislating for, and indeed there are some very, very positive and strong things. But instead, we do not have a considered or nuanced discussion from Mr Davis – no, no, no, no, no. We do not have him coming in here saying, 'This is what's going well. This is what's going badly. This is what we as the opposition are going to throw over at your heads and make an issue out of.' Not even an attempt – just 'Everything's disastrous. Everything is.' It is all certainly all I have heard from Mr Davis for three years straight in this place, but what we do not see is a championing for Victoria. What we do not see is a vision for Victoria, certainly not a vision for young Victorians, as we have seen from the various attempts by Mr Davis in this chamber over the past few years. And what we have seen is that a budget black hole has been predicted by the measures that have been announced by the opposition – $11 billion worth of shortfalls, which is an extraordinary figure that they will have to answer for. And

they have not given any answers as to whether they plan to meet that by raising taxes or by cutting services. They will not of course say what services they will be cutting. But here on this side of the chamber we are continuing to focus on the COVID debt repayment plan, be it the fiscal recovery that the Treasurer has been working through or be it the strong investment.

Whether it is beef exports, subsea optical cabling, batteries, renewable energy, manufacturing in so many fields or indeed medical research, Victoria continues to be –

David Davis interjected.

Michael GALEA: one of the top three centres in the world, Mr Davis, with government support and with private investment, which I thought you guys actually liked over there, but maybe not. Maybe you do want us to fund everything ourselves – I do not know. But those sectors are still thriving, and as a result we are seeing those industries employ more Victorians, provide more and a wider breadth of jobs to Victorians and a better standard of living.

On that point, we were discussing just a few moments ago other cost-of-living measures. And there are many other things that this government is continuing to do to respond to some of those more challenging headwinds that Victorian families are facing, be that – though they have now tapered off – in the form of interest rates that have been putting pressure on households, especially many households in the outer suburbs of my electorate, where people in newer estates are more likely to be at the earlier stage of those mortgages. I know the pressure that has caused. It is why we have been looking at and implementing a number of reforms, be it support for school students and the school bonus, or whether it is also making public transport free for under-18s from 1 January next year. We have already introduced of course the regional fare cap, meaning that Melburnians can travel across the state, but also regional Victorians can travel across regional Victoria or to the city at no more than the cost of a daily fare. When you take that on top of the fact that we have slashed the regional payroll tax rate repeatedly to the lowest level now in the nation, it is no wonder we see Victoria's economy going from strength to strength, and that is, at the end of the day, the most important thing. The budget is very important, and indeed, if you look at the operating cash surplus, you will see a vastly different picture to what Mr Davis is trying to portray. The most important thing for the strong economy is that it is supporting Victorians to have a good standard of life so that they can succeed and prosper.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:27): I rise to speak to Mr Davis's excellent motion that we are debating today, because it goes to the very heart of what this government is on about. The motion states the large number of annual reports tabled or rather dumped – because that is what it is; it is known as dump day in the Parliament – in the 28 to 30 October 2025 sitting week. The government knows that they do this; they do this on purpose. A few years ago they dumped these reports just before Christmas. They are very sneaky, they are very deceptive with the Victorian public, and this motion goes to the heart of that secrecy and the lack of transparency.

The motion talks about the at least 103 agencies that were reported as being in deficit, reporting a collective net loss of $3 billion, and it includes a number of areas. I want to talk to my area of health, because 57 health services, three state departments – I heard Mr Davis talking about the creative industries and other areas that this motion goes to. But it goes to the heart of the mismanagement by the government, who have really been very fiscally poor. They have been so bad at managing Victorian taxpayers money in this really important area, and they literally disregard it. They laugh it off and think it is frivolous when we are talking about billions of dollars in deficit and the waste and mismanagement, the daily interest repayments that the state taxpayer has to pay because this government has run up a huge debt. We are paying $20 million today in interest repayments. Those interest repayments will go to close to $29 million a day. That is over $1.2 million an hour in just a couple of years.

Members interjecting.

Georgie CROZIER: I hear them scoffing over there, like it is some sort of joke. These Labor MPs are laughing again at this really important issue around Victorian taxpayers paying $20 million a day in interest repayments, going to $29 million a day in interest repayments. This is no laughing matter. It is the children of our generation and our grandchildren and their children that are going to be paying for this government's legacy – this incredible debt that they are leaving behind. And it goes to the waste and mismanagement and the reporting and the hiding of what is going on. I want to speak to it. I know they keep interrupting and carrying on, but I want to go to the issues around the Department of Health's annual report. In the foreword it talks about transparency and the planned surgery reform blueprint and the number of planned surgeries that they delivered – 212,000. Well, that was down from the government's own projections of 240,000, which they could never meet, so they had to revise the targets to make them look better than they actually were. They could not even get that right. They have done everything completely back to front, not understanding how the system works.

In addition, they talk about greater transparency and increasing transparency in Victorian planned surgery reporting. I have been wanting to see where the latest VAHI – the Victorian Agency for Health Information – data is. It is now 13 November. It was due on the last day of last month, so it is 13 days overdue. That is for the quarter July–August–September. We are now at 13 November, and there is no data. I checked before I stood to speak, and the elective and planned surgery waitlist for those patients waiting for surgery in Victoria still remains at 58,627. That is tens of thousands of Victorians waiting for vital surgery. They cannot get it, and I have those Victorians ringing my office. In fact I am getting a lot of emails about people's experiences with the services that they are not getting because of the government's mismanagement and the huge pressures that are in the system.

I want to go on to this issue, because the elective surgery information system, the ESIS, is part of that transparency that we have been talking about. For a number of years I have been raising this in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. In fact in the last PAEC hearing in June I asked about it again, and the government said, 'Yes, we're going to release the data from a number of hospitals.' So clearly we do not have the true numbers of the Victorians that are waiting for surgery or procedures, and that is why I say that those figures that have just been released for the last quarter, the 58,627, are inaccurate. They do not have the true picture, and there are many hospitals that are not included in that ESIS list. The government keeps telling me, 'It's coming. It's coming.' Well, in their audacity, the Department of Health said:

> In 2024–25 we worked with the following health services to prepare them to commence ESIS reporting …

and they list a whole lot of these health services. I have been asking for this data for years – not just for the last 12 months but for years – and asking why it is not included, and the department comes and says:

> Other health services participating in the project are well advanced towards commencing ESIS reporting in 2025–26.

Well, it is now November 2025, nearly 2026, and we still have nothing. Again, this report is full of spin and ideological rhetoric, which it goes on with. When I look at it, there is a lack of transparency and millions of dollars that have been spent on consultancies. We had the Minister for Health saying that health services have to stop spending on consultancies. Well, there are dozens here and millions of dollars in spending. Then if I turn over the page and have a look at the number of reviews, the reasons why there were the reviews, the terms of reference, the anticipated outcomes and the cost of these reviews, again, there are dozens and dozens and dozens of these reviews. Yet, where it says 'Publicly available' – yes or no – nearly all of them say no. There are less than I can count on one hand that have got a public report. This needs to be better. The Department of Health need to do much better than they are doing, because this is not in the interests of Victorians. Victorians deserve to have greater transparency and greater accountability.

If we cannot see the true data, how can you be accountable? Well, they spin their way out of it every time. I could go on – I have got 76 health services and other departments that have done their annual reports. Ambulance Victoria says what we all know, that the ambulance response times for code 1 are

way under – a dismal figure for the code 1 response in 15 minutes. We know there are many issues within Ambulance Victoria, but there are issues right across the health system, and that is why I demand greater transparency and greater accountability from the government. They can defend all they like, but it is here in black and white. There is an ideological push right through this annual report.

I am interested in better patient outcomes. I do not want all the guff. I am sick of the spin. I want greater transparency. We have got annual reports that have to be reprinted because they have cut-and-pasted figures from several years, so they have to be reprinted – cut-and-pasted figures. I really find that incredible and concerning given the accuracy of the data that Victorians are getting through this government. Every Victorian deserves a better response from government – greater transparency. I think Mr Davis's motion is an important one, because it goes to the heart of what this government tries to do: dump all of these reports and not give the MPs, let alone the journalists, any time to thoroughly go through them. It is always about deflection – 'Look over there, look over there' and 'We'll announce something else to make you look over that way.' You know, I have got to give them credit for that. They will get 10 out of 10 for spin and deflection, and they will get 10 out of 10 for being disingenuous and deceitful, too. This is a government that is mired in spin. But we have had years of a government that has wasted taxpayers money – billions of dollars – that is wasting taxpayers money, and we are not getting better outcomes for it. It is not transparent in these annual reports. Victorians know it.

Tom McIntosh interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: It is only a Liberal and Nationals government, Mr McIntosh, that will bring transparency and integrity back into government.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (15:37): I thank Mr Davis for this opportunity to correct his misapprehensions and to inform him and his colleagues about the real performance of Victoria's finances. How can we trust Brad Battin and the coalition when they constantly distort and falsify the financial and economic data of this state? Here we have the cherrypicking – a list of government entities across completely unrelated sectors. There is no pattern or logic to this motion. Included in the list are government-funded hospitals lined up against self-funded water entities. The only thread that we see here are the consistent distortions and inaccurate claims from those opposite about Victoria's economy and finances. The only other consistency we see is that the motion from those opposite is running down our state as a result – running our state down, running our city down, saying negative things and really causing harm as a result.

The reality is that departments and other government agencies have performed strongly. Many have reported operating surpluses. Where operating deficits were reported, it was generally as a result of non-cash asset depreciation. I wonder if you know what that is? For those opposite that might have bothered to look up the Victorian financial report 2024–25, they would know that in fact we delivered an operating cash surplus of $3.2 billion in 2024–25, our third consecutive operating cash surplus, and that net debt at the end of 2024–25 was $4.7 billion less than forecast. Instead, they read the papers and try and figure out what policy question they are going to ask in question time next. That is not a strategy. As the Treasurer said in this chamber on 15 October, Victoria's financial report shows that the government's plan to create more jobs by backing business and state-shaping infrastructure investment is strengthening the Victorian economy.

I would just like to point out, for the avoidance of any confusion for those less financially literate on the other side, and particularly for Mr Davis who gets the figures wrong all of the time, that this is the report for the whole state, not for one entity or a random selection of state entities. We really do have a bunch of economic Henny Pennies opposite us. Henny Penny really is a story about Chicken Little, who believes the sky in falling in after one acorn falls on her head, and she sets off through the party room, just like all the Liberals are setting off, to tell the king. She tells Cocky Locky, she tells Ducky Daddles and then she picks up Goosey Loosey as well. But, you know, the only thing that Henny Penny can conclude is that you do not believe in net zero, particularly in Canberra.

All the numbers on our economy tell the truth. Over the last decade Victoria's economy has grown faster than in any other state. Our economy is 31 per cent larger than when we came to government. The growth is underpinned by a strong labour market. In 2024–25 we had record levels of working age Victorians in employment and record levels of participation in the workforce. Business investment grew by 1.2 per cent in 2024–25 and increased by 53 per cent in 10 years. It is yet another metric that shows Victoria is leading all the other states. This government is continuing to follow our five-step fiscal strategy, and it is working. We remain on track, particularly against steps 4 and 5 of the strategy, which are: stabilising net debt levels as a proportion of GSP – tick; reducing net debt as a proportion of GSP – tick.

Just to reiterate – in case those opposite were too busy scanning the financials of their local sports centre annual report to notice – the government has delivered an operating cash surplus of $3.2 billion, and that is $2.6 billion higher than forecast. This is our third consecutive operating surplus, as I said, and the net debt is lower than we forecast. Our fiscal strategy is working. We are delivering the services and infrastructure Victorians rely on while delivering an operating surplus. Compared to the reckless plans of those opposite, with policies that would blow out our budget by $11.1 billion – an $11.1 billion black hole – and with all their proposed cuts, I think that is where we see the irresponsible behaviour. All they know how to do is to cut, cancel and close. If they had their way, we would not have a railway line in Warrnambool anymore. If they were allowed to keep going, we would have fewer primary schools in Warrnambool than we do now, because they were closed. As I have said before, we picked up second-hand floorboards for our dining room from a primary school that was closed and demolished by Jeff Kennett.

Then there are the cancellations. Well, I think we know what they are going to cancel. What are they going to cancel?

Renee Heath: You tell us.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Yes, the SRL. You are going to cancel the SRL, or you are going to turn it into some kind of messy partial project that limps along with no commitment, or, like last time you were in government, announce a train station but not knowing where it is. You had absolutely no idea of what the Metro Tunnel was all about at all, and we came up with a with a proper plan. We have done the planning, done the consultation, done the modelling on public transport in Melbourne and constructed the project. Now, next month that project is going to open. That is the narrative of this government: getting things done – not cancelling, getting things done. When you look at the financial status, the economic status, of this state, there is only one thing you can say, and that is that there are no acorns falling out of the sky. Henny Penny is economically incorrect – completely wrong. Our economy is a strong economy. All of the data shows that, and it is no accident that it is a strong economy. We have been investing in economic infrastructure, supporting our communities and making sure that the right investments are made at the right time. So I condemn the motion, and I really, really strongly encourage the opposition to read the economic reports of this state and the annual report of this state as well.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:46): I will probably just need to compose myself after that. The government has demonstrated that transparency and accountability are treated not as clear obligations but as inconveniences. It has dumped over 200 annual reports – a data avalanche absolutely consciously designed to bury scrutiny and protect ministers from answering for their performance based on what is in them. We are talking about 103 government bodies spanning health services, transport agencies, creative industries and even Victoria Police that have lost $3 billion above and beyond their budgets. Amongst them is in fact Breakthrough Victoria, a body designed to scrutinise the financial viability of other companies, which could not even meet its own budget. There is over $3 billion in wrongly estimated, underfunded projects that went bad all within a year, across 100 sections of government. To get one budget wrong is careless; to get 100 wrong suggests something is very fundamentally wrong.

If the state was not in so much debt – if the state was in fine, robust financial health – it might not be so serious. But this is 100 sections of government in serious deficit in a state that is in severe financial distress. The consequence of attempting to cover up losses and deficits makes that all the more serious. Now, if this were the private sector, there would be board resignations, shareholder revolts and regulatory interventions. No CEO would survive the collapse of standards we have seen across state departments. In the real world business owners, directors, are bound by law to provide clear and truthful reports. They can be disqualified, prosecuted and even jailed for misleading financial disclosures. If you are a private citizen or a private business, you try hiding your losses and insolvency from authorities and see how far you get. You do not get to go to the bank and lie about your assets and reserves. You do not get to underplay parts of your accounts to the tax authorities or the State Revenue Office. And what you really do not get to do is invent your own terms, your own accounting standards. In any other walk of life that is financial deception at best but effectively fraud, and it is illegal. But in this Labor government anything is rewarded, anything is permissible, as long as you can dodge a news cycle.

Under the Premier and the Treasurer, ministers are allowed to go over budget, preside over deficits and conceal their losses, and no-one is held to account. The people of this state have to put up with this contempt for basic governance. Victorians deserve the same standards of truth and transparency that every business in this state is required to uphold. It is really not that complex. Annual reports are the test of any organisation's or body's integrity. They are meant to be objective statements of fact, not fantasy novels. Government reports are a direct reflection of the standards the government sets for itself. We can either accept a government that hides losses and dilutes accountability, or we can demand better – open reporting, competent management and fiscal honesty. This is not even a partisan matter. In any quiet, sober discussion of reporting standards, no-one would think this is okay. It is about professional standards, and if the private sector can meet them, surely the government must too. This is a financial problem, but it is also a material problem of ethics, governance and practice. Like all unethical behaviour, it affects the soul of the state. When you manipulate accounting, all kinds of inappropriate activity can be hidden, because that is what fraudsters do when they commit fraud.

There are multiple concerns with the way these annual reports are presented, but I will focus on one today. We have learned that critical financial data, such as the cash reserves in health services, has been removed from the reports. It is not an administrative error; it is a deliberate lie by omission. It hides the depth of the financial hole the government has dug across Victoria's hospitals and agencies. Meanwhile, net debt grows now by more than $2 million every hour. By 2029 the public sector's debt will soar to $194 billion. That is not an accounting line; that is a future burden on every Victorian family, every small business and every front-line service.

Victoria cannot operate this way. It is an absolute race to the bottom. It is part of a wider problem in this state – a denial of object reality in terms of roads, crime, finance, business closures, police shortages, hospital infrastructure and the funding fantasy of the SRL, a project for which the government does not know the costs and has no funding for. But none of it matters, because when the time comes to report it, you can drop line items, you can list billions of dollars in liabilities as 'to be confirmed'. You can transfer liabilities from one set of books to another. You can basically get away with murder – laughing all the way to the ratings agencies. But I will give you a warning: eventually the ride ends. The carnival ends. Eventually the game comes to an end. Eventually there is a reckoning, and only stupid people believe you can get away with fraud forever.

The first sign that that time is coming is when people stop believing your BS. That is when the embezzler has to start inventing ever more elaborate lies to keep the fantasy alive, and eventually the lies and the misdirection become so preposterous that people see you for what you are. A lot of people already do, and a lot more are coming. I guarantee by the time of the next state budget this government will have painted itself into such a financial tangle of misdirection and oh-so-clever accounting – calling cuts 'investment' and calling reckless borrowing 'getting things done' while allowing the state

to fall to pieces around it – that not even that fantasy novel of your annual reports will hide what you have done. I commend this motion to the house.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (15:53): I rise to make a contribution to Mr Davis's motion. I must say this has become something of a familiar tactic from those opposite – another attempt to cherry-pick numbers and paint a picture that does not reflect the true state of Victoria's finances or the performance of our public institutions. We have seen this before – select a handful of figures, strip them of any context and present them as evidence of some sort of fiscal chaos. The reality is far more straightforward and in fact far more positive.

Under the Financial Management Act 1994 all public sector entities are required to prepare annual financial statements and reports – departments, agencies and public corporations alike. Each has its own responsibilities, its own revenue streams and obligations, and each report reflects that. But our state's financial position is not determined by picking out a few isolated results. The true measure is the aggregate result, the combined picture across the entire public sector, which is reported transparently in the annual financial report tabled by the Treasurer. That report makes it clear that Victoria's finances are in a sound position.

Departments and agencies performed well overall, with many posting surpluses. Where deficits were reported, they were often due to non-cash factors such as depreciation, not poor performance. The annual financial report shows an operating cash surplus of $3.2 billion in 2024–25 – our third consecutive operating cash surplus – and that net debt was $4.7 billion lower than forecast in May. It is not an accident. It reflects a responsible long-term fiscal strategy that balances investment in services and infrastructure with sound budget management. This is what the credit ratings look at when assessing the state's financial strength, and I must say they consider a total consolidated result, not just cherrypicked data from a few select entities. To suggest otherwise is to misrepresent the reality of the work of our credit rating agencies.

I must say that the Allan Labor government's fiscal strategy is working. We are delivering the services and infrastructure Victorians rely upon while returning the budget to surplus. It is not theory; it is the outcome of disciplined management, targeted investment and an unwavering focus on the long-term needs of our state and the Victorian people. I am very happy to compare that to those opposite with their proposed policies which would create an $11.1 billion black hole in the budget. The only way they could fill that gap would be by cutting the services and infrastructure Victorians depend on. We have seen the story play out before. When they were last in government they cut or they cancelled or they closed – cutting frontline workers, cancelling critical projects and closing schools and hospitals.

On this side we understand that a strong budget means investing in people and investing in services, not withdrawing from them. It means ensuring that hospitals, schools and transport networks have the funding and stability they need to serve communities now and into the future. Nowhere is that clearer than in health. I am delighted to say that the Allan Labor government is delivering record funding for Victoria's world-class public health system. We understand that health care is not a cost to be managed down; it is an investment in the wellbeing, the security and the dignity of every Victorian. This year's budget commits an additional $11.1 billion for health, taking total funding to more than $31 billion. That is the largest investment in frontline health care in the history of our state. That includes a record $9.3 billion boost for hospitals, giving every public health service the certainty they need to plan for the future. It also includes an incredible investment of $634 million for nine new or expanded hospitals, ensuring care is closer to home, and there is more than $200 million for health infrastructure across hospitals, aged care and mental health.

