



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

### **60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 14 May 2024**



## **Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly**

### **60th Parliament**

#### **Speaker**

Maree Edwards

#### **Deputy Speaker**

Matt Fregon

#### **Acting Speakers**

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

#### **Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier**

Jacinta Allan

#### **Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier**

Ben Carroll

#### **Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition**

John Pesutto

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

David Southwick

#### **Leader of the Nationals**

Peter Walsh

#### **Deputy Leader of the Nationals**

Emma Kealy

#### **Leader of the House**

Mary-Anne Thomas

#### **Manager of Opposition Business**

James Newbury

**Members of the Legislative Assembly**  
**60th Parliament**

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

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 27 September 2023

<sup>2</sup> ALP until 29 April 2024

<sup>3</sup> Sworn in 6 February 2024

<sup>4</sup> ALP until 5 August 2023

<sup>5</sup> Resigned 7 July 2023

<sup>6</sup> Sworn in 3 October 2023

**Party abbreviations**

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

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**Tuesday 14 May 2024**

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

***Bills***

**Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine Bill 2024**

***Introduction and first reading***

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (09:35): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to establish the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine, to repeal the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine Act 1985, to consequentially amend other acts and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (09:35): I ask for a brief explanation of the bill.

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (09:35): The bill will strengthen governance and accountability mechanisms and address issues impacting the effective operations of the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine, VIFM.

**Read first time.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

***Business of the house***

**Notices of motion**

**Notices given.**

***Members***

**Acting Speakers**

**The SPEAKER** (09:36): Under standing order 20, I table a warrant amending the panel of members to preside as Acting Speakers to include Paul Mercurio.

***Committees***

**Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**

***Alert Digest No. 6***

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (09:37): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 6 of 2024, on the following bills:

Appropriation (2024–2025) Bill 2024

Appropriation (Parliament 2024–2025) Bill 2024

Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024

Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024

Hemp Industry Bill 2024

Local Government Amendment (Governance and Integrity) Bill 2024

Sentencing Amendment (Sentencing Practices for Child Sexual Offences) Bill 2024

Sustainable Forests (Timber) Repeal Bill 2024

Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024

together with appendices.

**Ordered to be published.**

### *Documents*

### **Documents**

### **Incorporated list as follows:**

#### **DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:

*Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* – Order under s 17B granting a licence over Lower Maribyrnong Riverlands

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission – Report to the Attorney-General under s 464ZP of the *Crimes Act 1958*

*Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984* – Notice under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Obligations of managers of land or infrastructure (Urban stormwater management and On-site wastewater management) (*Gazette S230, 9 May 2024*)

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

Ballarat – C246

Boroondara – C387

Hume – C267

Melbourne – C440

Strathbogie – C89

Yarra – C308

Special Investigator, Office of – Report 1 July 2023 to 1 February 2024 under s 30L of the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999*

Statutory Rule 30 under the *Transport (Safety Schemes Compliance and Enforcement) Act 2014*

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994*:

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rule 30

Documents under s 16B in relation to the *Environment Protection Act 2017* – Obligations of managers of land or infrastructure (Urban stormwater management and On-site wastewater management).

### *Bills*

#### **National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024**

#### *Royal assent*

**The SPEAKER** (09:39): I inform the house that today the Lieutenant-Governor gave royal assent to the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024.

#### **Local Government Amendment (Governance and Integrity) Bill 2024**

#### **State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024**

#### **Sustainable Forests (Timber) Repeal Bill 2024**

#### **Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024**

#### *Appropriation*

**The SPEAKER** (09:39): I have received messages from the Lieutenant-Governor recommending appropriations for the purposes of the Local Government Amendment (Governance and Integrity)

## MOTIONS

Tuesday 14 May 2024

Legislative Assembly

1607

Bill 2024, the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024, the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Repeal Bill 2024 and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024.

### *Motions*

#### **Lord's Prayer**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the recent joint representation from the Catholic archdiocese, the Anglican diocese, the board of imams, the Hindu council, the Australian/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council and Jewish Care urging members to recognise the valuable role of the Lord's Prayer and ensure its practice continues in the Assembly.

**Leave refused.**

#### **Minister for Planning**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Minister for Planning to explain the difference between her recent words that slamming the door on development and saying 'No, you can't live in our community' runs in contrast to her actions when she opposed the Pier One development in her own electorate as overdevelopment.

**Leave refused.**

### *Business of the house*

#### **Standing and sessional orders**

**Sam HIBBINS** (Pahran) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow general business, notice of motion 15, relating to the reintroduction of non-government business time to be moved immediately.

**Leave refused.**

### *Motions*

#### **Middle East conflict**

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (09:40): By leave, I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that since this house resolved on 17 October 2023 to stand with Israel:
  - (a) Israel's military has killed or injured over 120,000 Palestinians;
  - (b) Israel's siege of Gaza is putting over 1 million Palestinians at risk of famine; and
- (2) does not support the state of Israel's continued invasion of Palestine.

**Leave refused.**

### *Business of the house*

#### **Program**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:41): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2):

- (1) the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 7 pm on 14 May 2024:
  - Appropriation (2024–2025) Bill 2024
  - Appropriation (Parliament 2024–2025) Bill 2024
  - Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Bill 2024; and

- (2) the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 15 May 2024:

State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024

Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024.

It is great to be back on Tuesday, which is actually Wednesday but contains some of the elements of Tuesday. We will all try and make sure we are in the right place at the right time.

We have, as always, an important government business program before us, but it is even more important this week because it is the opportunity for the house to consider the budget that was handed down by the Treasurer last week. Since that time the Treasurer has been out and about, as have members on this side of the house, talking to the people of Victoria about how our budget is very much firmly focused on our Labor values of helping families where and when they need it most. I know again that on this side of the house there have been great opportunities to get out and talk about the school saving bonus and the fact that we are making breakfast free for all kids in schools. This is fantastic.

As is usual practice, the Parliament appropriation bill will be debated cognately with the broader appropriations bill. It is important that the house has a chance to consider the budget. As such we are also moving a take-note motion to ensure that every member who wishes to have an opportunity to speak on the budget has that opportunity. I know that this is an opportunity that will be taken up by every single Labor member of this house, because we take our responsibility to the people of Victoria to serve and deliver for them very, very seriously and we ensure that we use our time in this place to talk about the things that matter to the people of Victoria, and that includes investing in schools, health care, road and rail, upgrading our classrooms and our hospitals – so much for us to talk about. We are also looking forward to the opportunity that the budget delivers for the opposition leader in waiting perhaps – I am not sure – the Shadow Treasurer will be on his feet later this morning, using the time that is available to him to speak in reply to the Treasurer's speech. We look forward to that; we will be listening intently to his contribution.

When we talk about the confiscation amendment bill, we are guillotining the Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Bill 2024 today. It is another important bill for the house to consider given the bill targets the ill-gotten gains of criminals, and it is recognised as a key tool in disrupting, dismantling and deterring serious and organised crime. I know that this is a bill that will be welcomed by all members of the house, and we wait perhaps in hope that those on the other side will see their way clear to supporting this bill.

In terms of the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024 and the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024, the government will also seek to debate and guillotine the state taxation and gender responsive budgeting bills tomorrow. This is to ensure we continue the passage of the budget bills through the Parliament. Obviously these two bills are important components of our budgets, particularly given the focus of our budgets on delivering for the women of Victoria. And I will take this opportunity to congratulate both the Minister for Women, who is at the table, and the Treasurer for the work that they have done and their commitment to establishing gender-responsive budgeting as the way in which we do business here in the state of Victoria. This gender-responsive budgeting ensures that all of our budget initiatives are examined through the lens of the impact that they have on women and girls, because we know that in the past this has not been the case, and the real needs of women and girls have not been properly addressed in this place. But I have got to say, when more than 50 per cent of your caucus are women, you see a focus on the issues of concern to women, something that our government is especially proud of, and I know that there will be women and men who look forward to making, on this side of this place, a contribution. It will be interesting to hear what those on the other side have to say about gender-responsive budgeting, and whether they would have a commitment to continue it should they ever have the opportunity to form government.

So again, it is a really important week, one for which I know members on this side of the chamber are ready and raring to go. There are quite a few croaky throats, I might say, around the chamber. I think it is incumbent on me as Minister for Health to say, ‘Please look after yourself as respiratory viruses are kind of peaking a little bit at the moment.’ So some members may take the opportunity to say less rather than more, and to actually look after their health this week. I commend the government business program to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (09:47): The coalition will be opposing the government business program. I move:

That the government business program proposed by the Leader of the House be amended by omitting the order of the day, government business, relating to the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024.

The government has proposed a government business program that hides the budget and rams it through this chamber. That is what this government business program does. Earlier today we saw the Leader of the House give notice of a debate on the appropriation bills – the budget bills – and exclude every member who speaks on the original bill today, so if you speak on the bills before moving to the take-note motion, you will be excluded from speaking twice. I am sure the members on that side of the chamber were not aware of what their Leader of the House was doing, because it is unprecedented for a Leader of the House to do that. Why are they doing that for the first time? Members over there, you can only speak once on these budget bills. Though there are two different options, you will be excluded from speaking about the budget. We know why – a budget that is \$188 billion in debt.

The coalition has moved an amendment to the government business program excluding the State Taxation Amendment Bill, a bill that has not been second-read in this place. What is it? No-one would know. Victorians would not know, because they certainly have not seen it, so I think it is important to note for the house and for Victorians, in terms of understanding the amendment, what that bill does. What that bill does is increase the waste services levy and also increase the fire services levy. In terms of the waste services levy, it is a 30 per cent increase. The total tax take from those two items – effectively two new taxes and charges, so we now have a total of 55 increased taxes or charges over the last 10 years – on those two introduced in the budget is \$1 billion. And what has been the consultation? The bill has not even been introduced into this place and the government is proposing to guillotine it – guillotine a bill that does not even exist in this place for members to read, for the community to see. So the government is proposing to take another billion dollars out of Victorians’ pockets and will not even show the bill before passing a motion to guillotine that bill. It is shameful. That is why the coalition is moving an amendment to the government business program.

But the other thing this bill does, for the house’s information, is it further hurts non-government schools by introducing a number of measures on non-government schools to put into effect the government’s tax hit that they introduced last year. There are a number of measures secretly hidden in this bill that the government does not want Victorians to see – of course they do not, that is why they have not released it. They want agreement to guillotine debate on it before it has even been introduced. What the government is proposing with the state tax bill is outrageous – two new taxes, no consultation, new measures that hurt religious institutions and non-government schools through measures in that bill, and consultation has not occurred. Consultation has not even occurred. It is outrageous to think that schools are being so perniciously hurt again in this budget, and there has been no reporting on it. Of course there has not, because the government is doing everything it can to hide it, and not just hide it from the community but it is blocking their own members from speaking on these items. But we know the government has issues, and I think we will see that with other bills in coming weeks, like the integrity bill, which I know treats ministers and backbenchers separately. But we will deal with that issue at another time. This is a business program that is flawed and it is hiding the truth from Victorians, so the coalition will be wholeheartedly opposing it.

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (09:52): It is a pleasure to rise today to speak on the government business program, and it is great to be back in this place just a week after the Treasurer handed down his 10th

Victorian state budget. While I and many others on this side have been out in our communities talking about the important investments into schools and hospitals and easing the cost of living for hardworking Victorian families, we are back here today to debate the appropriation bills that will allow the government press on with its important agenda that the Treasurer outlined in his budget speech last week.

Of course we have two appropriation bills that we will be debating over the course of today, the Appropriation (Parliament 2024–2025) Bill 2024 and the Appropriation (2024–2025) Bill 2024. It is so disappointing but not surprising that the opposition is not supporting the government business program this week, but despite what those opposite say, we on this side – on the side of government – are getting on with the job this week. We are all ready to debate the appropriation bills, we are all ready to debate the take-note motion, and I am certainly looking forward to having more to say on these bills. I know my colleagues are too, and I am looking forward to hearing what they have to say about the state budget, the appropriation bills, and the importance of these investments in their communities.

The purpose of the Appropriation (Parliament 2024–2025) Bill 2024 is to appropriate funds out of the Consolidated Fund for the operation of the Parliament for 2024–2025 – very important work here. This includes ensuring that there is funding for the Parliament’s core operations and other entities, including the Parliamentary Budget Office, the Victorian Inspectorate and the Auditor-General, and for the integrity agencies: the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission and the Victorian Ombudsman.

The Appropriation (2024–2025) Bill 2024 is important to this week’s government business program as it provides that legal authority for the appropriation of money from the Consolidated Fund for the ordinary annual services of government for the 2024–25 financial year. This bill implements the expenditure decisions that were outlined in the budget last week, and I am sure that all members of this place want to see this bill debated and agreed to so that we can get on with upgrading schools, purchasing land and building new schools for our growth areas; investing in our health system in places that need it most; and of course providing some much-needed financial support to families that we know are doing it tough right now and are dealing with an increase in the cost of living.

Once these bills are passed, we can get on with the job of providing that relief through measures such as the \$400 school saving bonus for families and children. It is a great initiative. I have spoken to so many people about this over the past week, as I know my colleagues have been out speaking about it in their communities, and it has been met with such great excitement. That is a \$400 payment for families with children at government schools and eligible families at independent schools. For some of the larger families in my electorate with three or four children at a government school, I know that the school saving bonus is going to make a real difference when it comes to ensuring that students have everything that they need –

**Cindy McLeish:** On a point of order, Speaker, the member for Lara is actually debating the bills rather than talking about the government business program, and I ask you to bring her back to this debate.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Lara had strayed into debating the bills before the house in the government business program, and I ask her to come back to the motion on the government business program.

**Ella GEORGE:** What can I say, I am just so excited about the \$400 school saving bonus that was announced by the Treasurer last week, which will be included in these appropriation bills as part of the government business program this week.

This week we will also be continuing the debate on the Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Bill 2024, and debate will commence on the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024 and of course the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024. I would

like to spend the remainder of my time today focusing on that bill. The Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill is the type of legislation that only a Labor government would introduce. With a caucus of over 50 per cent women, gender equity is front and centre of everything we do on this side, and this bill will enshrine our government's commitment to gender equity and inclusivity when it comes to investment in government services and initiatives, and taxation policies. This bill will create a minimum standard for budget-reporting obligations on gender equality and also empowers the minister to request gender impact assessments. I commend the government business program to the house.

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (09:57): Of course it is no surprise that the opposition is going to oppose the government business program this week. With a bill on the program that has not even been second read, it would be irresponsible of us not to oppose it, particularly when we are looking down the barrel of a 30 per cent increase in waste management levies. I have spoken to many councils, many CEOs and mayors over the last week or so, and previously to that too. Small shire councils cannot afford to run as they are; they are not sustainable. Increase the levies, and again we are perhaps looking down the barrel of more amalgamations, which is the last thing we want. On the fire services levy, clearly they need some help. FRV's station 72 pumper –

**Michaela Settle:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is debating the bill.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I ask the member for Mildura to continue on the government business program.

**Jade BENHAM:** Apologies, Deputy Speaker. Okay, let us talk about the government business program and the fact that a motion has been moved that will exclude members that have been able to speak on the appropriation bills. And I suspect that there might be a few, because I know my Nats colleagues are all very, very intent – the Leader of the Nationals obviously is very intent – on talking about regional discrimination. They are all intent on contributing on the appropriation bills, but I have no doubt that that will be cut short and we will leave off some of those.

Fifteen minutes is not a long time to talk about everything that we have got to talk about when we talk about regional discrimination. It would be no surprise that all of our members would want to talk on both of the appropriation bills and the take-note motion rather than be excluded from talking on the take-note. We are gagged, so to speak – again, something we are getting used to in this place. Of course we want to talk about the budget and the state of this state. I am befuddled to come up with the appropriate words that describe not only the \$188 billion of debt but the fact that we are being gagged by not being able to contribute on the appropriation bills. Do we have to make a choice? We should not have to make a choice. We should be free to do our jobs and contribute on every single bill or motion that comes before this place. That is our job, and the fact that we cannot is absolutely preposterous. 'Preposterous' is the word that I was looking for before. It makes me sound like Mary Poppins, I am sure.

The Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Bill 2024 – hopefully that will be a quick one and we are not going to use it to filibuster and take up time this week, with only two days, so that we do not get time to contribute on what we want to be talking about. To be quite honest, it does not surprise me that we would be talking on something like that rather than the appropriation bills, which clearly the other side is embarrassed about. I mean, \$4 million for a scoreboard as opposed to taking 75 per cent out of cancer research. If you want to put money into community sport that classifies as regional, give me that \$4 million and I could make it go –

**Michaela Settle:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is debating the bill.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member was straying a little and should come back to the government business program.

**Jade BENHAM:** In the 40-odd seconds I have got left – I failed to mention I was going to keep this brief, because I knew I would fail at that – when looking at this government business program I am utterly dismayed. I am just befuddled, and I am quite frankly surprised that the other side would be surprised that we are opposing this government business program. Like I said earlier, it would be irresponsible of us not to, considering that there is a bill that we have not even seen. It just proves that Labor cannot manage money.

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (10:02): It is always a pleasure to talk on the government business program for the week, especially following the member for Mildura. I am sorry she has not got too many of her team members to back her and support her in here.

There is nothing more special or exciting than being in this place after budget day. As the member for Lara has already said, we have all been out and about in our electorates. I am sure you all have too, spruiking the budget announcements for your electorates and claiming them as your own, which is quite a common thing to do.

**James Newbury** interjected.

**Belinda WILSON:** I am pleased that the member for Brighton has come back into the chamber to hear me speak. He has been yelling and screaming so much over there. I think he might need to get his hearing tested, because I am in here a lot and the noise is extremely loud. I am sure there are lots of things for you to spruik, member for Brighton, especially the \$400 for all your primary school kids. For me and my electorate, this is an absolute game changer.

**A member** interjected.

**Belinda WILSON:** Well, the parents are getting it.

*Members interjecting.*

**Belinda WILSON:** No, it is not going into their bank account, but it is coming off their fees and it is coming off their camps and it is coming off their school uniforms. It is not a cash payment; it is into the school, which is a great thing. Kids in my schools cannot afford to go on camp, and this will allow them –

*Members interjecting.*

**Belinda WILSON:** No, we did not. We did not increase the cost of camp. Anyway, back to the \$400, which I think – and I think most of my colleagues agree – is an incredible initiative to be able to see kids who cannot afford to go to camp be able to go and be included in camp. The other great initiative for schools is the breakfast program. I am sure you have been to a school breakfast program in your primary schools, both members sitting at the table there.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the cuts to 29 schools' capital funding or any other policy matters are not relevant to this motion.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member had strayed from the government business program, and I ask her to come back.

**Belinda WILSON:** Thank you, member for Brighton, I appreciate you bringing me back to the government business program. I really do appreciate that. Thank you so much. As I said, it is always a pleasure to speak on a government business program motion, especially after budget day and especially after hearing an incredible budget from our Treasurer for the 10th time. I am really pleased to be here on this side of the chamber, as all my colleagues are, and I applaud and commend the government business program for today.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (10:05): I rise to support the Manager of Opposition Business's amendment to withdraw the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024 from the business program motion. This government business program is an absolute disgrace – to introduce a bill and

not second read it and to guillotine it within two days when no-one from the public has been able to even see it, a bill that increases more taxes after this government promised when they came into government 10 years ago that there would be no new taxes. Now we have 55 taxes. Guess what, it is a sneaky tax. It is a tax that increases fire services levies from \$840 million to \$1.4 billion. That is hidden in your rates bill. And the bin tax: householders who are struggling are now getting another direct hit with the 55th tax, from \$64 to \$169 per tonne. That is a 30 per cent increase in the cost of community members, mums and dads, putting their bins out.

**Michaela Settle:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is debating the bill.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member had strayed from the government business program. I ask her to return.

**Roma BRITNELL:** I will return to talking about the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024 that we are requesting be withdrawn, through the amendment put forward by the Manager of Opposition Business, because we object, as does every Victorian, to this increase in taxes. Where are the priorities for our community, the priorities of this current Labor government? They cannot manage money and they cannot manage projects, and every Victorian is paying the price. That is why we oppose this government business program, because Victorians are hurting. These are direct cost-of-living increases that these taxes and this bill, which we should see withdrawn, are imposing on our community.

To increase the fire services levy to \$1.4 billion to grab more money out of the pockets of our hardworking community members is nothing short of a disgrace by this government. But we have seen that right throughout this budget. It is absolutely laid bare for all to see: cuts to women's services, cuts to public IVF, which was announced less than two years ago –

**Michaela Settle:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is debating the bill.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member to continue on the government business program, please.

**Roma BRITNELL:** I will continue on the government business program, talking about the withdrawing of the state taxation bill, which is absolutely a disgrace to see in this business program given that it has not even been second read, it is not available to the public and it is going to be guillotined. That is why we oppose the motion. It is a bill that increases taxes, that hurts families, that increases the cost of living and increases the cost of putting your bin out from your own home from \$64 to \$169 – an increase of 30 per cent on the cost of living to families. It is an absolute disgrace. It is hidden in the rates bill, and it is a direct hit by the state government. Labor are trying to increase more taxes and hurt hardworking Victorians simply because they cannot manage money and they have got to come after Victorians' money. They cannot manage projects, and their waste is a disgrace. It is a disgrace that every Victorian is paying the price of.

Let us be clear: this is all down to Labor's mismanagement. This government business program is a reflection of the way the government want to hide these taxes by including a bill that they have not even second read and shared with communities. They are not going to tell them anything. That is what they are sharing: we are going to hide the facts, we are going to hide the detail and we are going to introduce a bill and not even give the public the respect of knowledge. That is what we see from this government – consistently false, consistently misleading and consistently deceptive. They are increasing the cost of living simply because they cannot manage money.

Fifty-five new taxes in the time they have been in government, and what is it doing to the Victorian people? That is what the budget we saw last week is demonstrating: more debt than Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania put together we have in this state. Do we have more services for it? No. All we have got is more taxes and no plan going forward to manage the extraordinary debt that they have encountered on behalf of Victorians who have to pay it all off, whether it is them, their children or their grandchildren.

The taxes are coming for you; they are coming for the Victorian people's pockets, and Labor are doing nothing but continuing the waste and going ahead with projects like the Suburban Rail Loop, which will do nothing to help Victorians who need health care, who need an education and who are getting taxed on those things – taxed on health, taxed on education and taxed on rent. This is a government that has no plan, no way of incentivising growth in the economy; it only understands taxation as a way to hurt Victorians.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The Leader of the House has moved the government business program. The member for Brighton has moved:

That the government business program proposed by the Leader of the House be amended by omitting order of the day, government business, relating to the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024.

The question is:

That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the motion.

Members supporting the amendment by the member for Brighton should vote no.