These investments are part of a broader $15.9 billion infrastructure program, with 67 projects currently underway across the state. I am just going to give a shout-out for a few that I am especially excited about: the new Melton hospital, the Barwon women's and children's hospital, the Ballarat Base Hospital redevelopment and the Casey Hospital expansion – each one representing our commitment to ensuring Victorians can access care when and where they need it. The Department of Health

measures performance by operating results, and while some hospitals, I do accept, have reported operating deficits, the overall trend is one of year-on-year improvement. That progress has been achieved through reasonable and responsible investment and collaboration with health services to strengthen their financial sustainability while maintaining the world-class patient care that we have come to expect here in our state.

We will always back our health workers – the nurses, doctors, paramedics, allied health staff and support teams – that hold our system together. They are the people saving lives, supporting families and caring for communities every day. This government, this side of the chamber, recognises that and continues to support them with the investment and the infrastructure, critically, that they need.

The same philosophy guides our approach to broader infrastructure. The Allan Labor government has built a reputation as the government of builders. We deliver what Victorians need. Our record speaks for itself. More than $100 billion has been invested in transport infrastructure, with projects that will serve the state for generations to come. There are 87 level crossings that have already been removed, eliminating congestion, reducing accidents and making local communities safer. The Metro Tunnel, opening to passengers in early December – that is a full year ahead of schedule – will completely reshape how people move across Melbourne. For the first time passengers will have direct access to underground stations in Parkville and along St Kilda Road, connecting them directly to hospitals, universities and workplaces. It will add hundred of new services and cut travel time across the city.

One that I know many folks are excited about is the 9000 trucks that will be taken off the roads every day locally in the inner west with the opening of the West Gate Tunnel, giving communities back their peace and their safety. It will provide a vital, real alternative to the West Gate Bridge and deliver faster, more reliable connections between the city and the western suburbs. There is also the North East Link connecting the M80 to the Eastern Freeway, the missing link in Melbourne's road network. It will save up to 35 minutes on a trip from the airport to Doncaster and remove 15,000 trucks from local roads every day. It is delivering 6.5 kilometres of twin tunnels, new parklands, wetlands, open space and a dedicated busway, cutting travel times by up to 30 per cent.

There is so much more to say, but let me just go on and talk a little bit about the job creation that comes from these incredible projects. Every one of these major projects supports jobs. Victoria's Big Build has created or sustained more than 50,000 direct and indirect jobs. It has also delivered 380,000 square metres of new open space and 220 kilometres of walking and cycling paths, and 3.6 million trees and shrubs have been planted. We are creating a much greener, more connected and livable city, and I am saying, importantly, we are doing it while managing the budget responsibly and returning it to surplus. Every project is delivered with a focus on long-term value, local content and community benefit. These are not short-term showpieces; they are the backbone of Victoria's future growth.

Victoria's economy remains strong. Employment is high, economic growth is steady and confidence across the construction and service sectors remains solid. Despite global pressures from inflation to supply chain challenges, our state continues to lead the nation in investment and innovation. This is a result of disciplined management but also a belief in the role of government to shape a fairer and stronger society. We know that when we invest in people and we invest in communities and infrastructure, we build not just an economy but a state where opportunity is shared. I will not enter into debate that will seek to divide and diminish our state and our brilliant works, because I know that we continue to manage the budget responsibly, invest in services and deliver for every Victorian. We back our workers, support our hospitals and keep building the infrastructure that keeps our state moving.

Mr Davis's motion before us today is another attempt to distract from that record, but the facts speak for themselves. The Allan Labor Government is managing Victoria's finances responsibly, delivering record health and infrastructure investment and building the future that this very state deserves. This is a state firmly focused on delivery and discipline. We are a government that builds, a government that protects and a government that plans for the long term. While those opposite continue to look

backwards, we will keep creating jobs, supporting communities and ensuring that Victoria remains the best place to live and the very best place to work. I thank you, Acting President Galea, for the opportunity to make a contribution on Mr Davis's motion, and I look forward to making my views known later on this afternoon.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (16:03): I rise to speak on Mr Davis's motion highlighting the reckless financial incompetence of this government with its dump day reports. Drowning in red, is this government, and so are all of its agencies. It is classic of the government to release these documents just before Melbourne Cup weekend. When it is about a long weekend, when it is close to Christmas Eve, a long weekend or the Labor Day weekend, you know the government is going to do something on a Friday or a Thursday to try to hide everything and sweep everything under the carpet. We had the same talking points from all those on the other side, again repeating slabs of text from the Premier's Private Office. They keep talking about this $11.1 billion black hole or something along those lines, which every single one of them mentioned, gracefully given to them by the Treasurer.

The Treasurer clearly has not done her homework, because they claim that we have costed a $7 billion black hole for scrapping the emergency services tax. I invite the government members to be in the chamber for the petition debate tonight to hear from the communities affected by the emergency services tax. Imagine calling a tax cut a black hole. You are taxing families, you are taxing farmers, you are taxing our volunteers and you are taxing property owners, and yet you are saying that is a black hole. You yourselves, this government, delayed the consequences of this tax for farmers for 12 months, recognising the damage that it is causing, and you have the gall to say it is our black hole. We will replace it with the fire services property levy, which is only a $3 billion cost. We are happy to work through those costings, but the Treasurer clearly has not done her homework. The total impact of our tax cuts for Victorians is only $5 billion.

It is no wonder this Treasurer refused every single media interview post putting out her little two-pager that is supposedly modelling of the opposition's costings. She refused every single interview because she does not like the pressure. She is listening to the polling, but the polling that is very interesting is the 12.1 per cent drop in Labor voting intention in the Legislative Council. No wonder Mr Erdogan wants to move to the number one position when we are seeing a dramatic drop in support for the Labor Party in this place because of silly games like this and silly stunts like this, because of dodgy financial accounting and dropping everything on the one day, again drowning in red. We saw all of the agencies' annual reports released on dump day. It cost $800,000 to fix up the mess the Deputy Premier created with multiple years of exam errors – $800,000.

There is one decision that highlights government incompetence. We saw a $1.5 million program for fishing rods for kids a couple of years ago, and didn't that go well? Fishing rods with Victorian government logos on them ended up on Facebook Marketplace in the hundreds. Is that a good use of $1.5 million? What has the government done this year? It announced round 2 of little anglers, a $1.5 million investment. Do you know what they have just done at the same time? A $1.3 million cut to Parentline. If you ever need to know what are the core, heartless Labor government decisions that make up the heart and soul of the Labor Party, it is cutting funding to Parentline while giving out free fishing rods that end up on Facebook Marketplace – an absolute shame of this government.

The release of these reports follows recent confirmation that Victoria's net debt is growing by more than $2 million an hour. Only this government could come up with a COVID debt repayment plan, a 10-year plan, and still have debt rising up to $194 billion by 2028–29. Debt is rising, yet you have got this repayment plan with all these taxes and are not paying down the debt. $194 billion of debt means over $25 million a day, over a million dollars every single hour.

When Labor cannot manage money, it is all Victorians that are paying the price. It is all Victorians that are feeling the effect of new waste levies, it is all Victorians that are feeling the effects of new land taxes, it is renters that are feeling the effects of new land taxes and it is manufacturers and industry

that are feeling the effects of property services taxes and emergency services taxes. It is farmers that are feeling the effect of the emergency services tax, because we know deep down in their souls the Labor Party have always wanted to charge farmers land tax. They have always wanted to do it, and now they have done it. They have delayed it for 12 months, and just before the election next year they are going to have to hit farmers even harder during a drought. That goes to show how heartless this government is. Its financial reporting is a sham, as Ms Crozier mentioned, just scrubbing out key reports.

We saw the disgraceful situation where the Victorian Multicultural Commission produced a map of India that cut off multiple sections of India, causing great offence to many in our Indian community. I am glad the head of the Victorian Multicultural Commission has apologised over this, but the Victorian Multicultural Commission sits within the Department of Premier and Cabinet. They are the ones that pulled back the independence of the Victorian Multicultural Commission; now they want to reverse that again. It is up to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and the Premier to apologise to our Indian community for causing great offence to our Indian community by printing this report –

David Davis interjected.

Evan MULHOLLAND: A bogus map. They clearly had not checked their homework. They might have not had Canva Pro or they might have an intern doing the work, but at the end of the day the government has starved the VMC of funds. It has not reappointed any new commissioners, so there is no-one to check the homework. Clearly the minister is too busy to actually check whether they are printing the right maps of a critical trading partner and a critical diaspora community in Victoria. Again it goes to show the incompetence of this Labor government. Only a Liberals and Nationals government will clean up Victoria's books by establishing a real-time expenditure tracker and a charter of budget honesty.

We know that ministers have not even been briefed on their Silver review. And do you know what they left out of the Silver review or what was exempt? The Suburban Rail Loop Authority – the SRLA. You have got Frankie Carroll getting paid almost a million dollars a year and $300,000 in addition to go back and forth to Brisbane. You figure if the minister wants to pay him that much, he should be living here in Victoria. It is an absolute disgrace. Surely a Victorian could do that job and save the taxpayers money. But it goes to show the largesse of the SRLA, who go out and buy wine for all their board members and try to hide the results and try to leak the results – *(Time expired)*.

Motion agreed to.

Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:12): I rise on my motion 1117 on the CFMEU. I move:

> That this house:
>
> (1) notes the sacking of Mr John Perkovic last week from the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU) and the consequential questions arising about the flawed administration of the union;
>
> (2) further notes the apparent failure of regulatory agencies, including the Fair Work Commission and the labour hire agency; and
>
> (3) expresses concern at ongoing criminal behaviour in some sections of the Victorian construction industry including, in particular, the continuing role of organised crime within and associated with the CFMEU.

The sacking of John Perkovic from the CFMEU raises questions about the administration of the union, and indeed it is what has triggered this motion. But yesterday's arrest of CFMEU figure John Setka on intimidation charges will be the last straw for many Victorians. The Victorian community are sick and tired of waking up to yet another headline of the corrupt and criminal behaviour attached to either the government projects or those criminals that are allowed to work and flourish on and around them. As far back as 2022 the Premier had knowledge of CFMEU threats, bullying, intimidation and

blackmail on Big Build projects. Three years later the Premier conceded that illegality on government construction sites was 'nothing new' and she had been aware of such issues from time to time. Yet, pretty inexplicably, the government and the Premier failed to act and, in failing to act, failed the Victorian community and allowed our costs to soar and corruption to poison businesses and workplaces on their watch.

There has been a very human cost to this failure, and there has also been significant economic cost. Major projects in Victoria typically operate at 20 to 30 per cent premium to equivalent projects interstate, and that cost impost flows through every corner of the building industry, adding cost to housing, all other construction and ultimately food transport. And of course the overruns end up in higher taxes, higher debt and cuts to frontline services. What the latest headlines – the latest in years and years of headlines – tell us is that government is incapable of addressing corruption and incapable of addressing the perpetrators and the shadow underworld systems working to keep criminals in places of influence. They cannot do it, because if they could or if they ever were going to they would have.

We have had to put up with the failure of regulators in the Fair Work Commission and the Labour Hire Authority to stem corruption at its origin. The institutions charged with upholding integrity in the workplace fell asleep at the wheel. The Fair Work Commission and other industrial regulators did not bring timely enforcement, effectively allowing unlawful conduct to continue unchecked. The state's Labour Hire Authority did little until more or less forced to and then focused narrowly on weeding out dodgy labour firms but missed the entire wide range of endemic, corrupt, illegal and immoral practices occurring on worksites by a very specific group. As a consequence, legitimate operators were bullied out of the market and criminal elements profiteered, all under the noses of a government that proclaimed zero tolerance for corruption, even as, clearly by its own admission, it tolerated it in practice. The Victorian Big Build corruption saga stands as a stark lesson in governance failure. Political will and robust oversight are both needed to prevent corruption, and in this case both were found lacking.

The state Labor government, from Premier Jacinta Allan down through to the ministers, failed to proactively respond to credible warnings of wrongdoing. Whether that is due to complacency, political calculations, sheer negligence or all of the above, it is precisely this failure that enabled a corrupt culture to take root in projects funded by Victorian taxpayers. Because of these failures by both the government and regulators a toxic culture of intimidation, coercion and kickbacks has been allowed to plague Victoria's construction industry for years.

The Labor Party's close relationship with the CFMEU has clearly made it reluctant to confront the union's problems, and only after public exposure under media pressure did the party distance itself, and even then in a limited fashion. It means that reform, what there was of it when it eventually came, had to be hurriedly introduced in hindsight. We had a government dribble out the pathetically weak Wilson review, which is the basis for equally pathetically weak reform legislation before the lower house this week, the Labour Hire Legislation Amendment (Licensing) Bill 2025. The industry sector have panned both variably as a whitewash, insufficient and pointless, and they are largely right. If you consider any new Big Build–related corruption and crime revelation over the last 12 months, the new laws in this bill would not have prevented one of them. It does not even go close to approaching the core issues. They are full of obvious loopholes and workarounds, yet this is the total sum of government reform.

The latest bill coming to the lower house shows how weak and avoidant the government is on genuinely addressing corruption on their own building sites, and so the headlines will continue. Victorians are sick of the headlines when they know that in any other walk of life this would be unacceptable. No normal business dealing with land tax, payroll tax, supply chain, labour rules and health and safety compliance would ever be given the latitude the government gives itself on its own projects. This is a big part of why the Victorian Big Build projects cost 30 per cent more than equivalent projects in other states. This is why the bullying, intimidation and corruption persists.

Recent police action is welcome. What it highlights is that the criminality is real and actionable, but let us keep in mind that there is a very, very big difference between the police catching criminals after the damage is done and the government's prior knowledge and failure to act to ensure the corruption and criminality do not occur in the first place. They should not be applauded for the police's work on a disaster that they are the architect of and allow to continue. I am sure there will be more arrests, because the government fosters the very environment in which criminality can take place. Claiming any credit for it is like an arsonist setting a house on fire and then claiming credit for the firemen who arrive and try and put it out. We are clearly in a situation where the government is more interested in protecting its own interests and image than addressing the problem. They claim zero tolerance, and yet they are happy by their lack of action to remain complicit.

None of this is to excuse the conduct of the corrupt elements of the CFMEU itself. As Liberals and Nationals, we remain incredibly concerned that the criminal elements still hold sway and seek influence and will continue to seek to intimidate. One cannot help but suspect that in the absence of genuine reform preventing it there is an underlying tension amongst criminal elements to just wait things out until the spotlight has moved on and they can get back to business as usual. We might welcome the news that there is to be a clean out of the toxic culture at head office. Fine. But everybody knows that the underworld operate a shadow administration across government worksites and across the industry. We all see it. Only a government in denial would dispute it. Reform, if it is to achieve anything, must specifically focus on this and address this, and it must be done regardless of the close ties between the union and the government. This is pointed out because we now have systemic, institutionalised criminal corruption within government worksites, which is to say we have institutionalised criminal corruption within government. If that is not so, then prove it. Prove it with targeted reform that addresses it, not blanket laws that affect everyone but no-one specifically, not laws that sweep up right-acting stakeholders because the government wants to tiptoe around its complicity with a specific organisation.

We have reached a level of institutional corruption that can only be resolved by two things, Firstly, the Liberal and National parties repeat our call for a royal commission into corruption on the government's Big Build projects. Enough is enough. It is time. Secondly, the Liberal–National parties have a policy of putting back in place a suitable building authority with teeth, one that would not allow this criminality to flourish, one that would not allow this or any other future government the convenience of looking the other way and sitting on information for years without acting. I commend this motion to the house.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:22): I rise to make a contribution on this motion in Mr Welch's name. Having listened to Mr Welch's contribution and read the motion, it seems to be a rehash and a regurgitation of a theme that those opposite want to just bang on about, which is about government bad, government debt, government corrupt. all these kinds of lines that they want to trot out. But in all of this, I have not once heard what Mr Welch might do if he was ever given the privilege of being the Minister for Industrial Relations or being in government. And the lecturing –

Richard Welch interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: On a point of order, Acting President, I sat in silence while Mr Welch made his contribution.

Richard Welch: I feel I did not provoke you like that.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Yes, you did. I ask that I be allowed the same courtesy – to be heard in silence.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jacinta Ermacora): It is reasonable to be heard in silence, and I ask the chamber to listen in silence to Ms Terpstra.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Thank you, Acting President; a very wise ruling. I will continue with this – the hypocrisy from those opposite. I have been sitting in the chamber all day today listening to the various things that we have to deal with on opposition business day. You get all the same words being trotted out: 'ridiculous', 'hubris', 'corrupt', all the usual standard lines and standard words that the opposition always resort to. They are heavy on rhetoric but light on actual solutions.

What I can tell you is that I know hardworking people who work in the construction industry, who work on our government projects and are building infrastructure for Victorians. This is infrastructure that is much needed by Victorians. They are sick to death of the Liberals kicking them in the guts and their union in the guts, because the members run their union despite what Mr Welch says. He would not have a clue what a union is. He has probably never been a union member; I know that for sure. But I can tell you, as a proud trade unionist and as someone who understands working people and the issues they face in employment, it is only when we have good, strong unions that we see people get the protection they deserve.

I will talk about the sorts of things that might happen in the construction sector if we did not have a strong union to protect workers and their rights. I know the construction sector, and I am sure Mr McIntosh will reflect on this as well and would certainly know this. The construction industry is an inherently dangerous industry to work in, not because of the reasons that Mr Welch wants to bang on about but because when you are working with heavy machinery and equipment it is inherently dangerous. People die going to work building the infrastructure that Victorians need, and this is why we have strong unions who are there to protect working people. Despite the garbage that Mr Welch goes on with, our government has been clear about this. We support construction workers, and we thank them every day for the work that they do. But we have also taken action in regard to the things that have occurred. Mr Welch wants to go on with all this rhetoric, but if he is aware of any criminal activity or has concerns about something, he should report it to the appropriate authorities. He should report it, rather than coming in here and raising motions just to bang on with rhetoric, which does absolutely nothing to address the issues. They do absolutely nothing to address the issues.

It gives me the opportunity to talk about the things that we have done. Mr Welch over there wants to criticise the Wilson review. Well, I have not heard what he would do. I have not heard one thing about what he would do, because he has got no clue, no idea, no policy and no plan other than just to be critical and just to go on with rhetoric and criticise and criticise. Gold medal to you, Mr Welch, for Olympic level criticism and complaining – gold medal. But let me tell you what the Wilson review actually did. We are getting on with implementing the recommendations from that review, which was a report into Victorian government bodies' engagement with construction companies and construction unions. We are making sure that people come forward with the information about conduct on work sites that have complaints processes and protections they deserve. We have actually implemented real processes that allow workers to come forward.

Prior to the break, we introduced and passed the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025. Let me talk about that. That is very important.

Harriet Shing interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: It is one they oppose. But there are multiple examples of large employers who rip workers off, and this is why our government had to take action. But no, we are not hearing a word from Mr Welch over there and whether he thinks that large companies ripping off workers, not paying superannuation and the like is okay, because it is not okay. I will tell you right now that if we did not have good, strong unions on the beat, we would not know about these things, because the bosses certainly are not going to come forward and say, 'I've ripped workers off. I've stolen wages and superannuation from hardworking people.' But no, they opposed this bill – those opposite opposed the wage theft bill. That was about making sure that workers can recover money stolen by employers from them because of the work that they did. It is an absolute disgrace. We passed that legislation, and it legislated our commitment to creating a new complaints referral service within the Wage

Inspectorate Victoria, because again, workers have to jump through multiple hoops to get the money they have basically earned from employers who want to steal from them. It is a disgrace. This new service will be responsible for receiving complaints and tip-offs at public construction projects and ensuring that those complaints are referred to the appropriate authorities.