**Assembly divided question:**

*Ayes (49):* Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (28):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Sam Hibbins, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

**Question agreed to.**

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (49):* Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

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**Motion agreed to.**

*Members statements***Drucilla Bartlett**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (10:19): I want to acknowledge the sad passing of Drucilla Bartlett, who left us on 7 April. Dru was a brilliant, multitalented, funny, loving woman with a talent for making friends and giving herself wholeheartedly to everything she took on. Known and loved within the eastern suburbs community theatre, Dru was a life member of 34 years of The Basin Theatre Group, working backstage, then as an actor and director. As well as stints on the committee, she also was a past president and the current president of the theatre group and steered it through the difficult times of COVID. Dru was also involved in the wider world of local theatre. She worked with other local theatre groups, encouraging the sharing of resources and ideas and camaraderie between the groups. In her professional life, she was a wonderful teacher. Following her teaching career Dru worked as a technical writer with numerous big companies. In later years Dru used her brilliant organisational skills working with Puffing Billy in administration and adding to her vast collection of people who loved her. Dru lit up the room and brought comfort and joy with her hugs. She will be greatly missed.

**Wantirna College**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (10:21): It was also a great pleasure to officially get work started at Wantirna College on the double-court, competition-grade gym – a huge undertaking, a very, very proud commitment of this Allan Labor government. The school will absolutely now have the facilities it deserves – a two-court, competition-grade gym and new performing arts facilities. I think it is the biggest educational infrastructure project we are getting on with. I was extremely proud that we were out there with principal Carrie Wallis and the students to acknowledge the event.

**Echuca abandoned train carriages**

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (10:21): The people of Echuca are demanding that the Premier and the minister for transport have the railway carriages that have been dumped in the middle of Echuca removed. Initially there were 16 carriages. They have graffiti on them now. They have windows smashed. They have the doors kicked out. They are right in the middle of town. They have squatters living in them now. People that walk past those carriages are being abused and having obscenities yelled at them. It is a social issue that we have these disused carriages in town.

To make matters worse, two weeks ago there were a further 12 carriages dumped into Echuca, right in the middle of the station on the vacant line there. Again, they are being graffitied. If they turn out the same as the 16 before, that will happen right in the middle of the station, where schoolchildren get on buses, where people get on trains to go places. We do not need those carriages in town. They are a huge social issue and I ask, and the community asks and demands, that the Premier and the minister for transport take those carriages away and have them put to scrap, as the intent is, before someone is attacked by the people that are living in those trains. We are a tourist town. We do not want the obscenity of those trains in the middle of town with graffiti all over them, with windows smashed out, with bullet holes through windows, with doors ripped off and with squatters living in them.

**Exford Primary School bus crash**

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (10:22): This week is the first anniversary of the Exford school bus crash, when Exford, Eynesbury, Melton and Parwan residents faced one of the most challenging events to have taken place in their community. Last month a joint awards ceremony was held for the first responders, as well as Victoria Police, to recognise their efforts, along with certificates of appreciation for the paramedics. When the alarms were sounded following the news that a local school bus packed with 46 children had collided with a truck, the rescue operation began, with all local fire brigades, including the SES and fire rescue services, responding, along with non-emergency crews. Many of the local responding members were faced with the unthinkable challenge that one of their children may have been on the bus. Despite this, the first responders, police and paramedics dealt with the intensity

and emotional challenges that lay ahead with the utmost professionalism and expertise required. Thankfully there were no fatalities, but the physical and emotional injuries were laid bare.

The leadership and the strength each of the responders showed was testament to their training. They just showed up and did their job. Enough cannot be said for the tradies and bystanders who were there straight after the impact, and the bus driver Graham, who made sure the bus was safe following the impact whilst injured himself. All the school staff attended the scene, providing immediate support. We remember their bravery today and the crucial support they provided to emergency services. The courage of our first responders in such a harrowing situation is often overlooked, but their actions on this day will forever be remembered by the children, the school and the community. I want to extend my best wishes to all involved and the school community in total.

#### **Tourist visas**

**Matthew GUY** (Bulleen) (10:24): Last week I raised a concern around what I believe is discriminatory treatment of people seeking to enter Australia on a tourist visa, and I follow that up with issues in relation this time to the Melbourne Hindustani Classical Music Society. The Melbourne Hindustani Classical Music Society – this is a concert which part of our Hindu community, which is large here in Melbourne, wishes to host with people from India – need to obtain a tourist visa for two weeks to come and perform in Melbourne. They have performed in Western Europe, they have performed in North America, but of course they get knocked back on a two-week visitation visa to enter Australia. I again place on record my concern that these issues are not being properly addressed by the federal Labor government and that we have this issue where people who are coming for weddings, sadly for wakes and now for classical music concerts are being denied two-week tourist visas when coming from a country that we should be engaging rather than seeking to push away.

#### **Latin America trade and investment**

**Matthew GUY** (Bulleen) (10:25): In the brief time I have got left I want to raise with concern issues in relation to this state's engagement with South America. A number of times in this chamber I have spoken about the necessity for Victoria to engage in the enormous market that is South America. We have a Latin America engagement strategy from this government which has never once been followed up by a single minister. They can greet the planes that come from Chile, but they cannot get on them and market us to South America.

#### **Ballarat East substation**

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (10:26): East Ballarat is a beautiful part of my electorate and holds a significant place in Ballarat's history. Many people enjoy walking along the river just 10 minutes from the centre of Ballarat, the perfect place for affordable housing, consistent with Ballarat City Council's aim to infill up to 50 per cent of housing stock in established suburbs of Ballarat. That is why the proposed power station on York Street is hard to swallow. Many in my community are distressed by the prospect of a suburb being towered over by a power station. We are fighting to stop it, but this is the awful legacy of Jeff Kennett's privatisation. The City of Ballarat has offered two alternative sites in more appropriate areas, but privatisation means that only the cheapest option is considered. We rely on the goodwill of a private company to consider the needs of people who call East Ballarat home, me included. With the land zoned for a substation many years ago, our options are limited. The Minister for Planning can only consider rezoning if the Ballarat council can justify such an amendment. We will continue to make it clear that the people of East Ballarat do not want this substation.

#### **Wesburn Primary School**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (10:27): It was certainly a slimy affair at Wesburn Primary School recently when they celebrated, in their own special way, the raising of \$6642 for Foodbank with the Foodbank food fight. Principal Anne Stenhouse had promised the students that if they raised more than \$5000 they could slime her and the teachers. There was loads of slime. I am not sure who had more fun, the teachers or the students, but it was a great outcome for a great cause.

**State forest access**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (10:27): Bush lovers are united in their passion to keep access to the forests in Central Highlands, but they are fearful that the Labor government are going to lock them out. Those who enjoy getting out into the local bush to ride horses, to hunt, to go four-wheel driving or dirt biking, to fish, to prospect or to simply take the dog out for a walk in the bush are all at risk of losing their favourite pastime. Labor's consultation about the future of the forests has been woeful. They set an exceptionally short timeframe – suspiciously short. They have used Engage Victoria – no-one looks at the Engage Victoria website. Further, you have to scroll down several pages to actually find out about the community drop-in sessions. And then you put a Post-it note at those sessions on a big bit of paper. I attended sessions at Healesville, at Yarra Junction and with 564 people at Alexandra, and the passion has never been clearer: they are worried about the future of their bush. The government cannot manage money, and they will not be able to manage the forest if they turn it into a national park.

**Moomba Park Wetland**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (10:28): I rise to thank the Victorian Labor government for their investment in the magnificent Moomba Park Wetland, which I opened alongside the member for Preston on Saturday. Jointly funded by Merri-bek City Council, the wetland catches and treats stormwater, provides habitat for the growling grass frog and other endangered species and provides a beautiful and interactive recreation space for the community to enjoy. I would like to thank the Merri Creek Management Committee and Friends of Merri Creek for their work and Wurundjeri elder Uncle Bill Nicholson Jr for generously sharing his cultural knowledge with us.

**Animal welfare**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (10:29): It was also great to be with the mayor on Friday at the official opening of the new dog parks in Glenroy and Fawkner and hear about the difference these investments make to so many locals, including a woman who can safely let her guide dog off lead for the first time in her life. Animal welfare continues to be a priority for the Allan Labor government, and Lort Smith were overjoyed at the news of their successful funding application to build an enrichment park in Campbellfield, because shelter dogs also deserve space to explore and exercise.

**St Charbel Parish, Greenvale**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (10:29): I also wish to thank Father Charles, Marleine Raffoul and the wonderful congregation for hosting the member for Greenvale and me for a mass at the beautiful St Charbel Parish in Greenvale over the weekend. Some of the mass was said in Aramaic, the language Jesus himself used, and to hear the whole congregation singing together was truly inspirational. I thank Father Charles for being a generous host and also for meeting with me, Viv Nguyen and Hume city councillors, along with a dozen priests and leaders from the local Assyrian, Orthodox, Chaldean and Syriac churches, following the stabbing of Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel in Sydney recently.

**Sick pay guarantee**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (10:30): In 2022, just before the state election in fact, Labor announced the sick pay guarantee so that casual and contract workers could access sick pay. The Greens have fought long and hard for workers rights and for a living wage for artists, so it was a small victory when in August last year Labor expanded the eligibility criteria so that it would include the arts. At the time Labor said that they were proud – and so they should have been – to expand the sick pay guarantee because they knew how important it was to Victorians. They said insecure work had terrible consequences, that no worker should be forced to choose between a day's pay and their health and that workers would now have the safety net needed to take time off when sick. But only eight months later, now with Labor's budget as part of \$1.7 billion of cuts, they are axing the sick pay

guarantee before the trial period has even ended. Because of Labor, 22 per cent of our workforce that are employed casually in hospo, in retail and in the arts will once again face lost income when they are sick. What can I say? I hope the Premier tips her barista.

#### **Meadow Heights Primary School**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (10:31): Thank you to the team at Meadow Heights Primary School, led by principal Margaret Leach, who provide extraordinary support to every child and family. Thank you too to Salwa and the incredible Meadow Heights Primary School Community Hub, which plays such a positive role supporting families. I am so pleased that last week's budget provides a major funding boost for our local community hubs and the vital work they do. Thank you, Treasurer.

I was delighted to join the school community to celebrate Mother's Day, and there was also huge excitement that Meadow Heights Primary will be receiving capital funding of \$700,000 to upgrade student and staff toilets – a commitment that has been sought for a number of years. Thank you to our federal representative Maria Vamvakinou, the member for Calwell, for her tireless advocacy on behalf of Meadow Heights Primary and also to the Deputy Premier for working with his federal counterpart to secure this funding.

#### **Roxburgh Park United Soccer Club**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (10:32): Run by passionate and dedicated volunteers like Ayad and Dunia Botres, Roxburgh Park United Soccer Club is an outstanding grassroots community club providing fantastic coaching and fulfilling opportunities to hundreds of young people every week. I was thrilled to join the club and many students from Roxburgh Rise Primary to see my friend the Minister for Community Sport announce a major Victorian government investment for new lighting at oval 2 at Arena Recreation Reserve, which will be delivered in partnership with Hume council.

#### **St Charbel Parish, Greenvale**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (10:32): Thank you to Father Charles Hitti, the fathers of the Maronite Order and the community at St Charbel Village in Greenvale. This is such a beautiful and peaceful part of my community, where the recently built church is set amid the greenery of Woodlands Historic Park. It was a profound pleasure to join the community, alongside my friend the member for Broadmeadows, for mass on Ascension Sunday and to wish so many parishioners a happy Mother's Day.

#### **Yarrowonga Football Netball Club**

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (10:33): A massive shout-out to Ross Mulquiney and the Yarrowonga Football Netball Club for their stand against domestic violence, particularly violence against women. Football–netball clubs are the heart and soul of our country communities, and leadership like that shown on Saturday is what makes the Pigeons not just a local football–netball club but a club that encourages a safe and secure environment and that teaches boys and young men to not only look out for but to call out their mates when they witness conversations or poor behaviour. Teaching the netball young women the signs to look for was also an outstanding piece of leadership which will help to start the conversation across the whole community, not just those who pull on the navy blue and white.