Also, we have strengthened the Labour Hire Authority's regulatory powers with a bill that was introduced into Parliament last sitting week. These reforms will expand the fit and proper person test to include past indictable convictions, insolvencies, close association with an unfit or proper person or membership to criminal organisations. Again, we have strengthened that. Construction policies and contracts for Victorian government-funded construction projects will include clauses that cover criminal or other unlawful conduct, requiring contractors to report and address suspected criminal or unlawful conduct on worksites and promote the new complaints referral body. There are some action items that this government has already done and put into place. But again I am hearing nothing from Mr Welch and those opposite about what they might do if they were ever given the opportunity to be in government. They have got no plan. They have got absolutely no plan other than just continued rhetoric.

In terms of the anti-corruption measures we have put in place, I note that the labour hire commissioner has said he has already taken action against hundreds of dodgy labour hire companies in Victoria's construction industry, and his soon-to-be-boosted powers will enable him to do even more to clean up the industry. The labour hire commissioner and his organisation, the Labour Hire Authority, is an incredibly hardworking organisation that every day makes sure that dodgy labour hire companies are brought into line. The IBAC report from 2023 into corruption risks on major transport infrastructure projects found that the Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority (VIDA), which was previously the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority (MTIA), is taking steps to mitigate and detect many corruption risks and has a well-developed integrity framework. These sorts of things are never static. There is always a need for continuous improvement, right, because obviously when you put things in place, people find ways of getting around it. You need to continually improve and continually take action to make sure you get around any changes in behaviour. Again, it is not a static-type thing. You have to continually improve and continually look at upgrading solutions. I know that VIDA, formerly the MTIA, are doing that. As I said, IBAC in 2023 found that they had a well-developed integrity framework. Again, all the bingo words over there – corrupt, bad, all the rest of it – are just hot rhetoric, honestly. It is just hot air and rhetoric.

In response to crime we passed the Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Bill 2024 to give Victorian police the tools they need to get organised crime off worksites. We strengthened Victoria's unlawful association scheme, introduced a new serious crime prevention order and prohibited the public display of gang colours as well. Under the legislation members of organised crime groups can be banned from prescribed government worksites as well.

In terms of investment we have invested in eradicating the rotten culture exposed in parts of Victoria's construction sector. We have invested $6.1 million as part of the 2025–26 state budget to fund the government's response to the Wilson review. We are also investing in Victoria's future, in the way that only Labor governments do. Our Big Build investments are boosting the economy, creating more than 50,000 jobs and building the road and rail projects that Victorian families want and need to get home safer.

What we know about those opposite is that all they know how to do is cut. If they were ever given the opportunity to be in government, they would cut, cut, cut, and those cuts would be deep and harsh. They only know how to tear things down. They certainly do not know how to build anything, because they have never built anything. And the continued disinformation about blowouts on projects is all garbage – it is all complete garbage. You have only got to look at what the Auditor-General has said about our projects. As I said, if they were ever in government, you could just imagine the chaos that would reign supreme because they are disorganised, hopeless, lacking policy, lacking direction and bitterly divided amongst themselves. The government will not be supporting this motion.

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (16:32): I rise to support this motion because the great threat facing Victoria today is not unions themselves, it is not private businesses as a class, it is not government as a structure, it is the fact that corruption has been allowed to spread across all three. And unless we confront that honestly, then all this violence and intimidation, all the cost blowouts and all the social decay that is hurting every single Victorian are actually going to destroy us. Unions have proven that they cannot self-regulate. Businesses cannot self-regulate either. It is actually the role of the government, and as we know, this government have proven time and time again that they are just not up to the task. We actually have to save unions from corrupt leadership, we have to save businesses from coercion and distortion and we have to save Victoria with a government that is actually willing to protect workers rights directly in the law, instead of outsourcing those rights to commercialised, self-interested, profit-driven and power-hungry corrupted unions.

The motion asks us to consider three things: the sacking of a senior CFMEU official, that is unions; the failure of key regulators, that is government; and the role of organised crime in the construction industry and business. The dismissal of John Perkovic is not an isolated employment decision of course, it is a symptom of the deeper rot that has been allowed to take hold in the CFMEU in Victoria. It is part of a wider pattern. We could talk about John Setka, the menacing and harassing emails directed at union-appointed administrators; Steven Deer, 21 fraud offences; the independent reviews that describe parts of the CFMEU's operations as a 'cycle of lawlessness'. These things are not random. Intimidation has been normalised, misconduct has been overlooked, and of course who foots the bill? Workers. Workers come last.

I heard it said over there, 'Why is anyone surprised? Construction's a very dangerous industry. It's got lots of heavy machinery.' Well, I think they are very highly skilled workers and they are perfectly capable of dealing with that machinery, but what they cannot deal with and could not be expected to deal with is this ridiculous institutionalised corruption, the blackmail, the money laundering, the drugs, the threats, the violence. And on the human consequences, we have all seen these headlines. They are absolutely awful. Do you remember that 17-year-old apprentice who turned up on a worksite in the wrong union T-shirt, was locked in a shed and went home and committed suicide? That is not a union. That is not a union, and Victorians will put unions in the bin if this kind of corruption is allowed to continue.

Women on construction sites were harassed, assaulted and treated like prostitutes – they did not even make it to be diversity, equity and inclusion hires. They were treated like playthings, all under the nose of this government, which rants on and on about its gender equality credentials.

We have got these young men emerging from prisons or crisis or from being convicted of petty crimes. They are vulnerable, they feel alone and then they are groomed into these networks where they are made into career criminals, and we lose another generation of young boys. What about the contractors and the subbies? They know that if they refuse certain demands or if they work with the wrong person, that means they might not ever work again. That is not solidarity. That is not union behaviour, it is cartel behaviour. It is being done under the banner of the good name of unions. But that is certainly not what is going on.

We are also asked to consider the failure of the Fair Work Commission and the Labour Hire Authority – but we all know these failures did not start last week. These have been unfolding and entrenched in this state for years. The agencies that were meant to be independent referees were under-resourced, it looks to me, systematically, by design, and they were politically constrained so that there was this environment in our state where challenging corruption in unions was considered more trouble than it was worth. In practice what happened was that the unions became the de facto regulators. They were the ones who decided who worked, who stayed, who spoke up and who was pushed out. Workers believed, erroneously, that the law would protect them from corrupt unions, but nobody did. Over many, many years, unions in Victoria – many of them, not all of them – have shifted from being worker advocates to political actors, funders, organisers, factional enforcers and powerbrokers. This is a blurring of representation and control, and it has reshaped the entire industrial landscape.

At the same time businesses, whose proper role is to provide the goods and services that families rely on, to create jobs and skills and to build the prosperity that funds our public services without burdening taxpayers, have been forced to operate under coercion, intimidation and political favour trading rather than fair competition. In this environment, workers are exploited three times over: first, as members of corrupt unions where they are forced to give their dues, which are then spent on delegate perks and political power plays; second, as taxpayers, funding these public projects with inflated prices; and third, as citizens, where the money that is wasted means they have to wait longer for hospitals, for ambulances and for infrastructure. The same worker pays three times and still ends up last in line. That is not representation. That is classic exploitation.

The third component is about organised crime. We have all heard about the investigation showing that intimidation, extortion and cartel-style conduct has become widespread, with workers being threatened, beaten up and stolen from in a culture where crossing the wrong person can end a business. It is not just an industrial relations matter. They are driving up the cost of living. Since 2014 Victoria has seen more than 50 new or increased taxes, and many of these charges exist to absorb the inflated costs that were created by rorted training schemes, inflated labour hire, rigid work practices and a politicised industrial culture. These costs flow directly into higher rents, higher mortgages, higher energy bills, higher freight and transport costs and higher everyday prices for the everyday people.

And when services fail under the weight of all this corruption and dysfunction, who is going to pay again? Families, through private fees and delays or just going without and suffering. You know who never goes without? Those rich union bosses and well-paid politicians –

A member: Like you.

Moira DEEMING: Yes, I am well paid – not as well paid as these fat-cat union bosses who are exactly the same as the corrupt corporate bosses that are claimed to be the ones fought against.

Now, when a government is actually doing its job, workers should be able to live their lives knowing that their rights are protected through clear, enforceable laws. That is what Victorians deserve. A union's proper purpose should be to give workers a fair voice to advocate for their rights, but you need clear laws to show when they have been broken.

At their best, unions lift standards, improve safety and secure decent conditions. We do not need to destroy unions; we need them. We just need to save them, actually – we need to reclaim them. We need legal standards that prevent corruption from taking root. And let us not forget that the party that has claimed to stand for workers has governed this state for the better part of 20 years, yet it has never legislated the basic rights it claims to champion. Oh, they have campaigned on them and marched on them and fundraised on them but just never, ever delivered them in the law. Instead they were fine outsourcing them to corrupted unions that they refused to – or just could not – rein in for some reason. And these unions answer to no elector, no democratic process that is public and no transparent standard.

The era of corruption in this state has got to end. If a Victorian does an honest day's work, pays their taxes and plays by the rules, then their safety and their livelihood and their rights should never, ever depend on the whims of political insiders or industrial cartels. That is how we are going to restore integrity to unions, confidence to business and fairness to Victoria.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:41): I rise to speak somewhat briefly to this motion, which, let us be honest, is another attempt by the Liberal Party to smear unions – to try to smear them anyway – in any way they can while also casting aspersions, in this case against Fair Work and the labour hire agency. I will state from the outset that allegations of criminal or corrupt behaviour must absolutely be investigated. I would hope we all agree on that in this chamber. But I will not stand by while this broken party attempts to delegitimise the critical role that unions play in representing workers' needs and protecting their rights, all the while ignoring the scandals and dodgy behaviour of property developers and big corporations. You lot are intent on going after the organisations that are

set up to fight for workers' rights and are instead giving free kicks to the big companies that flout the rules and game the system for their own benefit.

On top of this – to be very clear – this motion will not reduce any potential criminal or corrupt behaviour, and it will not make workers safer at work. It will not. To address corruption we need to bring our anti-corruption bodies up to the standards of other jurisdictions so that they have the power to investigate all corruption, including conflicts, including jobs for mates and including kickbacks. Now, this can be done. This could have been done through a bill that was introduced to this chamber recently, the Greens' IBAC bill. I will note this bill actually previously passed this upper house with the support of all non-government members – but not the government, I will note. It was voted down by the government in the lower house and could not progress. We should really actually be talking about that. I should note that this bill would have seen the remit of IBAC strengthened and expanded, and this, alongside more funding, would have tangibly improved our efforts to tackle corruption in Victoria. But instead we have this motion, which is disappointing.

My Greens colleagues and I will continue to fight for real improvements to our integrity and oversight systems here in this state, and at the same time we will continue to stand with unions in their work to improve workers rights and the conditions of workers right across our state.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (16:44): We cannot have criminality in any sector in our state, whether that is finance, our NGOs, our sporting organisations or indeed the construction sector. It is incredibly important to our state and it is incredibly important to our collective prosperity. The construction unions are obviously incredibly important to the industry and the broader sector. We cannot have corruption and we cannot have intimidation in the sector, whether that is from our unions or our builders. For all Victorians, we need the sector to work as well as it can and we need strong unions for the tens and tens of thousands who work in the sector. We know that those opposite have very few values, but one of the things they do gather around and agree upon is suppressing workers' wages. That is a policy of the Liberal Party. We know they will not invest in the infrastructure that our state needs and we know they will not invest in the workforce of our state.

I am proud to be part of a government that has invested in the workforce. When I started my apprenticeship, I feel very strongly that I worked with perhaps the end of the generation that wore overalls, that had been through the employment pathways of the last century doing apprenticeships and being employed for decades with an employer and taking immense pride in the work they did. I am incredibly proud that under subsequent Labor governments this century we have rebuilt, first of all, the training pathways through our TAFE system. We have created pathways into the workforce, ensuring that our big infrastructure projects are taking on trainees and taking on apprentices and we are creating that pathway. There was a comment from the other side before that construction workers know how to handle this big, heavy equipment. They are smart enough to do that. Well, when you are talking about people entering a workforce that is incredibly dangerous, it takes a hell of a lot of time to get the hours under your belt, particularly for young workers going into the workforce, because, let us be honest, there are a lot of people in this workforce who have not gone to the end of school, so they are not entering at 19 years old or whatever. We are talking about people entering it at 15, 16 or 17, which is something that is another really important part of this workforce – that we are enabling people to find employment where they can gain an income, can support themselves, can support their families and can make a really good contribution to their community through working in the construction sector.

I am incredibly proud that as Victorians and as Australians, unlike some nations in the world where construction workers are looked down on, I think as a consequence of decisions made by conservative governments in the 1990s when construction workers lacked that workforce pipeline, we now see the immense value in people working in construction and various trades and how important they are to our economy, whether that is working in remote sites, regionally or in metro areas.

As I was saying, the importance of that pipeline, that education pathway – and in Victoria we have an incredibly professional construction sector that we should all be proud of; there are other states and other nations in the world where it is far more transient, it is less valued by the people that work in it and you do not get the quality. Quality outcomes are something that we all want in our construction so it stands the test of time and so that it is safe for people. It is not just for those people working on construction sites in the construction industry. It is for all of us who pass through any building, any public asset or any public infrastructure that we are all safe going about our day-to-day work.

Richard Welch: On a point of order, Acting President, I am listening respectfully to Mr McIntosh's speech, and it has been a fine speech, but it actually goes nowhere near the motion. I would ask that he address the topic of the motion itself.

Harriet Shing: On the point of order, Acting President, the motion itself actually does refer to workplace representation. It also traverses subject matter which you, Mr Welch, in speaking to the motion, went to in some great detail. There is a degree of latitude provided to the first speaker on a motion, but having said that, you also did open the door in respect of the contribution that Mr McIntosh is now responding to. So this falls very squarely within the scope and the contemplation of the motion itself and the role which unions play in contemporary workplaces.

Richard Welch: Further to the point of order, Acting President, that is a mischaracterisation of my speech. I did not go to any of those areas, and there has not been one mention of one thing that is in any of the three clauses of this motion – the corruption, the regulatory agencies and the criminal behaviour. There has not been one mention of any of those things.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): I do not find that there is a point of order, but I ask the member to ensure he is relevant to the motion.

Tom McINTOSH: Mr Welch wants to talk about corruption. We know they vote against workplace safety, we know they want to see workers' wages suppressed, we know they will not invest in infrastructure and we know they will not invest in services. We know the Liberals will cut, cut, cut as they have done any time they have had an opportunity to be in government.

If we want to talk about corruption, why don't we talk about the Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry and how the big banks collected $850 million in fees for no service and there were dead clients involved? We could talk about wage theft and the Commonwealth Bank, the university staff at Melbourne University and the Super Retail Group. Qantas sacked 1700 workers to prevent them from exercising their rights under the Fair Work Act 2009 and paid $120 million to the ACCC for selling tickets to cancelled flights. You do not hear the Liberals getting up and talking about that, because they are absolutely motivated by putting workers under their heels.

We know they do not have any values. We see that whether it is federally with their colleagues in the federal caucus or whether it is here. They fight amongst themselves. They do not trust each other. They fight each other for positions of leadership to try and get ahead because there are no underlying values that inform policies that have a plan to improve this state. They simply do not have them. On this side, we collectively believe in shared values that – you know what, Mr Welch – grew out of the union movement. We want to see our workforce go to work and come home safely, whether they be retail workers, whether they be public transport workers or whether they are in the health system. No matter where people are working, we want people to come home safely and we want people to be paid well. We want people to ensure, as Ms Shing just said, that they can get superannuation.

Richard Welch interjected.

Tom McINTOSH: Yes, these sorts of entitlements that for decades you have stood against and pushed back progress on.

Richard Welch interjected.

Tom McINTOSH: Sorry, not you, Mr Welch, the Liberal Party. Before I was interrupted, what I was talking about was this concept and the comments from the other side that workers will be fine, workers will be safe and workers know what they are doing. I was talking about the pipeline of young workers, but every year we go to work on International Workers' Memorial Day and we stand and acknowledge every life lost, whether that is in manufacturing, whether that is in agriculture – lots of farmers lose their lives – or whether it is construction or all the injuries that occur in workplaces. It is unions that for decade upon decade upon decade have fought to ensure that workplace safety standards are improved and that pay and conditions allow people to care for themselves and their loved ones and to have money to be productive and to contribute financially and economically to their community to see our state thrive. I oppose this motion. I will leave my contribution there.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (16:54): I do enjoy a good old-fashioned Wednesday – now Thursday – arvo debating session. We have heard a few interesting contributions, and I rise to speak in support of my friend Mr Welch's motion.

Members interjecting.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I have been friends with Mr Welch for over a decade, thank you. Ms Terpstra tried to play the old class war instinct thing, so did Mr McIntosh. She said none of us have ever been members of a union. We know that is not true; my colleague Mrs Deeming has. I have. I was a member of the SDA for about four years, and I was also the general secretary of the Victorian branch of the National Union of Students – elected to that position. So I understand unions, and I think by and large they do a good job representing their workplaces. But there is one particular union that does not do a good job, and I think we can all agree on that. Even the government has agreed on that, although its approach is a bit of a wet lettuce approach. Last month we saw the sacking of John Perkovic from the CFMEU over allegations that he took bribes and other corrupting benefits from labour hire firms. To quote a report in the *Australian Financial Review*:

> His dismissal is an embarrassment for the administration, which was installed by the Albanese government last year to clean up the CFMEU following reports of underworld infiltration and bikie appointments.

This is not just another story about the CFMEU, it is another example of the chaos, corruption and division that have come to define this union under its leadership, and for too long the CFMEU has operated as a law unto itself. It has been riddled with allegations of bullying, intimidation and misconduct. Instead of standing up for workers, it has become known for internal power struggles and infighting and standover tactics. Workers deserve better. They deserve a union that defends their rights, ensures their workplaces and fights for fair pay. They do not deserve to be represented by an organisation that is consistently in the headlines for the wrong reasons.

We have seen frightening reports in the media of criminal activity on job sites. The *Age* reported some worrying instances on government worksites, including one woman who was seen on camera being bashed in her lunch break by a bikie-linked health and safety representative on a government-funded worksite. Another woman was locked in a small room on a government hospital site with a worker who was released from jail for threatening to kill a woman. He smoked ice and blew it in her face. A third woman was bashed outside of her worksite by a person with links to CFMEU figures, and to make matters worse, instead of the victims being supported, they are the ones here that end up being kicked off government worksites. That is what happened. In March the ABC reported that Victoria Police were expanding an operation investigating allegations of underworld infiltration of the CFMEU, including on state government projects. The *Herald Sun* reported this year that the CFMEU were still wielding power, causing fear and calling the shots on building sites.

Well, Mr McIntosh will play into the old class war argument of 'You're against workers.' Well, I have sat down with multiple contractors who have been threatened and blackmailed off government sites. I have sat down with Indigenous-owned businesses who have been kicked off –

John Berger: Did you report it?

Evan MULHOLLAND: I have written letters, yes, every time to the Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority, to the minister –

Tom McIntosh: To the police?

Evan MULHOLLAND: To the responsible authorities – several letters. You guys did not do it for a very long time. I have sat down with businesses that have been kicked off government worksites for who they belong to or who they are friends with or who does not like them at the time. And do you know what the key link is with all of these figures? They are using the under $30 billion North East Link as a proxy to extort people out of work on every other Big Build site in Victoria – 'If you don't get rid of this particular contractor down at Mordialloc, then your company won't get a job on the North East Link,' 'If your company won't pay $10,000, you won't get work on a different construction site,' 'If your workers don't pay an intro fee of $5000, you won't get work on the North East Link.' How do you possibly think that this kind of action is okay?

Harriet Shing interjected.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I will say to Ms Shing that every single person I have written with I have referred to the appropriate authorities and received a confirmation of response. Even in one of the cases the Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority confirmed publicly that it had received an investigation, as has Minister Williams. I get all these interjections on the other side. I have never, not once, not reported any allegations to the appropriate authorities.