#### **estival**

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (10:33): Myrtleford comes alive again this weekend for the annual La Fiera festival. Italian culture, food and wine are the hallmarks of this great weekend in the heart of the Ovens Valley electorate. Myrtleford is not just a town; it is a community that looks out for each other and works together for the betterment of all. As always Kerry Murphy will be front and centre making sure everything goes off without a hitch. Come one, come all, you will not be disappointed.

**Katamatite Lions Club**

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (10:34): This Friday night I will be attending the Katamatite Lions Club 50th anniversary. It is such a credit to a small community for the work performed year in, year out. On many occasions our smaller towns have stronger clubs than the bigger towns with a larger population base. The Katamatite Lions Rodeo over the last couple of years has demonstrated that the Lions Club has moved with the times and puts on shows that people want and are well supported. Happy birthday to the Katamatite Lions Club and congratulations to all service clubs in our community as they continue to thrive and prosper. We simply could not provide for our people if not for our Lions, Rotary, Apex and CWA.

**Anzac Day**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (10:34): Wonderful Anzac Day services were held across the Monbulk district. Thousands of residents came together across the hills for marches and services at dawn and mid-morning. I was pleased to attend three services this year: Upwey-Belgrave RSL's dawn service, the Mount Dandenong Peace Memorial 9 am service and Emerald RSL's 11 am service. Our other four RSLs – Dandenong Ranges, Monbulk, Cockatoo and Gembrook – all had huge turnouts for their services as well, showing that support for those who have served is strong across the hills. Let us not forget.

**Monbulk electorate student leaders**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (10:35): It was great to hand out more leadership badges recently. Congratulations to Cockatoo Primary School's 2024 school and house leaders: school captains Elli, Lucy, Belinda and Joziah; and house captains for McBride, Logan, Ella, Siena and Nate; for Fairbridge, Edward, Avery, Zac and Ruby; for Bailey House, Byron, Abbie, Elaina and Xander; and for Treloar, Heath, Matilda, Mason and Sam.

Congratulations also to Emerald Secondary College's captains: school captains Lily, Mitchell, Keilah and Charlotte; house leaders Riley, Dakota, Caiden and Jasmine C, Jasmine R and Jasmine R; Koori captains Hayden and Alinda; and every leader across the various subject and extracurricular areas. Well done on your new roles.

**Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (10:35): The Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show in March was an extravaganza. The show featured the best landscape and floral talent from Australia and beyond. The creativity and ingenuity showcased in each garden and display were truly impressive. The passion and dedication of the growers and horticultural businesses across the Monbulk district was marvellous to see in full display. The show will be back in March next year, and it is absolutely one for the calendars.

**South-West Coast electorate events**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (10:36): Congratulations to Mark McNamara, his board, CEO Luke Cann and the Warrnambool Racing Club team and the many vendors, staff and volunteers who worked tirelessly to coordinate a truly remarkable May racing carnival for 2024. More than 30,000 people radiated excitement and energy into Warrnambool and this premier event of our racing calendar, which brings visitors and tourism into town and provides a financial boon for the region. The accommodation, restaurants and hospitality providers in our region contributed to a fantastic week of celebrations for both locals and visitors. The positive feedback and enthusiastic response are a clear indication of the event's resounding success.

Investing in events and tourism pays back dividends for our regions, supporting local jobs and economies. It is therefore concerning to see that the Allan Labor government slashed funding to the tourism sector in last week's state budget to the tune of \$393 million – that is millions cut out of our visitor economy initiatives, regional tourism events and infrastructure. Our regional events bring so

much vibrancy and life to our regions and contribute millions to regional economies, so to cut funding now is short-sighted and threatens to have a major impact on the economic stability of regional towns and the events that we run, such as the May racing carnival, the Melbourne to Warrnambool cycling classic, the world-renowned grand annual sprint car classic, the Port Fairy Folk Festival, the Heywood Wood, Wine and Roses Festival and Portland's Upwelling Festival, just to name a few. Our region is all the better for these events, and we need a government that recognises this and gets behind regional Victoria and the major benefits our festivals and events bring to Victoria.

#### **Clifton Springs Primary School**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (10:37): In March I was accompanied by the Minister for Education to officially open the new Clifton Springs Primary School. School leaders Tess, Tobias, Miranda and Makayla gave us a wonderful tour of their new school building; they were so proud to show it off to us. Built beautifully by Lyons Construction, this build, though, is more than just bricks and mortar. It is about investing in our future. The new school building has not only transformed the school and the wider community but it has inspired students to reach their full potential with the new equipment and facilities. I even had one parent comment to me at the opening that she felt the kids were more settled and learning better. The primary school now houses a sensory room, a quiet space for students, a new STEM building available for the first time, a large library with more space for students to read and learn and a dedicated kiln in the art space. Congratulations to all involved, and a special mention to Meg Parker, the school and the school community for a wonderful outcome.

#### **Queenscliffe Maritime Museum**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (10:38): On the weekend I celebrated a special project at the Queenscliffe Maritime Museum with the opening of an all-abilities ramp and a listening post now allowing visitors to get up and close to ex pilot boat *Mavis III*. The project was supported with a state government universal design grant, helping to make public spaces and tourist destinations more accessible for everyone. This project is more than just a construction, though; it acts as a connection to a world where everyone, regardless of their physical abilities, can be included. Congratulations to the museum.

#### **Kenneth Hawkins**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:39): Kenneth Francis Hawkins was a good man. He was a gentleman. That is why he stood out. He was sparing with his words, but what set him apart was that he found wisdom in every word that he spared. Ken was a devoted family man from the moment he met Jean Louisa May Gardiner. Sixty-five years ago Ken met Jean. They both lived in the small town of Penguin, on the north-west coast of Tasmania. Their families were neighbours – Ken lived over Jean's back fence. They would marry, have two sons, move to the mainland, start a lifelong successful business, Caravan Court, and see six grandchildren born. Ken was at peace when he passed, with Jean by his side holding his hand. Vale, Ken Hawkins.

#### **Benjamin Johnson**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:39): My grandfather Benjamin Arthur Johnson was born 100 years ago with dough under his fingernails. His grandfather Benjamin Easter was a longstanding councillor and mayor in Northcote. He launched BE Johnson bakery. He also developed property and ran a nationally successful cake manufacturing business. His sons, including my great-grandfather George, took up the family trade and started Golden Crust bakery. My grandfather, who was part of the business from the moment he could walk, went to school in Spring Road Primary in Malvern before boarding at Geelong College. He later ran Chris Cross, a landscape supply business. The other family trade he pursued was horse training, and he had success with a champion thoroughbred Vain. My grandfather has lived a century but is a gentleman of a different time. Happy birthday, Bim.

**Glen Waverley electorate health services**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (10:40): The Allan Labor government has committed to providing world-class health care to the communities in Melbourne's east, and I might need some of that soon myself. In the recent state budget we announced a major investment of just over half a billion dollars to significantly expand Monash Medical Centre in Clayton. Works will begin next year to create seven floors of world-class health facilities for our growing community above our existing emergency department. It will include brand new operating theatres, birthing suites and a state-of-the-art intensive care unit, paving the way for an extra 7500 procedures each year. The other big hospital upgrade on the way is the major ground-up redevelopment of the Maroondah Hospital in Ringwood, with detailed planning and design continuing on this project of up to \$1.05 billion. Whether it is the Monash Medical Centre upgrades in the south of my district or the Maroondah Hospital rebuild in the north, we are getting on and delivering world-class health care for the Glen Waverley district residents.

**Women's health**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (10:41): But that is not all. For far too long women's health has been seen as a niche issue. As a government we say it should not be this way, and there is a power of work underway with the landmark women's pain inquiry and our rollout of 20 women's health hubs and much, much more. That is why I am thrilled to be hosting a women's health forum and morning tea at Vermont South Neighbourhood House next Tuesday 21 May from 10 am till 11:30. We will be hearing directly from BreastScreen Victoria and also from a survivor of breast cancer about her lived experience. There will be plenty of resources and of course a light morning tea as well; RSVPs are essential. I look forward to it next week.

**Belmore School**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (10:42): Last week I attended Belmore School for their student leaders presentation assembly. Belmore School is a leader in specialist education in Victoria, helping students maximise their independence, competence and confidence across functional and behavioural aspects of day-to-day life. It was an honour to present students with their leadership positions for 2024. Congratulations to Livian and Erica on your roles as the new leaders of the learning team, Olivia and Ryan on your leadership of the wellbeing team and Mark and Mary as leaders of the health, safety and environment team. It speaks volumes of your contribution to Belmore that your peers have recognised you as their leaders for 2024. You should all be very proud of yourselves and excited for what is to come.

**Kew Croquet Club**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (10:42): It was fantastic to return to Kew Croquet Club on World Croquet Day to present prizes to tournament winners and have a social game of golf croquet. The Kew Croquet Club is the largest croquet club in Victoria, and the event was the first interclub croquet tournament at the club post COVID. Thanks to local and state funding, renovation of the lower court was recently completed, making this tournament possible. Congratulations to the Kew Croquet Club president Clare, club members and tournament participants. I know with your enthusiasm and expertise the club will go from strength to strength.

**Kew Football Club**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (10:43): On the weekend I joined Kew Football Club for their charity luncheon during the Danny Delbridge memorial round supporting Breast Cancer Network Australia. It was very moving to hear Maria speak about her own journey. Thank you for your courage and honesty. The Kew Bears are such a fantastic community-focused club, and it is only possible thanks to their amazing volunteers, including tireless president Michael Cochrane.

**Budget 2024–25**

**Paul MERCURIO** (Hastings) (10:43): I would like to thank the Treasurer for all the work he did on the budget and delivering it to us last week. We all acknowledge it is a tough budget but a fair budget and a budget that is needed at this time. I would also like to thank the Treasurer's staff and all the people that worked so hard on putting this budget together. It is a very complicated and complex job, and I thank all who worked on it.

**Mornington Peninsula bus services**

**Paul MERCURIO** (Hastings) (10:44): As I said, it was a tough budget, but I am very happy and excited to say there was definitely a small nugget of joy in there for my electorate. In the budget delivered last year my electorate received funding so that planning for a cross-peninsula bus service could be undertaken. That preliminary planning has been done, and as a result of that we received further funding in this budget that will go towards infrastructure for the cross-peninsula bus service. Later this year we will begin consultation with all of the stakeholders within the community to understand the community's needs regarding the bus service and to determine things like timetable frequency, stops and of course the route it will take. This is absolutely fantastic news for the community and brings us another step closer to getting the bus from Hastings to Mornington in 25 to 30 minutes instead of the 2½ hours it sometimes takes.

**Mother's Day**

**Paul MERCURIO** (Hastings) (10:44): On another matter, last weekend was Mother's Day, and I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate all of the mums in this place and the other place on being the amazing mums you are. And to my mum: I love you.

**Barwon Health North**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (10:45): Barwon Health North has been a game changer for the health and wellbeing of the local community in the northern suburbs of Geelong. Last week marked an important milestone in officially opening the new dental facilities. This was another step in the vision that the state Labor government has had for Barwon Health North since its opening in 2020. These facilities offer nine dental chairs to our community, and it is a great example of what can be achieved when government, the health sector and the community all come together to work towards a shared goal. I am proud to be a member of the Allan Labor government that supported this vital project with \$3.5 million in funding. I would also like to acknowledge the hard work of the Barwon Health Foundation and all the people who donated to the Project North appeal. This community appeal raised an incredible \$2 million for the project to ensure that it has all of the state-of-the-art equipment needed to truly make it a world-class dental service. Community feedback was taken into account for the design of this facility, and for this I acknowledge the members of the community advisory committee, Gayle Newbury, Christopher Hutchinson and Sandra Anderson. You should be very proud of what you have achieved. Thanks also to Frances Diver, CEO at Barwon Health, and Professor Michael Smith, director of dental services, and everyone who has worked on this project and all of the incredible healthcare workers who are now providing dental care at Barwon Health North. Barwon Health North is so valuable to the local community, and the dental care now on offer adds to the wide range of health supports, including urgent care, medical imaging and dialysis – all available in one easy to access location.