Harriet Shing interjected.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Yes, I have, as I always do. Attempts to negotiate an outcome internally within the CFMEU organisation were very much unsuccessful. There are still problems on Victorian taxpayer–funded construction sites where the management of those construction sites and the delivery of those construction sites are not working. They are not working to the benefit of taxpayers, and they are not working to the benefit of hardworking individuals.

We saw that with Mickleham Road project stage 1 in the northern suburbs, where Indigenous businesses were kicked off the Mickleham Road site in favour of a brand new Indigenous labour hire company linked to Mick Gatto. How is that fair? No wonder it was the most expensive road project per kilometre in the history of the state, when you had the CFMEU running the show. This union is still taking Victorians for a ride.

Ms Terpstra said that she had not heard any of our plans regarding how we will tackle this. We released a plan well over a year ago to bring back the successful construction code of the Napthine government and create a construction enforcement Victoria authority to apply that code and to crack down on the blatant corruption that keeps happening on our construction sites.

I am sorry to say to Mr Puglielli: I will not be lectured to by a member of the Greens political party, when – now thankfully the former member for whatever seat in Queensland – Max Chandler-Mather stood up at a rally with CFMEU members, not wanting them to go into administration and wanting them to keep going how they were. Sorry, I am not going to be lectured to like that. He had the gumption to yell about property developers. I dare him to take a contrary view to the government's planning bill, otherwise he is just going to keep supporting the very people he hates.

Harriet Shing interjected.

Evan MULHOLLAND: It is relevant because I am speaking on the topic. We have seen scandal after scandal. We know document after document after document about the Premier being warned about CFMEU corruption on Victorian construction sites, but you know why she has applied a wet-lettuce approach. She has been the minister responsible or Premier for over a decade. She has enabled the CFMEU to take hold. The AWU does one deal in South Australia, and the CFMEU walk off every single Victorian Big Build construction site in Victoria. How does anyone think that that is

appropriate? It is not. Jacinta Allan and this government were the ones literally writing the CFMEU into contracts for the Commonwealth Games athletes' villages, saying, 'If you're not going to use the CFMEU workforce, you need not apply.' That is the length to which this government has enabled the CFMEU dominance here in Victoria. No other contractors have appeared. Usually you got into a room and it was said, 'It's not going to work if you don't have a CFMEU workforce.' The government literally wrote it into that contract. No wonder the Commonwealth Games were a disaster and we had to torch over $500 million – no wonder. I support this motion. It is a great motion.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:04): I thought I had heard it all, but that performance there takes the cake. I rise to contribute on this motion by Mr Welch. This motion discusses a few things in parts: (1) that this house should note the sacking of John Perkovic from the CFMEU and note the consequent questions arising about the flawed administration of the union; (2) that it discusses the behaviour of regulatory agencies, including the Fair Work Commission and the labour hire agencies; and (3) the motion expresses concern at the behaviour of some parts of the Victorian construction industry and allegations linked to organised crime that are associated with the CFMEU. This government takes the integrity of the union movement seriously. More than that, I take this stuff very seriously.

Next year I will be celebrating 40 years membership of the Transport Workers' Union branch. The union that I came from gave me every opportunity in life. It gave me a voice in the workplace, and it got me to where I am today. When I started working 30 years ago at the TWU I had just had one job and that was at Ansett Australia. It was a great job with great conditions and even better memories. I know a lot of the stories about this place, how there have been some rotten eggs in the union movement. The Liberals say that on our side of the chamber we do not take this stuff seriously, that we are somehow complicit in it and that we are somehow condoning this. That could not be further from the truth. Minister Stitt is another lifelong unionist. I just want to say about the minister that I met her 30 years ago when she was an organiser with the ASU and I was an organiser with the TWU. People like us take it seriously. Minister Tierney was the first woman to become the state secretary of the vehicle division of the Automotive Metals and Engineering Union 13 years ago; it is now part of the AMWU. She served as its first federal president for six years. Mr Galea spent 11 years – the best part of his 20s – working as an organiser for the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association, the mighty SDA.

You would think from what those opposite say that people like us join the union for the money, that it would be a cushy job. John Howard, the bloke those on the other side of the chamber lionise, the same bloke who ruined the country for a generation – I heard him say the other day on a podcast that too many Labor politicians do not have real world experience because all they did was work for unions. Nothing could be further from the truth. Most people in the union movement do not do it for the money. As I was saying before, I left a well-paid job, a stable income, a job with great entitlements and conditions, and I took a pay cut of 70 per cent when I worked at the TWU. I did not do it for the money. I did it because I cared about the mission of the union, and I cared about what it was doing for workers.

I also want to briefly touch on the allegations against the Fair Work Commission and the Labour Hire Authority (LHA). As Mr Welch would well know, a former Premier of Victoria, Mr Jeffrey Kennett, referred Victoria's powers to legislate on industrial relations to the Commonwealth in the 1990s. Except for a few select matters – for instance, matters involving our staff members or ministerial offices – the government has no powers to do anything here. Mr Welch would know full well that the Fair Work Commission is a matter for the federal government.

I also want to briefly mention the other work the government has done in this space to combat organised crime in the construction industry. In December the Premier announced that the Labor government would accept all parts of the recommendations of the *Formal Review into Victorian Government Bodies' Engagement with Construction Companies and Construction Unions*. This is a formal review that was conducted independently by Greg Wilson, and the government said it would

accept these recommendations either in principle or in full. This is relevant to the part of the motion on the Labour Hire Authority. The government, at the time in December, accepted the review and as part of it the review's identification that labour hire was found to be 'a problematic area in relation to the allegations that have led to this review'. We know that it provides a potential route for someone who has been dismissed to return under another labour hire firm, and that this sometimes is just unacceptable. That is why the government committed to strengthening the Labour Hire Authority's regulatory powers by expanding a fit and proper person test. That means expanding it to include indictable convictions, insolvencies, close associations with unfit or improper persons or memberships of criminal organisations.

As part of that, the government committed to consulting and listening far and wide on these changes. And, guess what, we have done that. That part of the process we have dealt with in the business of legislating. We have to listen to the Department of Justice and Community Safety, Victoria Police, the Office of Public Prosecutions, the LHA and Workforce Inspectorate Victoria. All of these bodies were consulted. We ensured their voices were heard during the development of the bill. Industrial Relations Victoria also undertook targeted consultations with employer and construction industry peak bodies and unions on what the approach to this should look like. We wanted to make sure our implementation of recommendation 4 of the Wilson review concerning the definition of labour hire provider was dealt with favourably. As part of the legislative process we heard that stakeholders were broadly supportive of the changes and in particular stakeholders viewed the potential alignment with the Queensland approach in a positive light. As Mr Welch will well know too, this consultation has been valuable in shaping the final bill. In fact this consultation was made and done in order to advance the Labour Hire Legislation Amendment (Licensing Bill) 2025, a bill that is now before the other place. It was introduced on 14 October, just last sitting week.

The Allan Labor government will continue to build on the foundations to create fair wages, safe workplaces and respect for working people. It is our responsibility to ensure that we continue to advocate for the people we represent. As someone who is deeply proud of my background in the TWU, I place high value on strong worker protections. It is a principle that I carry into this chamber and every time I stand to speak. Every worker deserves to feel safe and respected on site. These protections are not negotiable and are fundamental to fair and decent work.

As someone who got his start as a rank-and-file union delegate, I find it insulting that organised crime and outlaw motorcycle gangs have gotten themselves into the position of delegates, not to strengthen their workplace or to help a mate but to help themselves. That is not unionism and that is not solidarity, it is selfishness.

These matters are being dealt with. These labour hire laws are addressing the risk posed by organised crime and bikies, and a new complaints mechanism within Industrial Relations Victoria has the power to get it done – and we know that there is a lot to be done. That is because, as the Premier said, part of the culture was rotten at its roots – and I want to acknowledge the work done by Greg Wilson in his report. He has done diligent work, including the eight final recommendations that were made. As the administrator of the CFMEU Mark Irving said, the report highlighted the structural requirements that need to be made to the entire system. He said:

> It demands a whole-of-industry response, from unions to employers, government agencies and law enforcement.

That is what we are doing. That is what the former federal employment and workplace relations minister, Minister Watt, said. Minister Watt was in support of the report and our commitment to establish the new complaints body. The Allan Labor government will continue to give Victoria Police the tools they need to get organised crime off worksites, strengthening Victoria's unlawful association scheme, introducing new serious crime prevention orders and prohibiting displays of gang colours.

While we are fighting this, we must remind ourselves that not every construction worker should be vilified because of the rotten apples in the dark underbelly. We know that those opposite want to take

any chance to take a swipe at Victoria's Big Build – the Big Build that has been building our state for a decade – because they are cutters and we are builders, boosting the economy and creating more than 50,000 jobs. But to protect this we must make sure that it delivers for all Victorians. Our $6.1 billion package as part of the recent 2025–26 state budget will do just that. I encourage Mr Welch to support this bill when we come, hopefully this year, to proceed on the bill.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:13): I also rise to stand in support of this motion, and I think it is important to go through some of the points: that this is about the sacking of Mr John Perkovic recently from the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union, the CFMEU, and the apparent failure of regulatory agencies and their concern of ongoing criminal behaviour. I found a particular article incredibly interesting to read in relation to this, and that is the EPIC – Empowering People in Construction – article headed 'CFMEU corruption: crime, cover-ups and govt complicity (2025)'. This report to me is very honest, it is very raw and it provides a fair amount of detail. What is really concerning is how much criminal activity has been entwined in the workings of the CFMEU, not to mention the bullying and the harassment of women. We only have to look at some of the information and we are just simply horrified. We do hear about it. We have been able to watch reports on the news and on special programs that have investigated this. I do applaud every journalist that has taken the time to honestly investigate and report on the issues that we are seeing with the CFMEU.

I want to add to that concern something that I discovered perhaps about a year ago that really troubled me. A wonderful service, and I am not going to mention its name, that helps young people in difficult circumstances to get employment was doing its job. It was very thrilled when it was able to say to me on my visit – and this is going back quite a while ago now – 'Hey, it's just been amazing. We have these young teenage people who don't have the family networks and supports, who've come from very difficult circumstances and maybe have been caught in petty crime, and we've been able to get all of them work – you just won't believe it – where they're going to be getting paid so well.' And I said, 'Oh really? Who's taken them on?' It was construction in businesses with the CFMEU. That really concerns me, and I think it should concern every Victorian when our vulnerable young people who have petty criminal histories and no family support services are being plucked from our society and placed into what on the surface should be a great opportunity and a great career or a great job. But when you have criminal activity running a union like the CFMEU and taking place in a way that it is so systemic and embedded, then we have major problems. That is why the third part of this motion expresses concern at ongoing criminal behaviour in some sections of the Victorian construction industry, including and in particular the continuing role of organised crime within and associated with the CFMEU.

People, when they are brave enough, are constantly concerned and feel intimidated. This particular article is very, very enlightening. There are so many things I could read out here that are so worthwhile in understanding the systemic bullying. I think it is something like 68 per cent of women that have experienced harassment. They found that 60 per cent of Big Build contracts – this is through the IBAC probe of 2025 – went to CFMEU-linked firms despite higher bids from competitors. One tender for the Suburban Rail Loop listed union compatibility as the criteria – a dog whistle for kickback-ready contractors. It was noted that when governments fund crooks, they become crooks by proxy.

I think the concerns that people have that this has not been dealt with, that it has not gone to a royal commission, are very founded. It is something that we have been pushing for. If the government wants to honestly convince the public that it is being transparent, that it cares about stamping out genuine criminal activity, then we need to see a real change in the construction industry. We need to know that the criminals are not in unions like the CFMEU.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:17): To sum up, I thank everyone for their contributions today. The first point to make is this is not an attack on unions and the valuable role that they play; in fact quite the opposite. If we did not care about unions, we would not care about the corruption in them so much and the fact that that corruption undermines the important role that they

play. That is very, very wrong. It is not an attack on unions. If it is an attack on anyone, it is an attack on the government and their accountability. It was just remarkable to hear so many contributions where the core issue, which is corruption of a major union on government worksites, is not sufficiently concerning for people to actually address the topic and address the issue.

There is no other way to understand that except that you are either embarrassed by it or you are complicit in it. But certainly the one thing that it all has in common is you are not willing to address it. We had Mr Berger say on one hand we have no power, Kennett gave all the powers to Canberra so we have no power to do it. Then he rattled off a list of things that they are supposedly doing where they clearly do have power to do it – the bills, the other things. If the government has the power to do something about it, then do it. But the fact is none of the things you have done and none of the things you are doing are going to address a very specific problem with a very specific organisation. That is the problem. The only conclusion Victorians can draw as they see headline after headline, week after week, is that you do not intend to. And that begs the question: why? Why wouldn't you want to address endemic corruption on your own worksites? There is no logical answer to that except that you are complicit. Whether you want to argue that you are willingly complicit or accidentally complicit or complicit by negligence, it remains you are complicit.

You are morally responsible. You are the government. You are the only ones who can act. You are the only ones who can stop the bribery, the intimidation, the wrecking of local businesses – you. You have had years to do it. You have absolutely no moral high ground here. You are in the job here of tidying up a mess you have made, but you are not willing to do it; you are not even willing to talk about it. You are not willing to look in the mirror and confront the issue and the situation that you have created. Accountability is required here, and until it occurs Victoria will continue to suffer; workers, good, hardworking union members, will continue to suffer; the soul of this state, which tolerates corruption, will suffer; and we will continue to spiral as a state.

We need to turn this around, and there is only one group, one party, one organisation that can do it, and it is the government. Why won't you do it? You will not do it because you are conflicted. Maybe you are embarrassed. Maybe there are too many connections. You can only wonder why. But I think any sensible, right-headed Victorian looking at the headlines knows the true answers. It does not need to be said. You can weasel-word around it, you can deflect and you can hide behind the skirts of the union movement – because that is what you are doing, hiding behind their virtue to avoid your accountability.

There is corruption on a Victorian building site that is costing us money. It is costing people's businesses. It is costing young people their self-esteem. It is costing us dearly and deeply every single day. Then it extends because it is costing us money. It is costing us money because building costs go up, and as building costs go up the cost of living goes up, transport costs go up, food costs go up and housing goes up. This is what happens when you allow a toxin into your society. That toxin does not stay where it is. It does not stay within the boundaries of your worksites. It spreads out across the whole of the state. The only way to get rid of that toxin is to cut it out, and that requires a desire to do so. The government has demonstrated through this motion and through its contributions to this motion that it has no desire to do so, because the first step in solving a problem is to admit you have got one, and you have not done that. I commend this motion.

Council divided on motion:

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

Noes (20): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom

McIntosh, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion negatived.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:28): I move:

> That the consideration of the remaining notices of motion and orders of the day, general business, be postponed until the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Statements on tabled papers and petitions

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into Climate Resilience

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (17:29): I rise to make a statement on the report of the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee's inquiry into climate resilience, which we tabled not too long ago. That report, following a detailed inquiry by the committee, made a series of really important findings and recommendations about the impact that climate change is having on the built environment in our state. It certainly attracted the interest of a lot of members of the community, and in talking with my parliamentary colleague the member for Footscray in the other place Katie Hall, we had a conversation about the community groups that she had been talking with about the issues of climate change and the resilience of the built environment. We agreed to go and jointly have a meeting with them. We met recently with Friends of the Earth Melbourne and with Climate Action Maribyrnong, with EP and Paul, at Katie's office in Footscray to discuss the report. We talked a lot about the process and went through the investigations and the findings. We looked at and talked about in general terms across the board how climate change is impacting the places that we live and work and also some of the specific issues in and around Maribyrnong and Footscray and how climate change is affecting those communities. We know obviously the impacts of the devastating flooding that occurred in Maribyrnong in October 2022, which was the subject of a separate inquiry and report that the Environment and Planning Committee did.

In the course of that discussion we had some really thoughtful contributions about the way forward for this from Climate Action Maribyrnong. We gave an undertaking – Katie said that she would make a contribution about the report in the Parliament. The small matter of exclusive cognisance probably precludes her from making a statement on a report tabled in this place, so I decided to do it on our collective behalf instead. Friends of the Earth Melbourne and Climate Action Maribyrnong were keen to reiterate to us, as members of Parliament and members of the government, the need to continue to fund local climate resilience work and to adopt the recommendations in the report that go to adaptation and the importance of community-based climate adaptation funds. They, as we are, are interested in the government's response, which the government, under the terms of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, will make within six months of the tabling.

One of the big things that we talked about was the impact of urban heat islands in our communities and the way that the urban heat island effect is very demonstrably affecting urban communities, and the very important need for our planning and environment system and the Planning and Environment Act 1987 to deal with these issues. I was very grateful to be able to explain to these people that the government has recently passed through the Parliament amendments to the Planning and Environment Act to make sure that climate change considerations are taken into account in the planning and environment framework in this state. That is just one of the many things that the Allan Labor

government is doing to make sure that the places we live and the places that we love are resilient to the effects of climate change.

There is a suite of measures that we have taken to make sure that our built environment is resilient to climate change. The report also touched on the importance of making sure that our communities are resilient to climate change and are able to respond to natural disasters in the frequency with which they occur. I commend that report to the house. I congratulate Climate Action Maribyrnong for the work that they are doing, and also, on behalf of Katie Hall, the member for Footscray, and myself, I thank EP and Paul who came and met with us for the very thoughtful and engaging discussion we had on these issues.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Petition

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:33): I rise to speak on petition number 658, tabled by my colleague Mr McCracken on 14 October. There is to be a full debate on this petition following statements on tabled papers and petitions, and I sincerely apologise to Mr McCracken that I am speaking before him, but I could not get on the list for that debate, so my way to contribute tonight is to speak on the petition as a tabled document. Petition 658 calls for the government to immediately cease the introduction of the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, ensure the current fire services property levy remains in place for the foreseeable future, and commit to a genuine consultation process, which includes CFA and SES volunteers, farmers, emergency services workers and other interested parties, to develop a fairer way of funding Victorian emergency services.

I want to start by congratulating Mr McCracken and every Victorian who signed this petition, because with its 43,748 signatures it is officially the largest petition ever tabled in the history of this Parliament. The fact that it is the largest petition ever tabled is reflective of the amount of anger the Victorian community has with the Allan Labor government about this big, fat new tax. This tax will cripple farmers, who will be asked to contribute more than three times the tax they were paying under the old fire services levy. This is particularly insulting given that many farmers are also the volunteers who fight the fires in their local communities and protect our state during the summer bushfire season. But the tax is not just a country tax, this tax is levied on every single property in Victoria, so even city residents are now paying far more than they were 12 months ago. The cruellest aspect of this tax is that the government chose to call it a volunteers fund, using the goodwill all Victorians have towards our dedicated volunteers in the CFA, SES and the Shepparton and Echuca–Moama search and rescue squads to try and gain support for what is just another Labor tax. The volunteers are devastated that they have been used in this way, and it has also driven resentment amongst some Victorians, because they think they are being hit by a massive tax increase to give more money to volunteers. One CFA volunteer even told me that his neighbour had said to him, 'It's your fault that I'll have to pay this tax.'

Another cruel aspect of the tax is the vast majority of it will go to propping up activities that have traditionally been funded from consolidated revenue – things like Triple Zero Victoria, the office of the emergency management commissioner and departmental activities. This is wrong because it is a straight cost shift from consolidated revenue to a tax on Victorians. There is no offset from consolidated revenue to make up for the extra tax that Victorians are asked to pay – no discount on your land tax, car registration or stamp duty et cetera. That money that consolidated revenue used to contribute to pay for these activities will just be used to prop up Labor's ailing bottom line and budget blowouts. This is a desperate grab for cash by a desperate and tired Labor government that has run out of money and ideas. It is time for them to go.

I want to congratulate the many Victorians who have joined the protest against this tax. It is not just the 43,748 people who signed this petition that oppose it. There have been multiple protests throughout the state, including at least three protests held at the front of this building on the steps of Parliament. These protests attracted hundreds of fire trucks and other emergency services vehicles and tens of thousands of Victorians, who travelled from all parts of our state to send a message to the Premier and

her government that this tax is a step too far. In the Premier's own electorate of Bendigo East, which is also in the Treasurer's electorate, Victorians have gathered three times outside the Premier's electorate office; once at the Capitol Theatre in View Street, where they were also joined by Victorians opposed to the Allan government's renewable rollout and mineral mining on private land; and at the big rally at Weeroona Oval, where thousands gathered to protest against the tax. Other protests have taken place in Werribee, Camperdown and other regional cities. I congratulate the organisers of these rallies for conducting rallies that have been peaceful and respectful but have also sent a very strong message to the Labor government.

It is also interesting that this tax has united some unusual allies. It is quite common for the volunteers of the CFA and SES, the Victorian Farmers Federation and the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria, the Liberal Party and the Nationals to be united on an issue, but it is unusual for them to stand shoulder to shoulder with the United Firefighters Union of Australia against the Labor government. On this issue these groups have also been joined by FRV, which has united the two fire services in a way some never thought possible. But that is not the full extent of the organisations standing against Labor's big new tax. Standing in solidarity with these groups are local government peak organisations – the Municipal Association of Victoria, Regional Cities Victoria and Regional Councils Victoria – as well as all 79 LGAs. The fact that this tax has united so many groups demonstrates just how bad this tax is.

Department of Treasury and Finance

Budget papers 2025–26

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:38): I rise to speak on the 2025–26 Victorian budget paper 3, 'Service Delivery', page 215. In doing so I propose the conversation: what would you do if you were an arrogant, if you were an ignorant and if you were a desperate government wanting to fill a budget black hole of ginormous proportions? Well, you would reclassify a property services levy and turn it into the most egregious tax, and you would label it the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. The fact that it has got 'volunteer fund' in this tax sticks in the neck of so many Victorians, so many of our volunteers – our State Emergency Service volunteers, our Victorian CFA volunteers – who are the most wonderful people that protect our life and property in regional Victoria. And in my electorate of Eastern Victoria Region in particular we have had more than our fair share of bushfires and devastation, and it exists across the state.

You would have that fund, and then in a spin-doctor format you would say, 'We are supporting the volunteers.' The government has come out and said that all of this goes to emergency services. All of this goes into – it may be emergency services – so much that was in core government services, as in Triple Zero Victoria, Emergency Management Victoria and Forest Fire Management Victoria, which is just actually in disarray at the moment. They were in core government services. They have been taken out of consolidated revenue, and our people right across Victoria are being asked to bear the burden of this government's mismanagement. What we know with this egregious, atrocious tax is that there is a 100 per cent hike on residential and commercial properties, there is a 64 per cent hike on industrial properties, there is a 150 per cent hike on those people who grow our food and fibre for our plates, for our nation's tables and for international markets – many of whom of course are also doubling in their volunteer capacity supporting CFA or SES. We have seen huge rallies, we have seen frustration and we have seen a level of pushback that I have not seen for quite some time. We have had rallies on the steps of Parliament. What happened when the government announced this? Three hundred CFA brigades went offline. People hung up their hats and put their jackets over the fence, saying that this is completely offensive.

We are soon to debate – and I congratulate Mr McCracken – a petition, an e-petition. You know how passionate I am about e-petitions, because in May this year I worked very hard with our Victorian community, those people that love our outdoor spaces, that love being out in our state forests, and that petition that I tabled and debated in here with my colleagues the Liberals and Nationals had 40,000 signatures. But Mr McCracken and his wonderful people right across Victoria have topped

that, and if I am going to be topped by anything, I want to be topped by that particular e-petition. I congratulate everybody who has signed this petition. Right across the board this is egregious.

What has my colleague the Shadow Minister for Emergency Services Danny O'Brien said? Supporting and standing with all of the coalition, the Liberals and Nationals, he has said and we have said we will scrap that tax. When we get into government in November 2026 we will scrap the tax, and we will properly fund our emergency services – our CFA, our FRV, our SES. We will return them to sanity so that many of those old trucks that the CFA are driving around that could have heritage plates, vintage plates, will be restored. There will be adequate funding, and we will respect those people who look after us.

Petitions

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (17:43): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

When our country communities are threatened by a fire, it is the men and women of local brigades that stand between life and loss. When storms tear through our farms, it is neighbours, not bureaucrats, who clear the roads. And when tragedy strikes, it is country people who dig deep, even when they have got little left to give. But now this government, the same one that claps our heroes, including our United Firefighters Union members, wants to tax them for their service – a tax on sacrifice, a tax on decency and a tax on the community spirit that has carried Victoria through every flood, every fire and every storm.

I remember that when this legislation passed in the Council earlier this year, in the dead of night, over 200 CFA brigades went offline. That alone should have been a red flag. I thank Steve Peel for backing this petition. Steve, we have made history tonight with the largest petition in the Parliament's history, with 43,748 signatures. But we have to ask the question: why does the government hate farmers so much? Why does the government keep punching down on regional and rural communities already doing it tough? Why hit people when they are hurting now the most? I will tell you why: because the government have made a cold political calculation. They think that on the electoral map, country people do not matter. They think that small communities are small voices, easy to ignore and easy to bulldoze. Well, they are wrong. What we lack in numbers, we make up for in fight, and we are prepared to fight. We have stood shoulder to shoulder at rallies right across the state and even on the steps of this Parliament, where thousands have gathered to send a message to the government: scrap the tax. I have heard the government's propaganda machine whirl into life recently claiming that all funds go to the emergency services. That is a bit of a stretch, because when this government says emergency services, they do not mean volunteers; they mean departmental bureaucrats. They do not mean firefighters and trucks; they mean paper pushers and pen-pushers in offices. They do not mean investment in boots and hoses; they mean plugging a budget black hole. And that is what this tax is really about. It is not about protecting people. It is not about supporting volunteers. It is not even about improving the system. It is about money, and the government want more of it. Once again they expect regional Victorians and rural Victorians to wear the brunt of this, because to them we are a soft target. As the Treasurer said in June, this was a progressive, proportionate tax based on the capacity to pay. I bet there is a lot of regret around those words.

Tell that to the potato farmers north of Ballarat. Tell that to the cropping farmers in the Wimmera. Tell that to the dairy farmers in south-west Victoria. Explain to the volunteer firefighters who pay already in blood, sweat, tears, time and courage. Take country people for granted at your own risk. We on this side of the chamber will never, ever apologise for standing with rural and regional Victorians. We always have and we always will, because that is who we are and that is why we will fight this tax with every single thing we have got. When the people of Victoria have their say in November 2026, we will scrap the tax. We will end the tax on service, end the tax on sacrifice and end the tax on

community, because the spirit of country Victoria is not for sale and it will never, ever be taxed into silence.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (17:48): I thank the member for his petition. It is a shame there are only 5 minutes, because there are a lot of facts that should be facilitated and put on the table. Obviously this petition calls on the government to cease the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund (ESVF) and keep the fire services property levy, which is slightly at odds with the Liberals and Nationals announcement that if they are elected in 2026, they will repeal the emergency services and volunteers levy as Mr McCracken has said. If you go into his electorate office, you can actually pick up a blue Liberal logo sign that says that they will scrap the tax. I am pretty sure the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission might want to have a look at that, but I come back to –

Members interjecting.

Jaclyn SYMES: Just putting it out there. In any event –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Mr McCracken was heard in silence.

Jaclyn SYMES: We have done the analysis on costing up the slogans that Mr McCracken likes to promote, because what that will see is a cut of $11.1 billion in the budget. That means a potential of – if the government changes – $11.1 billion behind where we are currently at. That is a budget black hole that can only be filled by cuts. Will that be teachers? Will that be nurses? Will that be doctors? Will that be child protection workers? Will it be firefighters? As Treasurer, I need to be clear: there is just no way that repealing the ESVF could somehow support a sustainable funding model of our emergency services. Repealing the ESVF will only reduce funding to core emergency services, get rid of the volunteer rebate and make it more difficult for local communities to prepare, respond and recover from natural disasters. As a regional Victorian, former Minister for Emergency Services and former agriculture minister I have experienced and seen firsthand the impact of disasters, and I know that we have more regular and more severe natural disasters happening around the state. They are putting increasing pressure on our emergency services, especially in rural communities, and as a state government it is our job to ensure support is always available when it is needed.

I have personally lived through Benalla being flooded. I have worked closely with communities that have been impacted by emergencies, most notably the fires at the end of 2019 and the October 2022 floods. In response to the floods more than $2 billion was directed to response and recovery. I will use Campaspe shire as an example. Government responded to the needs of the community with more than $10 million in emergency relief payments. 460 organisations received flood recovery and relief. Recovery funding equated to $3.5 million for the clean-up program. Three hundred people accessed the Elmore village, and a provision of temporary accommodation for other impacted residents was provided. There was a $1.4 million recovery hub supported by recovery officers. I use this as an example: it is clear this funding into this community far exceeded any contribution that they made under a levy. But what we want to make sure is that future communities that are impacted can have a similar response, and you can do that by having a levy that is hypothecated for emergency services response and recovery.

Under the ESVF we have shored up funding for our emergency service organisations and hardworking volunteers because every single dollar raised must go to emergency services. It is legislated. Because of the ESVF we have been able to announce new trucks, tankers, equipment, training, station upgrades, upgrades to the VicEmergency app and a doubling of the volunteer emergency services equipment program grants. Just this Monday the Minister for Emergency Services in the other place was in Scoresby inspecting the 50 new 4x4 crew-cab chassis that will become light tankers. She announced that the first seven would be allocated to a range of towns around the state. This builds on the $40 million CFA rolling fleet replacement program announced in December, alongside the provision

of a $40 million program for FRV and a $30 million program for VICSES. These are guaranteed minimum amounts, which has the benefit of allowing the organisations to plan their future orders. CFA is also in the middle of rolling out their radio program.

These investments in our emergency services are possible because of the ESVF, and that is why last year when this proposal was announced by the former Treasurer I supported it, because I was the emergency services minister. I wanted to invest in more FRV trucks, more CFA equipment, recognise SES volunteers, support the State Control Centre, update the VicEmergency app and ensure that we are well placed to step in when the very worst happens.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:53): I am also pleased to talk on this petition, and I thank all the petitioners that signed it. There is a lot of talk in this place and in the community about the cost of living – the cost of food, the cost of rent, the cost of petrol, the cost of gas, the cost of electricity – but no-one seems to be talking about the biggest cost of all, and that is the cost of government. That is borne through taxes, and the Victorian people have had enough. They cannot bear taxes any higher. The taxes are too damn high. And what we see when they institute taxes like this – I am sorry that the Treasurer has left, because she spoke about this $11 billion black hole. Actually she talked about making cuts. I think the government should make cuts. I think the government is far too big, and I am happy to provide some ideas.

Firstly, we should cancel the Suburban Rail Loop. This is a financial black hole that has the potential to send this state into financial ruin. Secondly, we should abandon net zero. We should abandon all renewable energy subsidies and let the electricity market operate on the free-market level as much as possible. We should allow more gas to be mined in Victoria. We have ample gas supplies, yet the government seems to be sitting on their hands and not allowing gas production which this state urgently needs and which would provide more tax revenue. There are many, many ideas here. I know that the Silver review is currently under consideration by the government. I would urge the government –

Members interjecting.

David LIMBRICK: Well, we have not seen it yet. I do not know what is in it, but I would urge the Treasurer to look at middle management consolidation within the public service. The idea that they cannot find $11 billion in savings to cover this without raising taxes and harming regional Victoria is just a joke. We can absolutely do it. We have seen how much money has been wasted on things in the past, like the Commonwealth Games, which we got nothing for – $589 million on nothing. There is so much waste in this state. We can absolutely cut back the size of government and maintain our emergency services as we need without adding more taxes for Victorians.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:55): Thank you to my colleague Mr McCracken for organising this petition and to the 43,748 fabulous Victorians who have signed the petition. This is a very historic point in time, not only because it is the largest number of petitioners that we have ever seen in this place who signed this petition but also because it has brought together a coalition of stakeholders like never before. Virtually every one of the 79 councils in Victoria has made sure that their ratepayers know that they have been made to be the tax collector for this state, the debt collector for this state. They do not like it, and they are very concerned about the fact that they are having to collect the tax on behalf of the government. It has also brought together our fabulous volunteer firefighters, standing alongside our United Firefighters Union members. I pay tribute to Peter Marshall in the gallery tonight. The paid professional firefighters are standing side by side with our volunteers to make sure everybody knows that they are opposed to this great big new tax, that it is a disgrace. They are standing alongside councillors. I see councillors in the gallery tonight, councillors who have stood with us on the platforms across Victoria as we join all Victorians in fighting this tax. It is an extraordinary coalition when I stand alongside Stephen Jolly, the mayor of the City of Yarra, not known for his conservative views normally. He does say that it is most interesting that he is standing alongside me. But we are joined at the hip on this particular issue.

It has also joined every farmer. At the time this tone-deaf government brought in this tax our farmers in Victoria were facing the worst crisis, probably since 1900. The least amount of rain had fallen in many parts of Victoria, and they brought in a new tax. They have had a few reprieves, but it is a stay of execution for farming communities. They will be hit with that tax next year, and they cannot afford it. Many will go broke. Many councils will probably go broke because people cannot afford to pay this tax. Everyone has joined together with us side by side to fight this tax. This tax applies to everybody in Victoria – every household, every commercial business, every farmer.

The worst thing of all is that it is in the name of volunteers. That is disgraceful, it is obscene and you ought to be ashamed of yourselves. And where are you? Look at these empty benches. There are virtually no Labor Party members there. Where is the crossbench? They are not there either – the Greens, who say they care about the environment. They do not care about the environment at all. They are working side by side to tax Victorians out of existence. As for the amount they are collecting, in the first year they will collect the same amount that it cost to not have the Commonwealth Games. But has anybody got a ticket to Glasgow? I do not think so. Nobody has.

Now, recently I visited the Melton fire shed, and guess what? For a 220,000 population, they have got one water tanker. Now, can you believe that? If a fire occurs in that growing community, they are in real trouble. A brigade captain from Bendigo wrote to us recently, very concerned. This is in the Premier's backyard. He says:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

> Today we had a ladder platform –

that is a cherry picker –

> in Footscray break down during the Fire Ops 101 program. Instead today we have highlighted the major issues we experienced with our truck fleet. Most concerning, last night FRV had no spare trucks across the state. A truck in Melbourne suffered a breakdown, and there was no truck to replace it. What is happening?

The one thing a government must do is keep its citizens safe. You are failing to do that, but you are trying to tax Victorians to keep themselves safe. What a disgrace you are. And it is a disgrace not every one of you is sitting on those benches to actually let the people of Victoria know how concerned you are that you are taxing them out of existence.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (18:00): I rise to speak in support of Mr McCracken's petition number 9451 on the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. This petition highlights a very real and pressing concern: the dramatic rise in payments that would fall upon Victorian ratepayers under this new scheme. For many households, farmers and small businesses these additional costs represent a significant financial burden, especially at a time when cost-of-living pressures are already high. The petition rightly calls for the government to immediately halt the introduction of this fund and to maintain the current fire services property levy, which provides an established, equitable mechanism for funding our emergency services.

Equally important is the petitioners' call for a genuine consultation process. The voices of those directly affected, the CFA and the SES volunteers, farmers, emergency service workers and the broader community, must be central to any decisions about funding. These are the people on the front lines protecting Victorians in times of crisis, and their perspectives are invaluable in shaping a system that is fair, sustainable and effective. I urge the Legislative Council to act on this petition, to listen to the concerns of the community and to ensure that any reforms to the way we fund our emergency services are developed through consultation, fairness and transparency.

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:02): Well, here we are again: a similar debate and a similar petition, but this time, I tell you what, you have not fooled 40,000 Victorians – 40,000 Victorians are awake to this government. It is the biggest single fraud on any public in this country since probably the days of Paul Keating. Paul Keating promised the GST, and he never could quite deliver, but this government has gone a step further. They promised a great big new tax, and that

is exactly what those opposite managed to deliver. They gave us a tax that they did not even need to pay for fire services, although this government was actually going to also pay for police or ambulances. But they conned the entire people of Victoria – and never took it to an election, mind you; never actually had a mandate. In the same vein that they did with the Commonwealth Games, they promised one thing and did another. But this is actually more sinister than that because they never took this to an election ever.

What they said was, 'In order to fund our volunteers, in order to fund our paid professional firefighters, we actually have to have a tax' – what nonsense. Therein lies the biggest crime that has been committed here: it is propagating a fraud. It is a fraud propagated by the Labor Party and those opposite, not only on the workers of this state, but most importantly, on our first responders – those who we know, in terms of firefighters, on six out of 10 occasions will be the first on scene. They will be the first to help a cardiac arrest victim. They will be the first to help when trying to save property. They will be the first to try and help when it comes to saving lives. When it comes to having their back, what does this government do? Well, they are behind them, all right, but they have got their back in the most wrong way possible. They have perpetrated this absolute fraud that somehow they need to fund it through a new tax when all of us in this place know, ever since Victoria was founded over 150 years ago and more, that every cent of general revenue is there to fund the basic services of this state, from police to ambulance and of course fire. Here is also the very inconvenient truth for those opposite: having introduced this tax, what are they now doing for fire services in Victoria? They are cutting them. This is the lie they are perpetrating. It is absolutely cruel.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Nick McGOWAN: It is gaslighting. Actually it is worse than that, because I will tell you what: go and spend the night with the firies. Members here today with me, Mrs McArthur and Mr McCracken, thank you for bringing this to our attention yet again. Peter Marshall is here today to join us with all the others in the chamber and all the others in the gallery, and credit to them, because they are relentless in their campaign to make sure that those who save us are being looked after. If they were not there right now, they would be thrown on the trash heap, because that is exactly what those opposite are doing to them each and every day.

Even this afternoon there was a chorus on the other side of the chamber here talking about standing up for workers – what an absolute lie. If you were doing that, you would have done presumptive legislation by now. You have sat on your hands for the better part of 20 years, and you have done nothing – not a thing. You can screw your face up all you like, Mr Batchelor, but have you done anything to progress presumptive rights for firefighters? Nothing – that is what you have done; absolutely nothing. Through you, Chair: that side has done absolutely nothing. And now they are doing worse than that – they are actually denying firefighters the resources they need to do their job safely. Forty per cent of the fire trucks in this state – 40 per cent of the fire appliances – are obsolete. Every time we send a firey out – a female firey or a male firey – guess what happens? They break down all the time, regularly, to the point that we do not even have backup appliances in this state to fight fires, much less save somebody from a cardiac arrest. So the next time your relative – your mother, your father, your son, your daughter – has a heart attack, it is more likely that it will be a firey that is going to save them. But under this government, with their broken-down vehicles, 40 per cent of which are already obsolete – and by the end of this year it will be another 20 per cent, so 60 per cent of the entire fleet of Fire Rescue Victoria will already be obsolete.

In the meantime, what is happening in the fantasy land opposite? They are opening great big train stations and great big tubes. Who are they going to send down the tunnels when people need to be saved? It will be the firies. 'We'll send them down – they'll be all right.' No, they will not, because their breathing apparatus does not even work. They do not even have breathing apparatus – they all expired, in terms of expiry date, in September. So not one firefighter has a proper breathing apparatus – neither short-term nor long-duration – to get into any of these tunnels to save themselves, much less to save any Victorian. That is the disgraceful state of the fire service in Victoria, because those opposite

are so duplicitous. They are prepared to lie and they are prepared to commit a fraud against the Victorian people, all while turning their backs on the workers of this state.