**Ripon electorate racing facilities**

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (10:46): Last week I joined the Minister for Racing to celebrate funding for local racing clubs across Ripon. We visited the Burrumbeet Park & Windermere Racing Club who have been running their annual Burrumbeet Cup on New Year's Day for more than 150 years. Three generations of committee members were in attendance, including hardworking club President Jonathon Charles, Manager Jeremy Rogers, thoroughbred trainers and stable staff. The club is full of incredible local volunteers and has just received \$48,000 from the state Labor government to

install new shade sails by the track so that racegoers do not melt in that summer heat. Club members told me it will make a huge difference, increasing race day numbers and boosting revenue. Congratulations to the club. These funds are well-deserved, and I cannot wait to see the shade sails in action on Cup Day.

The minister and I also visited the Ballarat Turf Club in Miners Rest along with the member for Wendouree to celebrate the completion of the new inside grass training track, thanks to \$1.3 million from our government. Congratulations to superstar CEO Belinda Glass and her team, including Bill Gribble, Nick Stubbs and Gabe Erbes who helped get the project done. It was much-needed, with 650 horses and up to 36 race days at the Ballarat Turf Club each year. I will always back them in and always support our racing industry across Ripon that contributes so much to our state's economy.

### **Eid and Nowruz**

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (10:48): It is always a pleasure to recognise the importance of Eid and Nowruz festivals that have recently been celebrated across my electorate of Narre Warren North and also the whole of the state of Victoria. Eid symbolises the end of Ramadan and Nowruz celebrates the new day and the arrival of spring, marking the beginnings of the new year for our diverse Afghanistan community. Recently I had the pleasure of celebrating Nowruz festival with the Bakhtar Community Organisation at their incredible event at the Hallam reserve in my electorate. The event was filled with music, dancing, food, art and fashion, and it was also joined by lots of community members, including the member for Narre Warren South. It was an amazing opportunity to showcase what our community has to offer, and I thank the Bakhtar Organisation for having me.

I also attended the Victorian Afghan Associations Network's Nowruz festival in Dandenong Park, which was equally as vibrant and joyful and had over 15,000 people in attendance. I want to express my appreciation to Bassir, to Miriam and to all the team at the Bakhtar Organisation and to Hafiz, Nizar and all the dedicated team at the VAAN organisation for putting on these incredible events. Their hard work brought together communities to celebrate in a meaningful way, and I thank them for all the hard work that they do. I also wish to extend my thanks to all their staff, to my staff member Moz and his wife Rukhsana who hosted my family and my office for an amazing Eid dinner at his house.

### **Regional Events Fund**

**Juliana ADDISON** (Wendouree) (10:49): It was terrific to be in Sovereign Hill yesterday with the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events Steve Dimopoulos and the member for Ripon to announce that the Regional Events Fund has now been extended to 2027. The Allan Labor government is making sure that more regional communities across Victoria can attract, stage and deliver sporting, cultural and entertainment events. Go regional Victoria.

### ***Statements on parliamentary committee reports***

#### **Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**

##### *Report on the 2021–22 and 2022–23 Financial and Performance Outcomes*

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (10:50): I am pleased to rise to say a few words about the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) report on the 2021–22 and 2022–23 financial and performance outcomes and express my joy at the upcoming budget estimates hearings, which begin on Thursday.

**Jess Wilson** interjected.

**Danny O'BRIEN**: Yes, it is joy, member for Kew, because this will be my 10th year of doing the budget estimates and there are so many things to do this next couple of weeks. Unfortunately we will not have the amount of time that I would like to really get into the details of this very bad budget.

But I want to talk about some of the things that we looked at in the outcomes inquiry, and indeed there have been issues raised in a number of the recent PAEC reports, both on estimates and outcomes, about the slow pace of recovery when it comes to natural disasters. My colleague the member for Gippsland East and I have been pursuing through the PAEC and Parliament processes some of the works that have taken a very, very long time when it comes to the bushfire recovery from the Black Summer bushfires. The headline article in that respect is the rebuild of the Thurra River bridge in Croajingolong National Park. It is an absolute disgrace that Parks Victoria, four years since the bushfires, has not completed that project. I believe that since the outcomes hearings in November, which are reflected in this report, finally reconstruction of the Thurra River bridge has begun. But there are a number of other things in the Gippsland East electorate that have not begun, including some of the works on the Yeerung River bridge at Cape Conran and the Mallacoota Inlet jetties upgrades that were promised.

It goes to an issue that I am very concerned about with the government. We saw last week in the budget decisions to delay projects. That is one thing. That is a government decision. That is a decision by the Treasury and the government of the day. What I am concerned about is the absolute lack of action that comes from many of our departments, whether it is Parks Victoria in this case or whether it is Parks Victoria in the case in my electorate of the rebuild of the Sealers Cove boardwalk between Tidal River and Sealers Cove, a very major tourism attraction in my region that was damaged in the 2021 storms. Reconstruction was meant to be starting this year, in 2024, and now it is heading towards 2025 and we are not going to see an outcome until then. Indeed I talked to a Parks employee a few weeks ago who indicated he would be surprised if even that is met. It just goes and goes.

The other one, that I mentioned recently in the media, is the Winnindoo fire station, a very simple small fire station. The government committed to it in the budget in November 2020, and yet here we are in 2024 and it is still not started and it is not going to be completed until next year. There is something seriously wrong within the bureaucracy, in my view, that these projects simply cannot get done. Whether that is by direction from a government that is very focused on major projects in the city and leaving country projects to languish, I do not know.

I also want to touch on the recovery in my electorate at Mirboo North. We have seen decisions by the government to establish a lead contractor there after the 13 February storms – some are calling it Boonado – that hit Mirboo North and damaged dozens of homes. I was very concerned to see when I drove around last week still multiple of these homes with tarps on the roof. Indeed there is a Facebook post this morning on the Mirboo North page of grass growing out of the sandbags holding down a tarp on someone's roof, highlighting how long this is taking to get this done. This is not an issue for government, I appreciate. I am very concerned that the insurance companies have been extremely slow to get action for Mirboo North. It is something I will be taking up with the Insurance Council of Australia. This is a really concerning issue.

**Juliana Addison:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance to committee reports.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Gippsland South to continue on the committee report.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Government members are trying to shut us down when talking about recovery from a storm disaster. Are you serious? Of all the things you want to pick up when I am talking about the storm disaster in Mirboo North – (*Time expired*)

### **Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**

#### *Appointment of the Parliamentary Budget Officer*

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (10:55): I rise to speak on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee *Appointment of the Parliamentary Budget Officer* report. I would like to thank the committee: the chair the member for Laverton; the deputy chair Nicholas McGowan, upper house member for North-Eastern Metropolitan; Michael Galea, upper house member for South-

Eastern Metropolitan; the member for Box Hill; the member for Point Cook; the member for Yan Yean; Bev McArthur, upper house member for Western Victoria; the member for Gippsland South; the member for Melbourne; and the member for Clarinda. I would also like to extend my wholehearted appreciation to the committee secretariat for their unwavering dedication throughout the entirety of the recruitment process.

Victoria holds the distinction of being the first Australian state or territory to establish a continuous Parliamentary Budget Office. Established in 2017 and operational from April 2018, the Parliamentary Budget Officer has provided credible and impartial policy costings and advisory services to members of Parliament across different political groups in the Parliament. Before the Parliamentary Budget Officer was set up, only government members could get advice on policy costings and financial matters from the public sector. Now all parliamentarians can ask for help from the Parliamentary Budget Office. The fact that the Parliament Budget Office serves members of Parliament across different political groups highlights its nonpartisan nature, and having an impartial source of analysis is crucial for ensuring fair and objective policy analysis.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer has played a pivotal role in crafting policies and helping with public conversations across the state, particularly concerning significant matters such as large-scale infrastructure builds, debt management and different policy ideas. In addition, it is also responsible for preparing election policy costings, pre-election reports and post-election reports. Making policy costings and reports available ensures transparency in the electoral process. It allows voters as well as other stakeholders, such as journalists and NGOs, to scrutinise the proposals put forward by political parties and to hold them accountable for their promises. These reports help us to see how much money political promises and plans will cost and where the money will be coming from.

I would probably need more than 5 minutes if I was to talk about all of the vital work the Parliamentary Budget Officer does daily. It goes without saying that the Parliamentary Budget Officer is very important to our democracy and the way the Parliament of Victoria works. As such, the recruitment process needs to be of the most rigorous and robust standards, as that is what we owe to the Victorian voters. The Parliamentary Budget Officer serves a five-year term. At this time I would like to thank the inaugural Parliamentary Budget Officer Mr Anthony Close. In his role Mr Close has demonstrated integrity, professionalism and dedication. He has worked tirelessly to build the infrastructure and processes necessary for the efficient operation of the office of the parliamentary budget and has set high standards of excellence every step of the way. Throughout his leadership he has fostered a culture of impartiality, earning the trust and respect of stakeholders and parliamentarians across the political spectrum.

The successor to Mr Close must have the same high level of judgement, including the ability to operate in a nonpartisan fashion in what can be a complex political arena. They must also possess the ability to lead, develop and inspire the staff of the Parliamentary Budget Office to attain the strategic objectives of the organisation. During the election period May 2022 to January 2023 there were 24 full-time equivalent staff, so a high level of leadership is required.

The priorities outlined in the Parliamentary Budget Office 2023–24 operational plan include engaging with new and returning members of Parliament, providing policy costings, advising on fiscal and economic matters and building relationships across parliamentary committees. The allocated budget for 2023–24 is \$3.4 million, and this money is well spent, ensuring voters can have adequate information and politicians can be held to account for their promises. What really impressed me in this report was the level that this committee went to in the recruitment process, because in a role like this a thorough candidate search is crucial for attracting top talent.

The committee agreed to the engagement of a recruitment consultant and the establishment of a selection panel to oversee and undertake the initial phases of the selection, the shortlisting process and participation in final selection recommendations. Thank you for the work of the panel members: Yves Giroux, Canadian Parliamentary Budget Officer; Bridget Noonan, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly;

David Martine, Secretary, Department of Treasury and Finance; and Jason Loos, deputy secretary and land coordinator general, Department of Premier and Cabinet. The selection panel was supported and advised by Jen D'Arcy-Smith of Watermark Search International and assisted by members of the committee secretariat. Watermark Search International and a recruitment consultant conducted research and talent mapping, uncovering nearly 130 candidates throughout Australia and New Zealand. After substantial work by all involved, on 18 August 2023 the committee sent a letter to the Treasurer, suggesting Xavier Rimmer be appointed. (*Time expired*)

### **Economy and Infrastructure Committee**

#### *Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users*

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (11:00): I rise to speak on the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users, and I acknowledge that you were the chair of the committee, Acting Speaker Marchant, and also the other members in the chamber who served alongside me on the committee over the past 12 months. The inquiry specifically focused on vulnerable road users, and those are the people who are least protected and most at risk on the road, such as pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists. In 2023 they made up nearly 36 per cent of all lives lost on Victorian roads, and in 2022 they made up almost half. Of course there are other vulnerable road users, such as older people, children and people with a disability, but specifically pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists are those that we see losing their lives on roads all too often.