It is not the first time they have done this. They did this just some months ago. We remember that, don't we? Remember the WorkCover changes, where they threw on the scrap heap everyone with a proven mental health disability – every single one of them. 'Chop them off. Let's all chop them off, shall we?' And they have done exactly the same to firefighters. They are lining up the cops in the same way – no wonder the cops are beside themselves; they have got the same amount of confidence in this government as the firies right now. Ambos – same story. The ambos are lining up one after the other – they cannot get their passengers into hospital because there is no investment going into hospitals. We have just seen in recent reports over recent days exactly the same problem. This government has turned its back on firefighters, and I would urge them to heed the call, because if they do not, the next ones who will need saving will be the Labor Party – and it will serve them right, because they brought it upon themselves.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:07): I am also very privileged to rise to speak on this petition today. It is the petition that has the largest amount of signatures ever in the history of this Parliament – 43,748. I congratulate my colleague Joe McCracken for his hard work and his thoughtfulness in putting out this petition, and I thank and congratulate all members of the community that have taken the time to actually sign this petition, because it really matters to them. They are aware of how this particular tax is going to impact their lives. Many of them are farmers that are already struggling and finding it incredibly difficult to just get through each day, let alone to have a tax like this imposed on them.

What is even more astounding is that not only has this got the most number of signatures ever, but all 79 councils have now united against this tax and said, 'We don't want to do it.' They are putting it out and making it very clear to their ratepayers that this is not their tax, this is a state government tax – as they should. Why should councils have to reel in money for a state government that is not working within its budget, blowing out budgets all over the place, making promises it cannot keep and then making the taxpayer – hardworking Victorians – pay for their blunders with these sorts of levies? This is an outrageous situation. To say that it is a fire tax levy – give me a break. We know these services are being completely depleted of their resources. They need significant increases, and those increases are not coming as quickly as they are required.

We know that we are heading into a very difficult summer – there has been so much rain – with all the additional grass growth, and we also know that many of these farmers have been forced into taking transmission lines on their properties, which is a huge concern for people that have to work in fires. The CFA are really stretched already. In fact you are not only asking them to take on transmission lines that could actually cause fires, but now you are going to tax these same farmers – who give up their time voluntarily – with taxes they cannot afford as you cause fires. This is an irresponsible decision from a government that is failing the Victorian people. This is an irresponsible situation, and everybody is paying the price. I am so thankful that I have the opportunity to be able to address the fact that so many people have come forward, and I can see the heads nodding in the gallery because they know how difficult it is to be paying these extra levies. Every Victorian is paying this price. It is like an additional property tax that nobody asked for and nobody can afford. As I mentioned earlier today, the number of people that are lining up because they cannot feed their families, they cannot put petrol in their cars, they cannot sustain their bills – it is impossible for Victorians now. And we are now hitting regional Victoria in such a massive way – along with every person in Victoria. Our fire services are paying the price as well, with heavy taxes. It is simply not sustainable. It is irresponsible.

I want to thank the people for standing up and being part of the largest petition we have ever known in this state. Congratulations to those who have come out today. And for those who are watching online, this is an absolutely disgraceful situation. It is appalling, as has been noted, that we have so few people in the chamber. The government has not thought to bring out its ministers and to bring out its backbench to at least show respect for the largest petition that has ever been tabled, to show respect

for the Victorian people about something that absolutely matters to them. You show that absolute lethargy, that you could not care less and you are not even prepared to turn up in your numbers to the chamber to at least show that you care about what happens to the Victorian people and how they are struggling. Shame on you. I am appalled by this government.

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (18:11): I want to thank my colleagues Mrs McArthur, Mr Limbrick, Ms Tyrrell, Mr McGowan and Mrs Hermans for their contributions. But I will never be lectured to by this Treasurer about managing Victoria's finances – not now, not ever. Not when the government has $200 billion in debt. Not when the government spends millions of dollars each hour just servicing that debt. I am sorry, I am just not accepting that – it is a disgrace. Not when you sold half of VicRoads, not when you have cut police funding – and who pays for that? Every single Victorian pays for that. And not when you have wasted $600 million on the Commonwealth Games. Do not lecture us about finance ever again. You forfeit that right.

I want to go back to the words of the Treasurer: 'progressive, proportionate tax, based on the capacity to pay'. Those words will ring in the Treasurer's ears and haunt her for years to come when she understands the damage that this tax is doing to regional and rural Victorians. How she can look those people in the face staggers me. The Treasurer walked out of here today when the debate was continuing, just like she walked out on every single regional Victorian. It was a disgrace. Stop ignoring country people. Stop pretending like we do not exist and start respecting us. We do not ask it – we demand it.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:13): I move:

> That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 278 to 1146, and order of the day, government business, 1, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Gayle Tierney:

> That the bill be now read a second time.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:14): I rise to speak on the Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I think what we have got to do is really picture what the faces are behind the state that Victoria is in. I am picturing a young family standing at a service station late at night, the dad checking his phone on the new government fuel app, hoping that that locked price might keep the budget steady for one more week so he can pay the budget. He watches the numbers flicker, fills the tank and then drives to the nearest food bank. This is the reality and unfortunately will be the reality for many Victorians and many families in this state. At the same time, a renter reads that under this new scheme she can transfer her bond more easily when she is moving house. It will not make the rent cheaper, it will not lower the rising power costs, it will not stop the letterbox from filling up with bills. She is looking at a casual job in retail. It will not stop the cost-of-living crisis, but what it will do is give her some certainty around it. These are the faces of the state under strain.

This is Victoria in 2025, where working people carry the weight of the government promises that never quite reach them, and I do not think there is any better example than what we just heard in this last petition debate. We were told that the government's new fuel app would make petrol cheaper and

that the bonds underwriting scheme would make renting fairer. We were told yet again that more bureaucracy could resolve the cost-of-living crisis – or relieve it at least – which this government is largely responsible for causing. But in Victoria we have been told many things. I think that what we know for a fact is that often when the government gets involved, the problem does not go away, the problem gets worse. Victorians have been told that the tolls that they are paying would fund better roads, yet we saw what happened over the weekend in Nar Nar Goon. Regardless of the fact that Sonja Terpstra does not seem to believe that it even happened, the fact is that one pothole caused over 20 cars to be damaged and to be pulled over on the side of the road. Victorians have been told to trust the government, while the government dumps over 200 annual reports on one day, covering up billions and billions of dollars of cost overruns.

While the opposition will not oppose this bill, it is our job to set the record straight, to make sure that Victorians understand what these measures do and what these measures will not do and to help explain and understand what truly drives economic pressure in the real world, not just the talking points from Spring Street. I have heard a lot of things, speaking about the potholes before and speaking about how apparently the state Labor government has an incredible commitment to safer roads and to all these sorts of things. We have heard all sorts of stories, and I think that Victorians are at the stage where they do not trust them and they do not believe it, because what the government refuses to admit is simple: every new scheme built on borrowed credibility and every new guarantee without grounding adds more bureaucratic weight to a state that is already being crushed under the weight of what it already has. You cannot keep building policy on promises when the foundations – sound management, fiscal discipline and common sense – have already been eroded like they have in the state of Victoria.

I am going to start with the first aspect of this bill, which is the new government fuel app, one of the headline measures that is part of what creates this bill. Its plan does not set fuel prices, it does not cut fuel taxes, it does not increase competition and it certainly does not fix the roads that push transport costs higher and higher. Under the bill's fair fuel plan, every fuel retailer must lock in prices each afternoon, a price cannot go up for 24 hours and that information is then fed exclusively into the government's new fuel app through its state-run Service Victoria. It gives Victorians 24 hours of certainty, but it does not in any way, shape or form lower the prices of fuel. I think that is very important for us to acknowledge. But private apps actually already exist that do essentially the same thing. They work efficiently, competitively and – what I believe is most important to us – at absolutely no cost to the taxpayer. And unlike the proposed government app, they rely on live, open data or crowdsourced information.

Under this bill, those independent apps will actually be locked out of live access for a full 24 hours. The government app will become the only platform with real-time information. By contrast, in New South Wales, where the FuelCheck system operates, all fuel prices are updated every 30 minutes and made immediately open to all similar apps. That means every servo, every app and every motorist can see and respond to the prices in real time. Competition remains active, stations can drop prices instantly to attract customers and consumers can genuinely shop around. If the goal of this government is transparency, why on earth would they be blocking information sharing with other apps that already exist and that already essentially do what this government app sets out to achieve? Yet this government is insisting on building its own app, monopolising information and using taxpayer dollars to tell Victorians what they already know and can already access: that fuel in Victoria is extremely expensive because everything is taxed extremely highly – more highly than any other state in this country – and that people are being crushed by the cost-of-living crisis.

This side of the house supports transparency and information for consumers, but we also believe in calling it out when policies are purely window-dressing and when policies address symptoms rather than the cause. Real cost-of-living relief does not come from a government app, especially when there are already private apps that essentially do the same thing. Real cost-of-living relief comes from tackling the drivers – like global oil prices, fuel excise, transport logistics, rising commercial leasing rates and the poor state of Victoria's infrastructure. When fuel prices rise, there is a ripple effect

throughout the whole community. As the prices at pumps climb, the cost of freight climbs, the cost of food climbs and the cost of housing climbs. The farmer pays more to run a tractor, and the truck driver pays more to deliver and move goods like milk and food. Every kilometre travelled on our crumbling roads costs the end user something.

Yet this government's answer is another app, another office and another slogan: 'Locked prices. Fair prices. Savings for all'. 'Savings for all'– that is the slogan – regardless of the fact that this will do nothing to bring down the price of fuel in the state of Victoria. There is no real modelling and no evidence, just a claim of $333 in annual savings. Where that figure has been plucked from is anyone's guess. I really do not know where they plucked that figure from, when it is actually a new app that apparently cost something and when there is new bureaucracy that costs something. Yet they are claiming savings.

I want to point out that while WA's FuelWatch has been in place since 2001, it has only provided price certainty, not affordability. The ACCC confirmed that it did not lower average fuel prices. This fairer fuel plan is not real innovation, it is imitation – and the worst sort of it, because it lacks an understanding of the key cost drivers, which makes this a sales pitch for voters rather than a genuine attempt to make Victoria better for families that are struggling under a cost-of-living crisis.

The second measure within this bill is of course the government's guaranteed bond scheme. Essentially, this bill allows the state to underwrite private rental bonds, allowing renters to transfer one bond to another property without waiting. While we acknowledge that many will see the goodwill behind the idea and it will make rental transitions smoother and reduce disputes, we must be honest and talk about what it really is. It is a taxpayer-funded guarantee that turns renters into possible debtors and a public department into a possible debt collector. That is what it is.

Everyone should be wary of the government underwriting anything. Every hour in this state we pay a million dollars in interest alone. We are not even knocking a dollar off the debt we owe – it is just on interest. When it comes to managing risk, the government does not manage it, it just keeps creating it. Look at our debt. Our debt is astronomical, and I think just looking at that really tells us everything we need to know. There is another important comparison, I think, and that is the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority – what was once a building insurance safety net is now a sinkhole. In fact 103 government agencies are in deficit and the public sector wage bill is up $4 billion – $4 billion in a single year. But back to the VMIA: the taxpayer-funded building insurer underwriter is riddled with mismanagement, repeatedly bailed out to keep it afloat and an operation that looks now much more like a Ponzi scheme than a public safeguard. Hundreds of home owners were left stranded after builder collapses, especially Porter Davis, waiting months, sometimes years, for claims. This is what happens when the government steps in as guarantor without accountability. They do not manage risk, they multiply it. A government that cannot fix a road – and cannot admit when a road needs fixing, more essentially, with what we saw today – should not be trusted to run a fuel app. A government that cannot even settle insurance claims should not be trusted to underwrite private bonds. If it cannot be trusted to balance its own bills, it should not promise families financial relief that it cannot deliver.

We also need to look at what is going on under the surface with ordinary renters, not just with bonds but with overall financial capability to pay their debts. One in three bond settlements involve deductions or full claims by landlords – one in three. Nearly $847 billion is now owed in unpaid fines; 1.2 per cent of mortgages are in arrears; there is a 14 per cent rise in personal insolvencies – that is devastating, 14 per cent; and there is a 70 per cent surge in renters seeking help for arrears. I have mentioned a few times that in the Eastern Victoria Region there is such a housing crisis, such a rental crisis. Because of the new and increased taxes that have been brought in by this Labor government, it is becoming more expensive to be a rental provider in the state of Victoria than anywhere else in the nation. So in Pakenham, for instance, there are at least 20 families waiting for one house that comes up, per one rental property, and then of every four rental properties that go on the market only one of them comes back. The data is clear. People are fleeing this state because it is so expensive to do business in this state. It is so expensive to pay land tax in this state.

Ann-Marie Hermans interjected.

Renee HEATH: Yes, you cannot even get into a doctor. It is so expensive. It is more expensive to grow a tomato in Victoria than it is in any other state in the nation. These numbers are not just statistics, they are like warning lights on a dashboard. How will the government chase them for money that they do not have? How will it happen? These are questions that need to be asked. This scheme relies on renters having the financial capacity to repay despite worsening economic conditions. Unless bonds are returned in high numbers, arrears are low, disputes are rare and repayment is high, this model will keep bleeding more and more taxpayer dollars.

Our citizens, the people of Victoria, are so overtaxed. They have got more of a tax burden than any other Australian. Every child born in Victoria inherits a greater tax burden than a baby born in any other state. I think we have to be seriously careful and we have to be seriously looking at government overreach to make sure that we are not making life worse for Victorians. If landlord claims keep rising, shifting the payment and cost burden to the state, then the taxpayer at the end of the day is going to be the one footing the bill for all of this.

So we could risk that something that is designed to help people, something that is designed to reduce the cost-of-living crisis, something that is designed to make fuel more accessible and something that is designed to make rentals more accessible could in fact end up costing Victorians more and more. Unfortunately, the figures also tell us that Victorians are at breaking point, unable to pay existing bills and unable to absorb new costs. If you had been in here and looked around the gallery before, you would have seen everyday Victorians that came in on a Thursday night in their own time to protest a new tax that has been put on Victorians once again by the state Labor government, because they cannot afford it. It is a tax that disproportionately affects farmers, that disproportionately affects volunteers, and they came in to protest it because Victorians are feeling crushed under the weight of this government's tax burden.

When a government agency with a record like the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority's decides to underwrite yet another liability, it does not just risk its own budget, but it risks blowing another huge black hole in the state budget, which is almost $200 billion in debt. If there is a surge in unpaid bonds under this scheme, the taxpayer will ultimately bear that cost. If the pattern of rent arrears spills over to bond repayment in arrears, recovery will fall short, and when that happens it will not be politicians that pay. There is no cost-of-living crisis in this chamber. It will not be us that pays, it will be the people of Victoria. What I want to point out is that while this government wants to give an illusion that it cares about the cost-of-living crisis, it in fact actually has created it, and Victorians are the ones that are paying the price.

Both measures, the government fuel app and the bond underwriting scheme, come from the same mould. I think it is short-term headlines, short-term applause and long-term risk – I really do believe that. They were both born of looking at election cycles, not looking at the next generation – looking at what is coming next at the end of next November, rather than the burden that it will place on the next generation. This is what this government is doing. It follows a familiar pattern that we have seen around the world, the same playbook used by the socialist and activist movements, promising everything under state control, but never explaining who will pay for it. Recently we have been hearing about government-owned supermarkets, something I am sure that my colleague and I will have very different views on. We have seen in places like New York government-owned supermarkets, but what freezing prices does, according to the research, is end in more shortages. More government intervention means more tax burden.

In ending, Victorians need relief – that is absolutely real – relief grounded, though, in real-world and sound economics, relief that repairs, rewards work, encourages competition, supports small business growth and business growth in general and builds confidence to invest and employ. I truly believe what Victoria needs is people to feel confident in it once again. People have lost confidence in Victoria. Rental providers have lost confidence. The international sports community has lost confidence in

Victoria. Investors have lost confidence in Victoria, and only that confidence and people investing in the state once again and building that economic turnover, building revenue, making people prosperous again, will actually be able to solve this problem. Relief gives young people hope and not a false comfort of dependency, but an opportunity for them to rely on themselves. Real relief does not come from government expansion, but it comes from government discipline. Victorians do not need another promise. They do not need another guarantee or another headline timed for the next election.

The opposition will not oppose these measures, but we want to set the record straight, because Victorians deserve honesty about what drives their costs, where their money goes and how real relief is achieved. Fairness is not found in forms or apps or government underwrites. It is found in good economic management, sound priorities and respect for the people that keep the state moving. And it is those people, the working men and women of Victoria, that we are on the side of and that we will continue to stand for.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:35): I rise today to speak in support of the Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. After years of campaigning by renters, by community advocates and by my Greens colleagues we are finally seeing some long-overdue reforms that will make life fairer for people who rent their homes. These changes are a testament to the persistence of renters who have refused to accept a system that is stacked against them. For too long renters have lived under a housing system that privileges landlords and real estate agents – a system that treats housing as an investment opportunity rather than a basic human right.

This bill includes several long-awaited improvements that respond to the growing public demand for stronger renters rights. A key reform in this bill is the introduction of a portable bond scheme, a change first promised in Labor's 2023 housing statement. It will allow eligible renters to transfer their bond between properties rather than paying a new one up-front while waiting for the previous bond refund – been there – because waiting for your bond, while needing to pay for a new one, costs thousands of dollars, which many people simply do not have, especially when faced with record high rents and growing economic inequality. This reform will give renters some breathing room. The bill also strengthens fairness around bond disputes, requiring landlords and agents to provide evidence before making a claim. For too long tenants have lost bond money over exaggerated or frankly baseless claims, often for normal wear and tear. Under these new rules landlords will need to justify their claims. This will bring some much-needed transparency and accountability to a system that has too often been abused.

The bill also expands safety requirements, ensuring that all rental agreements, new and existing, meet gas and electrical safety standards, and that gas checks occur within six months before draughtproofing work. These reforms will ensure that tenants can live in safer homes. The strengthening of mandatory professional training for real estate agents is another welcome inclusion in this bill. Giving the government power to approve or reject training providers and set ongoing education standards will help lift professional conduct across the industry. The majority of renters have endured, at worst, discriminatory, predatory behaviour from agents and, at best, incompetence and apathy. Hopefully this measure will begin to curb such behaviour. The bill also makes it illegal for agents to charge renters for background checks as part of applications – a small step in protecting renters from unnecessary and unfair costs. It also empowers Consumer Affairs Victoria to publish clear guidance for landlords and rooming house operators on what records they must keep to prove compliance with minimum standards.

[NAME AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Beyond the rental reforms, this bill does also introduce new provisions for petrol stations, requiring them to report their daily maximum price. I guess now we will know in real time how much we are getting screwed over. So, there is that. People will probably use it though, let us be clear. In many cases here we are talking about incremental reforms. What we need to see is broader action to tackle the full scale of this economic inequality crisis that we are facing in this state. A core issue remains:

rents are rising faster than wages, and renters are shouldering unsustainable financial pressure – like Kate, a renter in Ivanhoe in my electorate. Three months ago their rent went up by 40 per cent, despite a list of outstanding maintenance issues like missing bedroom doors, a garage door that will not shut and a broken oven. Kate is not her real name, because she does not feel safe disclosing her real name. We are hearing from renters all over the state, of people being hit with rent hikes of hundreds of dollars a week – often just after requesting repairs. These increases are being used as tools of intimidation. Unlimited rent rises are in practice forced evictions, and yet this bill does nothing to limit rent increases. Landlords can still raise the rent by any amount they choose, with no justification. Until we place reasonable limits on rent increases, renters will continue to live in fear of retaliation whenever they assert their rights.

Meanwhile this Labor government is continuing its plan to demolish all 44 public housing towers across the state, displacing thousands of people and putting public land in the hands of private developers. It is a policy that deepens housing insecurity and shrinks the supply of homes people can actually afford. In September this year we saw reports that tenants living in so-called affordable housing in Flemington under the ground lease model had copped a 17 per cent rent increase within the first year of moving in, pushing their rent to a point where it was no longer affordable, forcing them to move out. Labor wants to push this privately run affordable housing lottery model as the future of housing in this state. The ever-diminishing amount of public housing in Victoria is a major driver of the broader rental affordability crisis, making it harder for renters, forcing people on lower incomes to scramble for a home to rent that will no doubt push them closer to poverty, and that is if they can even find and secure a home. Everyone in this state deserves a home that is safe, that is stable, that is affordable. This bill makes progress towards that goal, but we still have a chasm that lies ahead of us, which is why I will be moving amendments. I ask that they be circulated now.

These amendments will ensure that rent increases in Victoria are fair, that they are reasonable and that they are tied to what people can afford. They will set a maximum allowable rent increase to be no more than the annual wage price index for Victoria as published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for the previous financial year. If your wages are not going up, neither should your rent. For too long renters have been at the mercy of unlimited rent increases that bear no relationship whatsoever to wage growth or inflation. These amendments will make sure that rent increases are capped in line with real-world income growth, not landlord profit expectations.

I am also moving an amendment that will require the government to publish Victoria's annual wage price index on a public website each year so that renters and landlords alike can clearly see the limit that is applied. This is a straightforward, fair and transparent measure that brings balance back to this system, ensuring that rent rises reflect real-world economic realities, that renters are no longer priced out of their homes simply because wages have not risen at the same rate as this inflated housing market. My Greens colleagues and I support the Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, but we will keep fighting to make unlimited rent increases illegal. We will keep fighting for public housing, and we will keep fighting for a future where every renter in this state can live with dignity, security and respect.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (18:43): I am pleased to speak on this bill. This bill is all about helping Victorians with cost of living. The fair fuel plan will address transport costs, which affect households everywhere. Wherever you live, whether it is Warrnambool, Werribee or Warracknabeal, you should not have to pay more than is necessary just to get to work or drop your kids off at school.

We have already delivered the first phase of our fair fuel plan through the Servo Saver feature on the Service Victoria app. Launched on 15 October this year, Servo Saver is a simple idea that makes a real difference. Under these new laws all fuel retailers must report their prices in real time online, and it will be an offence not to report a change within 30 minutes. Those prices are then fed directly into the app, meaning drivers can see exactly where the cheapest fuel is in their area or along their route. The ACCC has already told us that if motorists filled up at the lowest point of the fuel cycle and shopped

around, they could save up to $333 each year. That is hundreds of dollars back in family budgets, money that can go towards groceries, school supplies or paying bills.

The second phase of our fairer fuel plan, and a key feature of this bill, is the fuel price cap. The bill amends the Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012 to make sure that once a retailer sets their daily maximum price, it cannot go up for 24 hours.

Another key feature of this bill, which I am very pleased to mention, is the introduction of the portable rental bond scheme. This bill introduces a landmark reform for Victorian renters by delivering a portable rental bond scheme. This reform is a key cost-of-living initiative in the government's 2023 housing statement, which will create a fairer, more accessible and more modern rental market. One of the most significant hurdles for renters when moving between rental properties is the prospect of needing to pay a new bond before their old one has been returned. This double bond situation has for too long placed unnecessary stress and financial burden on renters. The new portable bond scheme fixes that. It allows renters to transfer their existing bond from one property to the next, saving them on average $2,360 when they move. It is not surprising more than 736,000 households are expected to benefit.

The bill continues further to make renting fairer, safer and more modern by requiring landlords and agents to provide evidence before making a bond claim. Renters will now get that evidence at least three days before the claim is lodged, and failing to do so will be an offence. It bans background check fees. Some agents have been charging up to $30 for checks that tenants do not need to pay for. It expands gas and electrical safety checks to all rental agreements, regardless of when they were signed, ensuring every renter is safe at home, and bans rent payment fees, including charges on rent tech apps. Paying rent should not come with a surcharge. It tightens professional standards by updating compulsory professional development requirements for property professionals, ensuring training keeps pace with industry standards.

I will counter my colleague Mr Puglielli a little bit in terms of the rental increases. There were some changes by this government in 2021 when we put through that you cannot raise rent more than once in every two years and you have to be able to justify it if it is questioned in VCAT. That is a powerful way of restricting rental increases that might be flagrant and unaccountable. Each of these reforms are simple, fair and grounded in the belief that renters deserve respect and safety, not hidden fees, not unsafe homes and not unfair treatment.

In conclusion, it is clear the Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 is designed to make everyday life fairer and more affordable through practical action, using technology, transparency and good policy. It is another good step forward in building a fairer Victoria for all, and I commend this bill to the house.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (18:49): I am delighted to stand and speak to the Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. It is another great example of how Labor governments make people's lives better across a whole range of spectrums. We have just heard from my colleague Ms Ermacora about what it is going to mean for people with the cost of living when it comes to putting fuel in their car. We will now require all fuel retailers to report their fuel price in real time, and it will be an offence to fail to report fuel price changes within 30 minutes, so motorists will be able to see where they can get the best deal and save themselves money. There are a number of things Labor governments will always do, will always advocate for and will always deliver on, and that is ensuring consumers are getting safer products. We have seen over many, many decades that those opposite, the conservatives, the Liberal Party, take a hands-off-the-wheel approach.

They were all doing student politics at university, studying Thatcherism and Reaganism. That is their view, whether it is wages and trickle-down economics, whether it is consumer goods and having no concern or regard for the safety of products for end users, for kids. You go back and look at discussions around putting seatbelts in cars – by goodness, they were against that. So I am sure they do not have

the values underpinning a plan that would lead to policies to see consumers getting a better deal day in, day out. You know what happens when that occurs? You get lower cost of living, and when you have got lower cost of living, people, families, communities, have more money floating around for essential services, for goods, and we get stronger communities.

I am really proud of what will be the 150th reform in rental fairness. The portable bond scheme is coming in, and it is a really good, commonsense simplification for renters and Victorians. Again, for consumers in Victoria, whatever they are purchasing, whatever their interface with consumer goods, it is always a Labor government that will deliver goods that they can depend on being safe and will ensure there are consumer protections. If the goods are not safe, if the goods are faulty, there is a mechanism there to see them get justice in that situation. I will leave my contribution there. I am very proud to be part of a party that in its DNA, in its fabric, is committed to seeing consumers get the best possible outcomes for themselves, whether it be the safety or the quality of the goods they get or indeed the price they pay for things such as fuel.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (18:52): I am very pleased to be here in this spot to rise and speak on the Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, which is yet another example of the way that the Allan Labor government is supporting Victorians, particularly those who need help with the cost of living. That is what the amendments in the fair fuel plan in this bill do. I want to commend the work that particularly Mr Staikos has done in delivering on that agenda. But I want to spend just a couple of minutes of this contribution tonight talking about the very significant changes in this legislation that are part of the Allan Labor government's continued reforms to make renting fairer in Victoria.

Here in this bill tonight we have the measures that will support the introduction of our portable rental bond scheme. We know that around 30 per cent of Victorians are living in rental properties. There are more and more renters here in Victoria than ever before. The Labor government has for the past several years been absolutely focused on suite after suite after suite of reforms that are about making renting fairer in Victoria, and today this legislation helps with the portable bond scheme. The portable rental bond scheme will mean that renters will not be stuck having to have paid two bonds at once, which is a practical change that makes a real difference in people's lives, particularly for those who do not have the capacity to find $1000, $2000, at short notice to pay a new bond when they are moving out of a place and waiting for their bond to be returned. This was announced, obviously, as part of our housing statement in 2023. It enables us to ease one of the significant financial burdens that many renters face. What it will enable renters to do is to access a scheme where bonds can be transferred between rental properties, and there is a series of provisions in there to account for things that may be called on in that bond. But fundamentally, I think for most renters, the transition between properties has had that unnecessary and costly and troublesome burden of having to find two amounts of bond payments, and this will resolve that. It is a win–win for the renters but also for the rental providers, who will not have to spend as much time on bond management and will get bonds guaranteed by the government.

The rest of the bill makes other significant changes to our renting scheme here in Victoria, adding new protections for our renters by requiring rental providers and their agents to provide renters with evidence to support a bond claim three days before the claim can be lodged. We are making it an offence with penalties for a rental provider or their agent to make an application to VCAT without supporting documentary evidence. Many renters speak about how their bond has been withheld for no good reason, and renters have been told this is for damage to a wall or a floor, but no evidence of the damage is provided or receipts of the repair attached. We are stopping the culture of rorting renters here in Victoria. We are mandating requirements for evidence if there is damage, and we are imposing penalties for people who want to continue to do the wrong thing. It is part of our amendments to redress and reset the power imbalances between renters and rental providers and to enable renters to better challenge unfair bond claims.

Additionally, we are banning charging fees for background checks. We are expanding safety checks on rental properties to include those in all residential agreements, regardless of when the agreement

started. We are banning extra fees that you get charged when you pay your rent, including on rent tech apps, because being charged fees just to pay your rent is not fair. And we are amending the continuing professional development reforms for property industry professionals.

This bill is just another example of the series of reforms that the Labor government has made to make renting fairer in Victoria. It is absolute evidence that Labor is on the side of renters in Victoria, and I commend the bill to the house.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:57): I stand to speak in support of the Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 introduced into Parliament by the Minister for Consumer Affairs in the other place, which will bring in protections and reforms across multiple sectors, including the fuel market, the rental market and the property and housing market, to ensure that Victorians are getting the best deals on their fuel costs and that they are being treated equitably and fairly when engaging in the rental and housing sectors. Before I speak further on the bill I would like to thank the Minister for Consumer Affairs for bringing this bill forward as well as key stakeholders involved in consultation on drafting this piece of legislation.

The specific actions of the Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill are, as described, to acquit the Victorian government's public commitment to implementing a fair fuel plan by 2025 by delivering phase 2 of the plan, which introduces a requirement for fuel retailers to report the maximum fuel price – that is, the fuel price cap – for each type of fuel they sell for the following day; to give effect to further rental reforms announced as part of the housing statement and reforms announced on 30 October and 19 November 2024 to better support Victorian renters and improve compliance with rental minimum standards; and to make amendments to the housing statement reforms enacted by the Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Act 2025, the housing statement reform act, relating to continuing professional development requirements for property professionals. This bill reaches across several pieces of legislation and impacts multiple sectors, with the goal of each change implemented being to protect Victorian consumers in activities that impact their daily lives and to increase transparency and access.

This bill was informed by consultation and engagement with key stakeholders over all three key areas, with phase 2 of the fair fuel plan being consulted on from August this year as well as the legislative impact assessment and the bill itself. Key organisations impacted by this bill, such as Energy Safe Victoria and Homes Victoria, have been involved throughout the process of drafting this bill, ensuring that these records now required from rental providers and rooming house operators do not lead to unnecessary cost, confusion or regulatory burdens, particularly regarding requirements on gas checks before draught proofing.

In 2024 the Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics published a report that determined the number of registered motor vehicles on Victorian roads to be approximately 5.5 million in January of 2024. With Victoria's population in 2025 totalling a little over 7 million, this would certainly suggest that fuel costs matter to a significant portion of Victorians. This bill will make amendments to the Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012 requiring fuel retailers to publish maximum fuel costs for the following day and maintain this capped price as reported. It will be an offence to sell fuel for any price over the fixed cap the next day. Daily assured maximum price capping means predictable pricing, avoiding sudden spikes or unforeseen increases.

This was announced by the Premier and the Minister for Consumer Affairs back in January as part of the Allan Labor government's fair fuel plan, which will require around 1500 fuel retailers across the state to report their prices each day. These prices will be available for public viewing through a new Service Victoria fuel finder feature. This is a small change that could help Victorians save several hundred dollars per year. In fact the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission found that in 2023 motor vehicle drivers in the Melbourne metropolitan area could have saved up to $333 if they were able to identify lower price fuel retailers and fill up their tanks at the lowest point in the fuel price cycle. But for many Victorians who have got to get up early in the morning to drop their kids off at

school or head to the office or their work sites, this is an undertaking that just is not feasible or realistic. That is why the Allan Labor government is bringing in these new regulations as well as this fuel price reporting scheme for ease of public access for Victorians to get the best deal on their fuel costs and save an extra couple of hundred dollars each year. While commercial fuel price reporting sites do exist, they can often be limited in scope or contain biases that promote fuel retailers that might not be the cheapest option, but this new Service Victoria feature will serve to consolidate mandatory price reporting. With that, I commend the bill to the house.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:01): I move:

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

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

Adjournment

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (19:02): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Farm safety

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (19:02): (2099) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC. More people die on farms than other workplaces in Victoria. The Allan Labor government is supporting a $2.6 million partnership between WorkSafe and the Victorian Farmers Federation to make our farmers safer. My request to the minister is to provide details of what this partnership will deliver to improve safety on Victorian farms.

Yoorrook Justice Commission

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:02): (2100) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, and the action I seek is that the minister categorically reject many of the controversial recommendations of the Yoorrook Justice Commission. Throughout the debate on the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 the Allan Labor government tried to walk a political tightrope. On one hand the Premier described the bill as historic and landmark legislation, declaring it gives Aboriginal communities the power to shape the policies and services that affect their lives. Yet when Minister Blandthorn was questioned in this place by Mrs McArthur, Mr McCracken, Ms Bath and me, seven times she used the words 'non-binding' and four times she said Gellung Warl has 'no coercive powers'. Which is it?

At best treaty will be nothing more than a costly bureaucratic redirection of billions of dollars and will waste our taxpayers money. At worst it will become a political weapon for implementing the most radical elements of the Yoorrook agenda, which will benefit a few but not even reflect the wider concerns of many Aboriginal Victorians and Australians. Sadly, I suspect it will be a bit of both, failing to close the gap while expanding the reach of government and emboldening the fringe activists driving this polarising, community-dividing experiment.

In my speech on the bill I warned this Parliament that this modern treaty will usher in a slippery slope, or at least it has the potential to do so. It gives Gellung Warl the keys to unlock a suite of sweeping reforms based on the 146 recommendations of the Yoorrook Justice Commission. I took the liberty of reviewing some of these recommendations, and they should alarm every Victorian. On public land and property taxes, it says it will theorise on portions of land, water and natural resource revenue, exempt traditional owners from certain taxes like water revenue, direct a share of our public land sale proceeds to government-selected traditional owners and grant legal personhood to natural resources. On policing and the criminal justice system, it wants to transfer core criminal justice levers and oversight powers to First Peoples, and it wants to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 for Aboriginal youths with no exceptions. It also wants to prohibit the detention of Aboriginal children under 16, so it will look like they are closing the gap, but in actual fact they will just not be allowing

these young people to have sentences. It wants to establish a police oversight body led by someone who has never served as a police officer and outlaw strip searches in prisons and youth facilities for Aboriginal people only.

On child protection it wants to create a parallel First Peoples-run child protection system, and on redress the restitution of traditional lands, waters and natural resource ownership rights, it also wants to do monetary compensation, tax relief and other financial and material benefits – and the list goes on and on and on.

Electorate officers enterprise bargaining agreement

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:05): (2101) My adjournment matter is to the Treasurer, and the action I seek is that she abolishes the public sector wage cap and allows for additional costed items to be added to the electorate officers enterprise bargaining agreement without offsets. I am raising this issue on behalf of the electorate officers and the Community and Public Sector Union delegates who are currently in active negotiations for the new EBA.

Rent and groceries do not abide by a wage cap. Bills do not care about the state of the government's budget. Since the last electorate officer EBA, rent has increased by over 35 per cent on average and groceries are on average $3,000 a year more expensive – everything is more expensive – and electorate officers are simply asking to be compensated fairly for the work that they do. But they have been told no, because the public sector wage cap blocks staff from even being able to negotiate for fair payment. I wish staff could go to their landlords and say, 'Sorry, you can't jack up my rent that much because my wages are capped.' Electorate officers are people who work so hard for each and every one of us and our communities, and in an increasingly volatile political environment right now they do a broad and ever-expanding cacophony of jobs. If it were up to me, I would see my staff paid so much more. But it is not up to me, it is up to the department, and they need the funding approved.

That brings me to you. I am disappointed to hear that negotiations have hit a wall due to the employer claiming they cannot add any costed items without offsetting something else from their agreement. The public sector wage cap restricts pay increases, it destroys good-faith bargaining and it prohibits staff from fighting for a fair wage. As MPs we have a tribunal that determines our wage, and there is no cap. Even when the tribunal was asked by some that MP wages be frozen, or at least kept within the cap that is forced on our staff, we still received an increase above that rate. So I am asking this government to go back to the drawing board with how it handles wages in the public sector. There are important asks. Staff need to be compensated properly for their work, and the EBA needs to be adequately funded.

Early childhood education and care

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (19:08): (2102) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Children. The action I seek is for an update on how the Victorian government is supporting families with kids in kindergarten in Eastern Victoria.

VicRoads, Maryborough

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (19:08): (2103) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. It relates to issues around Maryborough and the certainty over the VicRoads there. That is what locals are looking for: certainty. We know that an agreement has been reached between the Central Goldfields shire and VicRoads to provide services to local community, and I commend the Central Goldfields shire for securing this agreement. I also commend David Hendrickson from R U Safe Driving School, along with the hundreds of concerned locals that have campaigned on this day in, day out for probably close to a couple of months now.

I do not actually understand how it could have got to this point in the first place. The fact that cutting services in Maryborough was even considered for Labor's chopping block has to have a big question mark over it. When locals have asked the member for Ripon, she has largely just regurgitated

government lines on the matter, failing to advocate for locals. In the end her contribution has largely been irrelevant. When asked how long the current arrangement runs for, she said, 'How long is a piece of string?' That is code for: she does not have a clue. Locals really need clarity around this because they want to know their service is going to be there for the long term. It is a risk that creates unease with locals. It would be absolutely insane to expect locals to drive to places like Bendigo or Ballarat, which are over an hour away, just to get a licence photo or to get their P-plates.

We are talking about basic government services here, and that is the risk if VicRoads is not secured for the long term in Maryborough. It is not like locals are asking for anything above and beyond. We are talking about simple services that most Victorians, in fact every Victorian, should have access to and indeed should expect. I have attended community meetings, a car parade and a public rally to show my support. We on our side of the chamber will always support country Victorians to get the services that they need.

My question to the minister is this: will you guarantee that Maryborough locals will have access to the full suite of VicRoads services for the long term, not just in the lead-up to the next state election? Will you publicly release the documents which detail the arrangements that have been reached so the community of Maryborough can have certainty going forward? The government owes Maryborough an explanation, and it is about time some simple, plain-speaking honesty was delivered.

Kingston City Council bus services

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:11): (2104) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Minister for Public and Active Transport. The action I seek is for them to support the recommendations of the *Better Buses for Kingston* report. Each and every day thousands of people in the South-Eastern Metro Region rely on buses to get them to where they need to go. Buses are vital for building connections and are the only mode of public transport that can quickly adapt for Victorians. When public transport does not work, it entrenches social disadvantage, increases isolation, worsens cost-of-living pressures and limits access to essential services.

There are so many groups and individuals who are passionate about public transport in my local area, but today I want to focus on the City of Kingston and express my support for their advocacy to improve buses in the region. Their report *Better Buses for Kingston* has been submitted to the Department of Transport and Planning for consideration. It details how to improve services for some of Melbourne's longest bus routes, including routes 828, Hampton to Berwick; 903, Altona to Mordialloc; and 709, Hampton to Carrum. This report calls for more-frequent buses – the longest wait times should be no longer than 20 minutes, seven days a week; increased service hours – earlier starts and later finishes will make bus travel a more feasible option for many people; and better route infrastructure – somewhere comfortable to sit and protection from the elements should be given at every bus stop.

This report is backed by evidence and supported by the wider community. Council went out and met people to understand how these services could be improved, not just in their offices but at the bus stops. These changes are not controversial, and they will help thousands of people who rely on these buses across multiple areas in the region I represent. I ask: will the minister support the recommendations of the *Better Buses for Kingston* report?