The committee was asked to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the behaviour of road users and the impact of this on particularly vulnerable road users. Unsurprisingly, there were fewer vehicles on the road during the pandemic lockdowns and road fatalities did fall in 2020 and 2021. However, they did not fall as much as expected when compared to the drop in kilometres actually travelled. We saw, for example, in Victoria fuel sales fell by 26 per cent in 2020, but fatalities only fell by 12 per cent. And after restrictions lifted, we did see the number of lives lost on Victorian roads rise in 2022 and 2023. What the report found and what the inquiry found was that while there is a lack of published supporting data, anecdotal evidence does suggest that Victorian drivers behaviour worsened during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of increased aggression, impatience, risk-taking, inattention and rule-breaking.

We make a number of recommendations in this report, but we did identify six of the highest priority. These include: developing a road user hierarchy, creating a vulnerable road user advisory group to contribute to the development of road safety interventions, reviewing the flexibility of speed zoning guidelines, reviewing the location of pedestrian crossings on arterial roads to ensure there are regular crossings and prioritising road treatments in regional areas, in particular looking at regional road safety. If I talk to a specific number of findings, in particular finding 15 in the report, it says:

Restrictions in Victoria's Speed Zoning Technical Guidelines limit the designation of 40 km/h speed limit zones in certain areas as well as the timing of school speed zones, resulting in higher speed limits that place vulnerable road users at risk.

What we heard was that there are technical guidelines, particularly those enforced by VicRoads, that require a limited amount of designated road space to put in place 40-kilometre per hour zones – it is a minimum of 400 metres. This is an issue that has played out in my own electorate of Kew, where the North Balwyn village has been fighting for years to reduce the 60-kilometre speed limit through that shopping strip to a 40-kilometre speed limit, but time and time again the request by those local traders, those shoppers, the primary school around the corner and the parishioners at the Greek Orthodox Church to reduce that speed limit has been rejected because it does not meet the bureaucratic guidelines of VicRoads and, excuse the pun, they are hitting roadblock after roadblock. We should be doing everything we can to support our hardworking local traders and small businesses and helping to increase safety and foot traffic at that shopping strip.

Just two weeks ago in this place I tabled a petition signed by more than 440 local residents calling on the Allan government to reduce that speed limit. I thank the Minister for Roads and Road Safety for

her engagement on this issue. I provided her with letters of support from 21 local traders along the strip, Boroondara council, St Bede's Primary School and of course the local area commander Inspector Sandy McIver on behalf of Victoria Police, all calling for the reduction in that speed limit. I call on the minister to once again overcome the technical and bureaucratic roadblocks at VicRoads, including that arbitrary 400-metre minimum requirement for a 40-kilometre zone, and instead put safety first, support our small businesses and reduce the speed limit.

With the time remaining, can I just also call out recommendations around the importance of increasing pedestrian crossings right across Victoria, but particularly in certain locations in the electorate of Kew, and greater accessibility to public transport through assessable tram stops – another key recommendation from this inquiry.

### **Legal and Social Issues Committee**

#### *Register and Talk about It: Inquiry into Increasing the Number of Registered Organ and Tissue Donors*

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (11:05): It gives me great pleasure to rise today to speak to a committee report that was tabled by the Legislative Assembly's Legal and Social Issues Committee, and it is the *Register and Talk about It: Inquiry into Increasing the Number of Registered Organ and Tissue Donors* tabled in March of this year. I was a very happy contributor in fact to this committee as a member of it up until February of this year. As this is my first contribution on this particular report, I would do what is customary in acknowledging all my fellow committee members in producing this report: the chair the member for Lara; the deputy chair the member for Euroa; we also had the members for Geelong, Mornington, Eildon and Clarinda on this committee. It would be remiss of me to not give a very special shout-out to our very hardworking secretariat, and Jessica Strout led a terrific team including Katherine Murtagh and Raylene D'Cruz in helping the committee in putting this very, very comprehensive report together.

The report itself is quite comprehensive, and it is quite reflective of the number of submissions that were received by the committee as well as the number of hearings that were held. There really was wide engagement on this issue. You are probably asking, 'Well, what is the actual issue? What was the inquiry about?'

**Paul Edbrooke** interjected.

**Gary MAAS:** I am glad you ask, member for Frankston, because the issue is that, while people across the state are interested in organ donation after they pass, the numbers that we once had previously are now in decline. As I said, the evidence shows that there are some 81 per cent of people across the state who are willing to donate their organs, but when you look at the actual figure, that translates to a figure of 23 per cent of Victorians. That figure is quite low, and the trouble is that with our younger members of our population, when you look at the stats around that, the numbers are even lower. We are looking at figures of around about 10 per cent. Even though the engagement is high, the numbers are low, and when we look at some other states across the country and other jurisdictions across the world, they have still been able to hold high numbers. So the committee held an inquiry to really look at what some of the best ways are that we can form a good evidentiary base that potentially government could rely upon in creating good policy to get a good legislative outcome to hopefully make sure that these numbers are high again.

We did hear from very many different stakeholder groups. We heard from medical practitioners and transplant directors from the Austin and over at the Alfred. We had research teams from La Trobe University present to us. We also had some really moving and very touching lived experience from Zaidee's Rainbow Foundation, as well as hearing from very diverse and different multicultural and First Nations groups to this end. There are something like 41 different recommendations that the committee has made. It is a very comprehensive report, but as I said, this report will form a very good evidentiary base to create some really good policy and hopefully one day some legislative change.

**Economy and Infrastructure Committee***Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users*

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (11:10): I am pleased to rise today to talk on the Economy and Infrastructure Committee inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users. I was part of this committee, and it was a very, very good committee. Obviously the chair was the best chair of all the committees we have ever had, but I would like to thank my fellow committee members the members for Bellarine, Shepparton, Pascoe Vale, Glen Waverley and Tarneit and the member for Kew, and also the secretariat: Kerry, Marianna, Alyssa and Adeel.

It was quite interesting being on the committee, being this was my first time to have an opportunity, and I thought the committee got along very well, and we listened to a lot of submissions. There were over 300 submissions, from memory, and it was interesting when we were talking about the vulnerable road users. Obviously active transport plays a big part of that when we are talking about vulnerable road users, and what was interesting through the committee and all the discussions, especially coming from the people that ride bicycles, was probably one of their biggest concerns was the amount of distance we have between cars and bicycles when we are on the road, and scooter operators as well, which got me thinking. I thought, 'Well, I'm not much of a bike rider,' as you could probably tell, but I thought, 'I'll test out –

*Members interjecting.*

**Wayne FARNHAM:** No, I do not wear lycra. I thought, 'I'm not going to ride up Collins Street, but I'll grab one of those scooters that everyone talked about' – the e-scooters – and I decided to ride the e-scooter from the apartment into Parliament one day. I was going up Collins Street. To say the scooter struggled getting up Collins Street might be a bit of an understatement, but there is not a lot of distance between the bike lane and cars. If we are going to talk about these committees and then we have to look at the infrastructure that is there, maybe we have to go back and look at the infrastructure so they can have that distance that is actually legally required.

What I found in this committee, and one of the issues that is coming out of this committee, is the introduction of electric cars and e-scooters and the effect that has on walkers, because they cannot hear these vehicles or scooters coming. I think we were out in the member for Pascoe Vale's electorate. We had quite a few walking groups come in there, and they were talking about how accidents happen. They said they had done studies around the electric vehicles and the scooters, and it is quite dangerous, but one thing they did not study was – I did ask the question at that time – how many people had earphones in or headphones in. When we talk about vulnerable road users I think we need to talk about the education as well at the same time to educate people about certain risks if they are riding or walking along those lines. Everyone wanted separate lanes for everything. To be honest, we do not have enough space for separate lanes for bikes, separate lanes for walkers and separate lanes for cars. Looking at that, when we are going forward and looking at new subdivisions and everything else, you really must take this into account.

One thing that really struck me, and it is a challenge in regional Victoria, is when we are talking about how easy it is in the city because the suburbs are quite close and linked, but in regional Victoria, especially in my seat, we cannot put bike lanes around an electorate of 4500 square kilometres – it is near impossible. What we should be looking at, and what the government should be looking at investing in, is safety on the main arterial roads where the main traffic goes, especially for bike riders, because in regional Victoria our roads are full of potholes, our edges are rough and an accident can happen quite easily with active transport users in these areas. The government really needs to look at increasing the investment into regional roads to make it better for vulnerable road users and active road users, and I would suggest out of this report the government should take that on board.

**Legal and Social Issues Committee***Register and Talk about It: Inquiry into Increasing the Number of Registered Organ and Tissue Donors*

**Katie HALL** (Footscray) (11:15): I am pleased to make a contribution on this Legal and Social Issues Committee report and to talk about it and the register. I do not have the privilege of serving on that committee, but I would like to commend the work of the committee and, in particular, the chair the member for Lara, on their work on this important topic. Organ and tissue donation of course provide significant health and economic benefits to both individuals and the health system. Encouraging Victorians to register to become organ and tissue donors is key to increasing the likelihood that a donation will proceed.

Prior to my election to Parliament I worked for the Victorian organ donation service, DonateLife Victoria. I started working there at a time when we were really working to increase awareness but, most importantly, discussions with family members – to tell your family members about your decision and then to register. Few people pass away in circumstances that would make them eligible – viable – to be organ donors, so the pool of potential donors is very low. We need every single person who believes in and supports organ and tissue donation to have that important discussion with their families, because their families are ultimately the people who will be making that very challenging decision, often on the worst day of their lives. I would like to acknowledge the skill of the staff at DonateLife, in particular: the national medical director Dr Helen Opdam, who is a very accomplished intensivist from the Austin Hospital; Michelle Skinner, who is a wonderful bereavement counsellor at DonateLife; and Bernie Dwyer, who is a nurse who I understand is about to retire after a long career supporting families to make that decision when they are confronted with the loss of a loved one.

Victoria has a low percentage of its population registered on the Australian Organ Donor Register. The inquiry identified opportunities available to increase this. As preparation for the report, the committee considered a range of submissions from people with lived experience – of course transplant recipients and donor families. The committee's inquiry documented 74 findings and made 41 recommendations to the Victorian government, all of which have merit, but some stood out to me. Our organ donation rate in Victoria is consistently above the national average, something we should be proud of. Yet whilst 81 per cent of Victorians support donation, Victoria has the second-lowest rate of registration on the organ and tissue donation register, with only 23 per cent of Victorians being registered donors. With better awareness, of course, we can encourage young people and people from different cultural backgrounds, who may not have as much of an understanding of the life-saving benefits of organ and tissue donation, to have that important conversation and to sign up on the register. There was a particular focus on tailoring education and community awareness activities to build relationships with community leaders from diverse cultural communities and to have clinicians speak to them to navigate the topic, which is sometimes a very sensitive and challenging topic.

I would really like to congratulate the Khillan family. I attended with the Minister for Veterans a fundraiser on the weekend for Transplant Australia, where they raised over \$125,000. So congratulations to Aayushi Khillan.

**Committees****Economy and Infrastructure Committee***Reference*

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (11:20): I move:

That this house refers an inquiry into the extent to which surveillance data is being collected, shared, stored, disclosed, sold, disposed of and otherwise utilised in Victorian workplaces to the Economy and Infrastructure

Standing Committee for consideration and report no later than 31 March 2025 including, but not limited to, an examination of:

- (1) the effectiveness of current privacy and workplace laws when it comes to employee workplace surveillance;
- (2) the current practices of employers disclosing the use of workplace surveillance to employees and others;
- (3) the manner in which surveillance data is collected, shared, stored, disclosed and disposed of or sold, including but not limited to covert, overt, remote, digital and analogue methods;
- (4) the ownership of workplace surveillance data;
- (5) the protection of the privacy, autonomy and dignity of workers and other individuals, and the potential for privacy and data security risks to individuals, workers, businesses, communities and Victoria;
- (6) the personal impact of workplace surveillance on Victorian workers, such as on their physical and mental safety;
- (7) the impact of workplace surveillance on workplace relations and the balance of power between employers and workers;
- (8) the impact of workplace surveillance on the balance of power in the workplace and the effect on workers rights;
- (9) international or domestic examples of best practice workplace surveillance regulation and privacy protection;
- (10) the potential consequences of unregulated surveillance on workers and their families;
- (11) Australia's obligations under international law, including International Labour Organization conventions;
- (12) the interaction between state and Commonwealth laws, and the jurisdictional limits imposed on the Victorian Parliament; and
- (13) any other related matters.