Victorian College for the Deaf

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (19:13): (2105) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education in the other place. The Victorian Education Excellence Awards recognise work and achievements of over 41 government education workers, including teachers, principals, business managers and other education support staff across the state. The winner of the outstanding secondary teacher category was Mr Robert Harrow from the Victorian College for the Deaf. Mr Harrow was instrumental in the creation of accessible vocational pathways by adapting VET certificates for delivery in Australian Sign Language, leading to students at the Victorian College for the Deaf enrolling in the Victorian Certificate of Education for the first time in 15 years. Alongside this

incredible achievement, he also developed the first deaf-led Auslan translation of the attitudes to school survey, allowing deaf students across Victoria to be able to provide feedback.

The Victorian College for the Deaf is both Victoria's oldest school for deaf education and the only one of its kind, with 52 students enrolled in 2024 between foundation and year 12 from across Melbourne, regional and rural Victoria and interstate. Located in the electorate of Prahran in my constituency of Southern Metropolitan Region, it is a pleasure to represent and advocate for such an integral institution such as the Victorian College for the Deaf. The action that I seek from the minister is an update on how our government is supporting both specialist schools, such as the Victorian College for the Deaf, and government schools in the Southern Metropolitan Region to support students with disabilities.

Pakenham road safety

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (19:14): (2106) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Residents in Pakenham have been very concerned about the dangerous conditions caused by the poorly managed Racecourse Road closure and the subsequent diversions through old Pakenham. Two constituents have already contacted me reporting multiple near-misses and serious collisions as drivers attempt to turn onto the Princes Highway from side streets such as James and John streets, where they have no traffic lights. Vehicles are queuing, sometimes on the median strips of an 80-kilometre road, blocking lanes, and in one case a bus narrowly avoided hitting pedestrians. The action that I seek is for the minister to immediately implement safety measures, including temporary traffic lights, so there is not a terrible accident, and to prevent anything worse from happening.

Recreational fishing

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (19:15): (2107) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation, and the action that I seek is for the government to scrap its little anglers fishing program and replace the program with children's binoculars instead. It is not the first time I have spoken out against this initiative, where the government is handing out free fishing rods to kids across Victoria, all while wildlife rescuers are left to deal with the fallout. Since the Allan government children's fishing initiative began, wildlife rescuers have reported a disturbing rise in native animals becoming entangled in fishing gear. Flying foxes, kookaburras, platypus and tawny frogmouths have all been caught on lines and hooks, many with injuries so severe that they have had to be euthanised. Instead of taking responsibility for this, the government has now announced a second round of little anglers kits for every grade 5 student in 2026. This means another 82,000 kits will be distributed across the state, as if the first round of 95,000 kits for nearly 2000 schools across Victoria was not enough wildlife destruction already. While it is difficult to trace whether a child was directly responsible for these wildlife entanglement cases, it is clear that if adults are already setting poor examples and failing to teach safe fishing practices, these harmful habits will inevitably continue to be passed on.

But there is another side to Australia's relationship with wildlife, one we and the environment can benefit from collectively, which has largely been ignored by our governments so far. Nature-based tourism is growing rapidly across Australia, with ecotourism ventures like birdwatching on the rise as more visitors seek unique wildlife experiences. Birdwatching alone generates $2.6 billion to the Australian economy each year. We are home to the second-highest number of endemic bird species in the entire world, offering people here and across the globe the chance to witness species found nowhere else on earth. Despite its substantial economic contribution, birdwatching continues to receive little strategic attention or support from the government, unlike more harmful initiatives such as the little angler kits – which, by the way, rely on stocking rivers and waterways with fish to compensate for the damage the fishing industry is already causing. Right now nearly one in six Australian birds faces the threat of extinction. A greater investment into this sector starts with recognising its economic potential and its capacity to protect unique environments, and it helps support

conservation efforts too. Therefore I urge the minister to ditch the bait and replace it with binoculars before it is too late.

Box Hill brickworks site

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:18): (2108) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Some weeks ago I noted the minister's confirmation that the Box Hill brickworks site is to be developed. I asked the minister what I thought was a very logical question: given the site is well known to be contaminated, what new environmental reports did the minister have that said it was a safe thing to dig up tons and tons of landfill and expose potential carcinogens to the local community in order to build on this site?

You replied to me, Minister, that I should look up the Suburban Rail Loop contaminated land report, and implied that would tell me everything I needed to know. I must admit I felt that perhaps I had been a little bit foolish, because maybe the information was on the public record all along. So I did go and look up the report you told me to go look up, and in that report it makes reference to the Box Hill brickworks, yes. In fact it quotes the 2019 EPA report that confirms the contamination, confirms the carcinogen, confirms the risk of leaching groundwater and says it should not be built on.

I would like to understand from you, Minister: on what basis have you proposed to rezone the land for residential properties, when you have not had an updated environmental study performed, you do not know how much it is going to cost and you do not know what the risks are to the local community? Could you please explain to me and to my constituents what on earth is going on?

Lockharts Gap Road, Tangambalanga

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (19:20): (2109) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for comprehensive repair work to be undertaken on Lockharts Gap Road between Tallandoon and Tangambalanga in my electorate of Northern Victoria. Lockharts Gap Road is surprisingly busy and nestled in the hills of the Mitta Mitta Valley. This already narrow, winding road is made even more treacherous by the deep potholes found on almost every bend. I took a drive up there last week to see the conditions for myself. On a road with a speed limit of 100 kilometres per hour I found myself not feeling safe enough to drive at more than 60 kilometres an hour in some places. Deep potholes, rutting, rough surfaces and hazards on the sides of the road made the journey a somewhat harrowing experience. I feel for my constituents who have to drive this road every day.

This road needs urgent and comprehensive repair works done to make it safe for road users. No-one should feel their life is in danger when simply making their daily commute from town to town. This is how my constituents feel. There is rarely a day I do not have someone from my community reaching out regarding the horrendous conditions of the roads in Northern Victoria. Minister, the action I seek is for comprehensive repair work to be undertaken on Lockharts Gap Road between Tallandoon and Tangambalanga in my electorate of Northern Victoria.

Life Saving Victoria

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (19:21): (2110) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Emergency Services, regarding the state government's decision to transfer responsibilities for paid lifeguard patrols from the state to local councils and taxpayers, and the action I seek is for the minister to immediately reverse this decision and reinstate full state government funding for Life Saving Victoria's professional lifeguard program ahead of the upcoming summer season. For decades lifeguard patrols have been a core, state-funded service, protecting Victorians and visitors alike across our coastal regions. This government consistently uses the phrase, 'This saves lives.' Well, guess what? These patrols save countless lives every single summer. They are not a luxury, they are a lifeline. Yet this year the government has told councils to pay the bills themselves, leaving councils scrambling to find hundreds of thousands of dollars outside their adopted budgets, which sets a precedent for them to pay in the future as well.

Along with other bayside councils, Hobsons Bay City Council in my electorate, which obviously includes the Altona and Williamstown beaches, received a request from Life Saving Victoria for $88,000 for a service that has always been funded by the state government, not taxpayers. Lifesavers are an emergency service. They belong under the state emergency services portfolio alongside police, fire and ambulance services. Beach safety is not a local feature like a bin or a barbecue, it is a statewide responsibility tied to emergency response and public health. This cut comes despite the rise in drownings over last summer. The *2023–24 Life Saving Victoria Drowning Report* recorded 54 deaths. Forty per cent of those were from multicultural communities like many in my electorate. This government says it cares about multicultural communities. Well, their actions say otherwise.

Hobsons Bay – and many other councils – warn that fewer paid patrols will put lives at risk as crowds surge this summer. To make matters worse, this demand comes on top of the government already directing the council to collect more than $9 million for the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. The state has now begun to ask them to ask for tax to fund lifesavers too. Victorians are not asking for luxuries, they are just asking for safe beaches. We cannot expect volunteers to carry the burden alone, and we cannot make local taxpayers fund this vital service, so I urge the minister to restore the full state funds for lifeguard patrols before the summer begins.

Yackandandah-Wodonga Road, Staghorn Flat

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (19:24): (2111) My adjournment is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I received correspondence from a constituent. He says:

> I live in Yackandandah, you may be aware recently there has been a partial road closure on the Yack to Wodonga Road caused by a "sinkhole". This particular part of the road has been an issue for several years but now due to the partial road closure and traffic light system, I'm concerned that this will be the remedy for the upcoming months based on recent history of how the Victorian government manage their roads. I wondered if you were able to find out if there is any timeframe for this to be repaired as many of my local friends as I do travel on that road daily for work. There's currently no infrastructure or equipment to show that there's any potential repairs to be done in the near future.
>
> It has a severe impact on the journey time, safety of other road users travelling on that road and tourism.

The action I seek is for the minister to investigate this issue and to ensure that the road is repaired as promptly as possible and provide a timeframe.

Gellung Warl

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (19:26): (2112) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples. The action I seek is clarification as to how the government intends to maintain ministerial and parliamentary accountability over Gellung Warl, the new body to be established under the Statewide Treaty Act 2025, which gained royal assent today. Under section 13 of the legislation, Gellung Warl is definitively stated to be 'not subject to the direction or control of the Minister' in relation to its functions and powers. Yet this same body will be funded directly by Victorian taxpayers through a standing appropriation. This is an automatic, ever-increasing payment which begins at almost $24 million in 2025–26 and rises to more than $70 million within four years. After that, the figure increases automatically each year. Parliament will have no opportunity to review, reduce or redirect that expenditure.

This is an extraordinary arrangement. We are creating a publicly funded body with no expiry date, a permanent income and no effective mechanism for democratic oversight. Is there any other precedent for this? I can think of absolutely none. Ministerial responsibility, the cornerstone of the Westminster system, is being casually bypassed. Once the money leaves consolidated revenue, it is gone without the normal checks of departmental reporting, Auditor-General scrutiny or budget paper transparency. Will there be an alternative budget? Where is the guarantee? According to this legislation, they can do what they like.

The government has presented this as administrative reform, but it amounts to the establishment of a fourth arm of government, operating independently of Parliament yet drawing on its purse. As far as I am aware, no other Victorian public authority enjoys anything like this combination of autonomy and guaranteed funding. It is unprecedented. The Auditor-General, the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission and the Ombudsman, all independent by design, remain subject to statutory oversight, reporting requirements and review by this Parliament. Why should Gellung Warl be different?

Minister, Victorians are entitled to ask a simple question: who will be answerable if this body fails to deliver results, misuses funds or exceeds its mandate? To whom do taxpayers turn if millions are spent and nothing improves? The action I seek is for the minister to explain clearly to this house and to all Victorians what mechanisms will exist to ensure Gellung Warl remains accountable to the Parliament that funds it and how this government intends to uphold the principle that those who spend public money must ultimately answer to the public itself.

Live music precincts

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (19:29): (2113) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Environment in the other place. Live music has always been a part of who we are in Melbourne's north, from the small gigs that fill our pubs and cafes to major events that draw thousands. Live music, figuratively and literally, gives our state rhythm. In my electorate you only have to walk down Sydney Road to see the posters all along the street and the packed dancefloors of our local favourite venues. Just the other week, tens of thousands of Victorians turned out for the Oasis concert at Marvel Stadium – even a few members got to enjoy the show, as I understand – and last night AC/DC was at the MCG, and what a big, big concert that was. As soon as we left here you could see – for the dinner break – how everyone was absolutely thrilled to bits to head down to the G to see AC/DC. It truly is a reminder of how central music is to our state. The Allan Labor government's recent announcement on noise rules for live music and outdoor events are all about keeping that spirit thriving.

The EPA will review the requirements for designated live music precincts – areas where live music is recognised as a priority activity – making it easier for venues and communities to host performances. This review will cut red tape and help organisers to comply with noise regulations, creating more space for artists to perform and audiences to connect. On top of this, the government will examine existing noise control rules within these areas to make sure that we strike the right balance between supporting more opportunities for Victorian artists and meeting community expectations. These changes will make it easier for venues to plan, for councils to manage events and for artists to perform with confidence, all while protecting the vibrant culture that makes Melbourne and Victoria the live music capital of the country. The action I seek is for the minister to provide information on how Victorians can have their say on the proposed regulations.

Education system

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:31): (2114) My adjournment debate tonight is for the Minister for Education, and it relates to the new laptop program. When I say 'program' I use that word, shall we say, advisedly or perhaps on advice because the clear feedback I have had from my schools in the Ringwood electorate is that there is no money for these laptops. In other words, the schools are expected to provide these laptops to their children from prep through to grade 6 in whatever age group and year group they provide them but they are having to carry the can. Through my adjournment debate, being for the Minister for Education, what I am keen to understand is how much my local schools have been apportioned or provided with in terms of funding to be able to pay for this program.

The list of schools includes Marlborough Primary School, Whitehorse Primary School, Heathmont East Primary School, Antonio Park Primary School, Mitcham Primary School, Eastwood Primary School, Great Ryrie Primary School – who have I missed? I cannot forget Marlborough, one of my favourites. One of yours too, President?

The PRESIDENT: I think you said it twice.

Nick McGOWAN: I have said it a couple twice. I am just recollecting to make sure I have got them all for the minister, so when he goes and looks at this list he has a comprehensive list. I am here to serve the minister at the end of the day; we are all here to serve the people. But through the minister and through the government, if I can assist him in any way, that would be great.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Nick McGOWAN: I am very generous. It is one of those days really.

Wendy Lovell interjected.

Nick McGOWAN: It seems I need assistance and a jacket, as it turns out today.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Nick McGOWAN: That is what I am saying – I need a jacket. That is right. In time I am sure someone will donate one and I can wear it. But the serious point here is these schools are doing it tough as it is. They have got a tight budget. They have, over the last couple of years, been told to spend any money that they were holding in reserve for any particular special projects, be it those unforeseen expenses, those things that the government does not normally provide for but the principals and the leadership teams know are important. They have basically exhausted all those reserves and now they are being told by this government they have got to pay for all the laptops for the children, and there is not a cent in their budget for that purpose. This comes from the schools themselves. It does not come from my discussions with members in here or anywhere else for that matter. I am very keen to understand from the minister what each and every one of my primary schools has or, let us be positive, perhaps they are about to receive a cheque for Christmas to help afford this into the new year – I am not sure that is the case. But in any case I would welcome some advice from the minister in respect to each of my primary schools and how much they can expect in terms of financial support to make sure this program is funded.

Victorian Maternity Taskforce

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (19:34): (2115) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and it is in relation to the Victorian Maternity Taskforce report. As a former midwife I am very interested in this area, and I have met with a number of midwives and others who have been keenly awaiting the report to see what recommendations and findings are in it. As we know, the taskforce was established only after years of mounting failures across the system, with the government forced to respond to growing concerns from clinicians, boards and communities about unsafe staffing levels, closed maternity units and inconsistent care. The government have been in power now for 12 years. The government has ignored repeated warnings of these failures, and the report confirms what families, clinicians and regional communities have been saying for years: maternity care in Victoria is under strain, unsafe and unequal. Under Labor we have seen a steady decline in maternity services, with hospitals forced to close birthing units, staff burning out and women giving birth before reaching hospital. On too many occasions women are giving birth on the side of the road. The report highlights that regional and rural hospitals have been left without the workforce or resources to keep birthing services open. It points to an alarming increase in births before arrival, particularly in regional Victoria, which is a direct result of Labor's failure to maintain safe and local care. It is disappointing that the report does not address increasing access to continuity of midwifery care. That is something that I am very familiar with, because it provides better outcomes for women, their babies and their families.

Families are being put at risk because this government refuses to invest in the basics. When women are giving birth in cars on the way to hospital it is clear the system is failing them. The taskforce found critical workforce shortages and inconsistent clinical guidelines across hospitals contributed to poorer outcomes for mothers and babies. So the action I am seeking is for the government to restore local

maternity services, rebuild the regional workforce and put accountability back into Victoria's maternity system.

Rural and regional roads

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (19:36): (2116) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that I seek is for the minister to show compassion for Victorians by ordering Transport Victoria to pay compensation for damage caused to vehicles by the atrocious condition of Victorian roads, and particularly to my constituent, whose story I will outline. One of my constituents was driving home from Melbourne towards Kialla on 3 August this year when he hit a series of large potholes on the Goulburn Valley Highway between Nagambie-Locksley Road and Racecourse Road. There were numerous potholes along that stretch but no warning signs about the hazardous road conditions. The impact of hitting the potholes caused significant damage to his wheels, rims and tyres, leaving the car undrivable and requiring it to be towed to the nearest service centre. Thankfully no-one was injured, but the incident was a major inconvenience, and the cost of the repairs totalled $8372. My constituent lodged an insurance claim and also submitted a notice of incident and claim for compensation to Transport Victoria, as well as clear photographic evidence. Two and a half months later he received an email from Transport Victoria denying any liability and refusing his claim. This is outrageous and completely unacceptable.

The atrocious condition of Victoria's rural roads is a direct result of two decades of Labor neglect of rural and regional roads. Labor spends billions and billions of dollars on cost blowouts and Big Build projects but will not invest in properly maintaining rural and regional roads. The Allan Labor government is responsible for allowing Victorian roads to fall into a state of disrepair. It is liable for the damage caused to my constituent's car by potholes, and it should pay compensation for that damage.

The email he received from Transport Victoria denying his claim said that the Goulburn Valley Highway was inspected twice in the weeks before the incident and no hazards were found. But when he originally rang VicRoads to complain about this section of road, VicRoads said they had received numerous other reports of potholes along that stretch. I drive the GV highway multiple times a week myself, and I know how bad the road is and how many sections have dangerous potholes. I viewed the photographs of the road taken by my constituent on the night, and I cannot believe the stretch was correctly inspected and no hazards found, because the photographs clearly show large and deep potholes, yet Transport Victoria continues to deny the claim. A few days later my constituent noticed that those potholes had already been repaired, proving that the defect existed and was significant enough to require urgent attention.

I will forward the constituent's details, correspondence and photographs to the minister and ask that she order compensation to be paid. The minister must take responsibility for the horrendous condition of our roads, accept liability for the damage done to cars and pay fair compensation. Regional Victorians deserve better.

Aitken Boulevard–Central Park Avenue, Craigieburn

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) incorporated the following (2117):

> My adjournment is directed to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and it concerns the intersection of Aitken Boulevard and Central Park Avenue, Craigieburn, in the neglectorate of Kalkallo, and the action I seek relates to the delays to this road project and the simmering frustration of these long-suffering communities.
>
> Minister, my constituents are frustrated by the delays in the upgrades to this intersection. While they recognise the need for road improvements, they feel like these projects in the north are not planned properly, leading to delays and gridlock being a constant part of life.
>
> I note that Hume City Council recently resolved to write to you, and I congratulate councillors Daniel English and Jim Overend for leading this advocacy, bringing to your attention the frustration of locals and have also written to your department pleading for the works to be completed before Christmas.

Their letters will also note the lack of coordination by your department and express their concerns around the need to prioritise Somerton Road and Aitken Boulevard. To quote the councillors:

> Somerton Rd is in urgent need of duplication, and Council has proposed duplication of Aitken Blvd between Somerton and Craigieburn Rd during the period 2029 and 2032. Therefore, the intersection should be delivered in a manner that avoids unnecessary delays or reworks.

I also note that they will call for better coordination of PSP intersection upgrades, a problem which is symbolic of this government's inability to plan for the population growth in the north.

You want the revenue that increased population growth brings, you dump extraordinary demands for new housing on stretched councils and gridlocked communities, but you fail to put in the work here on Spring Street, here in Melbourne to plan for the roads and infrastructure that are needed as a result of your grand plans.

I end where I started and call on the minister to read the letter from Hume City Council; don't put it in the out-tray, don't put it in the too-hard basket, actually read it and realise that it is long overdue for this government to fund the roads and infrastructure my community desperately needs.

Responses

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (19:39): There were 18 adjournments to 12 separate ministers, and written responses will be sought in accordance with the standing orders.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 7:40 pm.