**Motion agreed to.**

### ***Business of the house***

#### **Orders of the day**

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (11:20): I move:

That the consideration of government business, orders of the day 1 to 3 inclusive, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

### ***Bills***

#### **State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024**

##### ***Statement of compatibility***

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (11:22): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (**Charter**), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024.

In my opinion, the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024 (**Bill**), as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this Statement.

##### **Overview**

The Bill makes a number of amendments to the *Duties Act 2000*, the *Gambling Taxation Act 2023* (**Gambling Taxation Act**), *Land Tax Act 2005* (**Land Tax Act**), the *Payroll Tax Act 2007*, the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* (**TA Act**), the *Environment Protection Act 2017* (**Environment Protection Act**) and the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972*.

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

### **Human rights issues**

The rights under the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are the right to privacy and the presumption of innocence.

#### **Right to privacy: section 13**

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

#### *Social or emergency housing exemption: Land Tax Act*

Clause 12 of the Bill introduces sections 78B and 78C into the Land Tax Act which relevantly provide that in order to obtain a land tax exemption in relation to social or emergency housing, the owner of the land must apply to the Commissioner for the exemption and provide the Commissioner with any information the Commissioner requests for the purpose of enabling the Commissioner to determine whether the land is exempt.

To the extent that the collection of any personal information from a natural person in relation to these land tax exemption applications may result in interference with a natural person's privacy, any such interference will be lawful and not arbitrary as these provisions do not require that a person's personal information be published.

Further, these provisions only require the provision of information necessary to achieve the purpose of determining eligibility for the land tax exemption which is exclusively in the taxpayer's possession. Therefore, there are no other reasonable means available to achieve this purpose.

#### **Presumption of innocence: section 25(1)**

The right in section 25(1) is engaged where a statutory provision shifts the burden of proof onto an accused in a criminal proceeding, so that the accused is required to prove matters to establish, or raise evidence to suggest, that the accused person is not guilty of an offence.

#### *Gambling Taxation Act amendment and TA Act failure to exercise due diligence*

Clause 5 of the Bill inserts new section 14A into the Gambling Taxation Act which requires a casino operator to provide specified information requested by the Commissioner within a specified timeframe. Clause 23 of the Bill amends section 130B of the TA Act to specify that if a body corporate commits an offence against new section 14A of the Gambling Taxation Act, an officer of the body corporate also commits an offence against that provision if the officer failed to exercise due diligence to prevent the commission of the offence by the body corporate.

Although this provision requires a defendant to raise evidence of a matter to rely on a defence, it imposes an evidential, rather than legal burden.

Courts in other jurisdictions have generally taken the approach that an evidential onus on a defendant to raise a defence does not limit the presumption of innocence. The defences and excuses provided relate to matters within the knowledge of the defendant, which is appropriate in circumstances where placing the onus on the prosecution would involve the proof of a negative which would be very difficult. Therefore, this amendment is compatible with the right to the presumption of innocence protected by the Charter.

### **Conclusion**

For these reasons, in my opinion, the provisions of the Bill are compatible with the rights contained in sections 13 and 25(1) of the Charter.

**TIM PALLAS MP**  
**Treasurer**

### *Second reading*

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (11:22): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

**Incorporated speech as follows:**

It is with pleasure that I introduce this Bill to deliver a number of 2024–25 Budget initiatives. The Bill also amends several state taxation laws to support fair and effective revenue management for all Victorians.

The Bill contains amendments to the *Duties Act 2000*, the *Environment Protection Act 2017*, the *Gambling Taxation Act 2023*, the *Land Tax Act 2005*, the *Payroll Tax Act 2007*, the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, the *State Taxation Acts and Other Acts Amendment Act 2023*, the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* and the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972* to ensure their consistent operation.

**Budget measures**Land tax exemption for social and emergency housing

In line with the 2024–25 Budget announcement, the Bill amends the *Land Tax Act 2005* to introduce a social and emergency housing exemption. Existing land tax exemptions, such as those for public statutory authorities and charities, cover many types of social and emergency housing but not all situations are exempt. The new exemption covers social housing or emergency housing owned directly by an appropriate housing provider, as well as privately-owned housing where the owner has engaged a provider to manage the property. Vacant land declared for future use as social and emergency housing by a charity will also be exempt. The exemption reflects the diverse range of delivery models in use by the community housing sector and supports the reduction of costs for owners who use land for this purpose. The new exemption will commence on 1 January 2025 for the 2025 land tax year onwards.

Waste levy changes

In Victoria we send around 4.8 million tonnes of waste to landfill each year. This is a waste of precious resources, which could be avoided by reducing the amount of waste we generate and recycling more. To drive this change, and support Victoria's transition to circular economy, waste levies will be increased from 1 July 2025. The Bill amends the *Environment Protection Act 2017* to increase the metropolitan municipal and industrial waste levy from to \$169.79 per tonne from 1 July 2025. The amendment also proportionally increases the waste levy rates at rural landfills, which attract lower levies than metropolitan landfills, and increases the reportable priority waste levy for Category C and D wastes to \$169.79 per tonne from 1 July 2025. The rates for other categories of priority waste are unchanged to continue encouraging the safe disposal of hazardous waste materials. These changes harmonise Victoria's waste levy rates with the comparable rates in New South Wales and South Australia and will encourage investment in resource recovery infrastructure and disincentivise waste going to landfill. The revenue raised from the waste levy provides core funding for agencies including the Environment Protection Authority, Sustainability Victoria and Recycling Victoria. The remaining revenue is added to the Sustainability Fund to advance environmentally sustainable uses of resources, best practices in waste management, and community action or innovation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or address climate change in Victoria.

Conservation covenants

The Bill amends the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972* to establish a legislated trust to support the establishment of conservation covenants by Trust for Nature (the Trust) to protect and conserve privately owned land in metropolitan Melbourne. To support the Trust's work, the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972* is amended to establish the Vacant Land Conservation Covenants Account (the Account) under the Trust Fund. The Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) may authorise payments out of the Account to the Trust for reasonable costs and expenses incurred in relation to the entry of conservation covenants for land that is in metropolitan Melbourne, is vacant and unimproved (does not have a dwelling) and is within a zone other than a non-residential zone. DEECA's annual report prepared under Part 7 of the *Financial Management Act 1994* must include details about income and expenditure in relation to the Account along with the number of covenants entered into as a result of money paid out of the Account.

**Vacant residential land tax amendments**Expanding the holiday home exemption

As part of the 2024–25 Budget the Bill amends the *Land Tax Act 2005* to extend the holiday home exemption from vacant residential land tax (VRLT) to certain homes owned by companies or trustees of trusts. Last November the Government committed to extending the exemption to properties held in the name of a trust or company as of 28 November 2023. The current exemption only applies to holiday homes used and occupied by the person who owns the land, or the vested beneficiary of a trust to which the land is subject. The Bill broadens the exemption to allow shareholders of companies, certain beneficiaries of trusts and relatives of those shareholders and beneficiaries to satisfy the holiday home exemption requirements for a property owned by a company or trust. However, the exemption only applies if land has been continuously owned by the same

company or a trustee since 28 November 2023 without any change in beneficial ownership (other than any transfers between relatives). The expanded exemption will commence on 1 January 2025 for the 2025 land tax year onwards.

#### Exempting land contiguous to holiday homes in metropolitan Melbourne

From 1 January 2026, VRLT will apply to unimproved residential land in metropolitan Melbourne that remains undeveloped for 5 years or more, in line with changes to the *Land Tax Act 2005* made by the *State Taxation Acts and Other Acts Amendment Act 2023*. This change may lead to situations where residential land is used and occupied as a holiday home and therefore exempt from VRLT, but adjoining residential land on a separate title is not exempt because it has been unimproved for 5 years or more. This would result in inconsistent treatment of a holiday home and any land contiguous to the home that enhances its use and occupation. The *Land Tax 2005* is therefore amended to allow unimproved residential land contiguous to an exempt holiday home to also be exempt. The amendment commences on 1 January 2026 in line with the expansion of the VRLT to unimproved residential land in metropolitan Melbourne.

#### **Other amendments**

##### Metropolitan planning levy

The Bill amends the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* to provide additional circumstances where metropolitan planning levy (MPL) can be refunded and to extend the 90-day validity period of the MPL certificate. MPL is imposed as a requisite for making a leviable planning permit application for the development of land in metropolitan Melbourne where the estimated cost of the development exceeds a threshold amount. The Commissioner of State Revenue (Commissioner) issues a certificate on the full payment of the levy, which is valid for 90 days after issue. The limited 90-day validity period and inability to provide refunds impose administrative difficulties on planning permit applicants and the State Revenue Office. This includes the need for applicants to extend planning permit applications in many cases, and unfair outcomes where the levy cannot be refunded in unforeseen circumstances. To improve the fairness and effectiveness of MPL, the Bill extends the 90-day certificate validity period to 180 days, and allows refunds applications to be made either where an applicant died before the application was made and no other person is proceeding with the application, or the relevant planning scheme was amended before the application was made resulting in either the proposed leviable development no longer being permitted or no longer requiring a permit. The amendments commence on the day after Royal Assent.

##### Land tax deductions

The Bill amends the *Land Tax Act 2005* to provide a taxpayer, who is a member of only one joint ownership or a beneficiary of only one trust and who owns no other lands individually, is not to be assessed at the secondary level. Both joint owners of land, and land held on trust where a trustee of a fixed trust or unit trust has notified the Commissioner of the beneficial interests in the trusts, are assessed for land tax at two levels. Joint owners are first assessed together on their jointly owned land, and then individually on all taxable land they own, including their interest in any jointly owned land. For affected trusts, the trustee is first assessed on the trust land at the general land tax rates, and then the beneficiary is individually assessed on all taxable land they own, including their beneficial interest in the trust land. In each case, a deduction applies to the individual assessment to reflect the share of land tax that was already assessed to the joint ownership or trustee. The changes to land tax under the COVID Debt Repayment Plan from the 2024 to 2033 land tax years include a temporary fixed charge amount, which currently applies at both the primary and secondary levels. This means the deductions available to some joint owners or relevant beneficiaries may not fully offset the secondary liability as intended, resulting in exposure to double taxation. To remove this anomaly the *Land Tax Act 2005* is amended to provide that a taxpayer, who is a member of only one joint ownership or a beneficiary of only one trust and who owns no other lands individually is not to be assessed at the secondary level. This restores the position of the above taxpayers prior to the introduction of the surcharge. The amendment operates retrospectively from 1 January 2024 to ensure it applies for the full duration of the temporary surcharge under the COVID Debt Repayment Plan (2024 to 2033), and that affected taxpayers are not subject to a higher land tax liability than intended for the 2024 land tax year.

##### Insurance duty

As announced in the 2023–24 Budget and legislated in the *State Taxation Acts Amendment Act 2023*, duty on business insurance will be gradually abolished over a 10-year period starting from 1 July 2024. Business insurance is defined as general insurance relating to specified classes of business in the Prudential Standards issued by the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA). To respond to changes to the classes of business in new Prudential Standards issued by APRA after the introduction of the 2023 amendments, the Bill amends the *Duties Act 2000* to include Directors & Officers insurance and Cyber insurance as classes of business insurance for insurance duty purposes. This amendment is proposed to come into operation from 1 January 2025, to provide insurance providers with sufficient time to update their systems and processes.

In recognition that APRA may issue new or amended Prudential Standards in the future, the *Duties Act 2000* is also amended to give the Treasurer the power, by notice published in the Government Gazette, to include other APRA classes of business as business insurance under the *Duties Act 2000*, or to carve out one or more kinds of insurance under a class of business from the same definition.

It is my intention to exclude public liability cover attaching to householder insurance (which is otherwise part of the public and product liability class of business) to ensure such insurance is not included within the definition of business insurance, by making of a declaration to that effect after the Bill has passed. This declaration will be effective from 1 July 2024.

#### Casino tax records

The Bill amends the *Gambling Taxation Act 2023* to enable the Commissioner to compel a casino operator to produce a document or information on a prospective basis for periods of up to 6 months. The Victorian casino operator is required to lodge a return and pay casino taxes to the Commissioner each month. The Commissioner under section 73 of the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* (TAA) has an existing investigative power to require the production of information, documents or things in a person's custody or control by way of written notice (section 73 notice). However, the Commissioner cannot use a section 73 notice to require the production of records on a regular or ongoing basis, such as the daily records created by the casino operator. The *Gambling Taxation Act 2023* is thus amended to enable the Commissioner to require the casino operator to provide information, documents or things specified in a written notice that are or may come into the operator's possession for a prospective period not exceeding 6 months. In recognition of historical non-compliance by the casino operator in disclosing and reporting on its operations for tax purposes, as identified by the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licensee, the penalty for failure to comply is equivalent to the existing penalty for failure to comply with a section 73 notice under the TAA (500 penalty units in the case of a body corporate and 100 penalty units in any other case). The Bill also amends the TAA to provide for the criminal liability of officers of the casino operator who fail to exercise due diligence to prevent the commission of this offence. The amendment commences on the day after Royal Assent.

#### Growth areas infrastructure contribution

The Bill amends the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* in respect of the growth areas infrastructure contribution (GAIC) to ensure it interacts with section 35 of the *Subdivision Act 1988* as intended. The *State Taxation Acts Amendment Act 2023* closed a loophole that previously enabled developers to utilise subdivisions under section 35 of the *Subdivision Act 1988* (section 35 subdivisions) to excise land for public purposes at an early stage and prior to GAIC being triggered, thus avoiding realisation of a GAIC liability. However, the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* further provides that subdivisions do not trigger GAIC if they are carried out by a public authority or municipal council and no additional lots are created, which is applicable to section 35 subdivisions. This may provide an avenue for developers to minimise their GAIC liability in a similar manner. The amendment provides that a section 35 subdivision is only an excluded subdivision if it subdivides land owned by a public authority or municipal council, which aligns with the policy intent to enable these authorities to separate part of a parcel of land that is or has been acquired compulsorily or by agreement from the balance of a parcel. The amendment commences on the day after Royal Assent.

#### Payroll tax for high-fee non-government schools

The Bill amends the *Payroll Tax Act 2007* in respect of the payroll tax exemption applying to non-government schools. The *State Taxation Acts Amendment Act 2023* amends the *Payroll Tax Act 2007* from 1 July 2024 to limit the exemption to low-fee non-government schools declared by the Minister for Education with the consent of the Treasurer (declared schools). However, the *Payroll Tax Act 2007* has other exemptions that high-fee non-government schools (undeclared schools) or related entities providing educational services to them could potentially claim in some circumstances. These include exemptions for wages paid by religious institutions or non-profit organisations to employees engaged exclusively in charitable work, or wages paid to persons providing educational services in connection with the curriculum of a school (other than for profit or gain). Therefore the *Payroll Tax 2007* is amended from 1 July 2024 to provide that undeclared schools are not eligible for exemption as religious institutions, and separate entities providing educational services in connection with the curriculum of undeclared schools are not eligible for exemption as religious institutions, non-profit organisations or for educational services, in relation to services provided to undeclared schools. The amendment will reinforce the policy of limiting the exemption for undeclared schools so that their payroll tax treatment aligns with that of government school, without affecting the status of any declared schools from 1 July 2024.

I commend the bill to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (11:22): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (11:23): I move:

That the debate be adjourned until tomorrow.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (11:23): I am absolutely outraged that the Treasurer would walk into this chamber, introduce a bill that increases tax – two new taxes, I understand, there could be more; we have only just been handed the bill – and they have done it immediately. They have moved these taxes and proposed to guillotine the bill tomorrow. They have proposed to stop any debate by tomorrow. It is absolutely outrageous. We are outraged on behalf of Victorians. What we know already about this bill is that it will increase the waste levy by 30 per cent. On top of that, the government has not consulted with anybody. It has not consulted on new taxes that are being foisted upon Victorians, and these taxes will seriously hurt business.

The second measure, the fire services levy, is a combined take, I understand, of a billion dollars. This bill will hurt people, this bill will hurt businesses, and the Treasurer has just stood up and said he wants to ram it through this chamber. I am not surprised he wants to ram it through this chamber. Of course he does, because he does not want the community to know about it. He does not want the community to consider it, and he certainly does not want non-government members to shine the light that is deserved on this pernicious bill and what it does.

The other element this bill goes to I can only just speak briefly about because I have just been handed the bill. I have only just been handed the bill, but this is going to go straight to the heart of the non-government school tax that the government introduced last year – a tax on children. It is one of the most shameful things this government, in my view, has ever done – to introduce a tax on non-government schools and to tax children. Schools now are effectively paying the state to teach children. We know they are doing an incredible job, and because this government have run out of money they have introduced a tax which hurts schools and which hurts, absolutely, the hip pocket. We know the impact of those taxes not only on non-government schools but on religious schools. We know many religious schools provide services and education to kids who cannot afford them. I know that there are near my community many Jewish schools that provide services to people who cannot afford them, and this tax goes directly to how many children can be taught. This tax absolutely undermines the good work they do.

The coalition will not stand for a bill which partly closes what the government calls ‘loopholes’ around this new school tax. Who knows how many of the members on the other side of the place are even aware that that is what this bill does. This goes straight to the non-government school tax again. And the government and the Treasurer walk into this chamber and say, ‘We’re going to introduce a billion dollars of new taxes. We’re not going to show anyone the bill. We’re going to give you 24 hours effectively.’ We are going to have 24 hours. We can have a short time of debate tomorrow, because they have already confirmed there will be no debate on it today.

**Michael O’Brien** interjected.

**James NEWBURY**: A short debate tomorrow, member for Malvern, and they will ram this bill and ram these new taxes through. It is absolutely outrageous. And to think the bill also closes loopholes in relation to non-government schools is absolutely shameful. There is no wonder in my mind that the government want to ram this bill through this place; of course they do. But they need to be called out for it, and every single member that votes to allow this should be condemned for allowing the government to guillotine and ram through a bill so pernicious – but a bill that also introduces a billion dollars of new taxes. This is an outrageous proposition.

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (11:28): The government sought to move the second readings on the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024 and the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024 on budget day, and those opposite were more than happy to hear one but not the other.

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, we are debating the state tax bill.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**: We are actually debating a procedural motion on whether we adjourn said bill for tomorrow.

**Paul EDBROOKE**: Thank you for clarifying that to the member for Brighton, Deputy Speaker. This is a disservice to the Victorian community and this Parliament House and a political stunt by those opposite. The Manager of Opposition Business had said that people will be excluded from speaking on this bill, and that is false. The Leader of the House has made clear that this side of the house would love everybody to speak on or make a contribution on the budget, which is why we gave notice of the budget take-note in the first place. It is a procedural debate, and it is clear that what the opposition manager of business is not clear about is that the bill that he was speaking on was not the procedural debate we are speaking on now.

He did mention the fire services levy, and for those opposite, for those at home even, I would say that the fire services levy is being returned to the figure it was under those opposite. It is not a huge increase that is going to blow the bottom out of every household budget, and certainly it is at the figure that was introduced by those opposite.

I know that there are lots of people on this side of the house that would love to speak on the \$400 bonus, and we have already heard some factually incorrect hocus, factually incorrect statements made from those opposite, about what that actually is and that people do not get cash in their pockets. Well, you tell that to the person that now does not have to fork out for the camp or the uniforms or something for their kids.

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, we are debating a one-day adjournment of this state tax bill. That is what the current debate before the house is, and the member is not debating that matter.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**: The member had strayed from the procedural motion, and we would appreciate him coming back to it.

**Paul EDBROOKE**: I will reiterate that those opposite did have the choice. Life is full of choices, and they made their choice. We on this side of the house would like to speak about this tomorrow. It is a budget focused on fiscal discipline. It puts us on the right path going forward. And people on this side do want to speak on it and people in our community do want to hear about the facts. I think that those opposite again – it happens outside the chamber and also happens inside the chamber – exhibit mass hysteria, dramatics, acting, when maybe they should open the budget books some time and read the actual budget.

I do note one thing I would like to speak about when we are speaking on the bill, and that is the Frankston Hospital. Apparently there has been a \$1.1 billion blowout. How can there be a blowout when that project was increased in scope and had its budget increased in the last budget? You simply do not have blowouts that are indicated in the previous budget, and I for one would like to clarify that, because I know the people in my community know about that. But what has been spread out there recently does not reflect that. Certainly I think this is the sensible way to go. I know those opposite will always not deny an opportunity to waste time, as they are now. This is a time-wasting exercise. It is a stunt.

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the motion is a procedural motion in relation to the one-day adjournment, not a defence of 55 new taxes.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** There is no point of order.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** There is no point of order. I think what the member for Brighton is missing is that big thing of books he always brings up during question time. If you had that, you might have got that one right.

**Katie Hall** interjected.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** The Pensky file, thank you member for Footscray. With that I will make a brief closing remark, which is that it is this side of the house that has passed a budget that many people in this house would like to speak on. We are happy to do that. Everyone is invited to speak on the budget, but that will be tomorrow. I know that those opposite will divide on this, and that is fine – that is democracy – but I think we might win the day.

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (11:33): I rise to speak on behalf of my fabulous Nationals colleagues, because we know that it simply is not fair for the democratic processes that we should be adhering to in this place that you would adjourn a bill for one day when you have just tabled it in the Parliament now. We know, as we heard earlier today, that the most important thing that we are going to debate this week is the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024. There is only one day that we are able to debate that in this place, and that is tomorrow.

So what the government are actually saying by introducing this bill urgently, by saying we have to debate it tomorrow and it has to go to the guillotine at 5 o'clock tomorrow is, 'We don't want to talk about gender-responsive budgeting. We don't think that it is important enough to spend just one single day of debate on gender-responsive budgeting.' Now, that is absolutely hypocritical and not the rhetoric that we usually hear from the Allan Labor government. Usually we hear it is so important that we discuss and debate gender-responsive budgets. In fact it is something we see a whole book dedicated to – it is a very important part of the budget day – but now here we are, when it comes to actually talking about it in this place, of adding to debate, it is diluted down. It is diluted down so we have the ability to spend less time debating and talking about gender-responsive budgeting as opposed to actually putting a focus on that, and we had an opportunity to do so. Labor had an opportunity to have a day focused on that. They have scrapped that through trying to adjourn this debate on this bill to one day rather than the standard 14-day period that is the custom and practice in this place.

What we need to do as well is to have the opportunity. I am sure members of the Labor Party would love to go out to their electorates and explain why they are putting up taxes yet again and why we are going to see from Labor another example of driving up household bills. Part of this legislation is about pushing up the waste levy, making sure we are getting more money into the coffers to fill that budget black hole. There is also another massive increase in the fire services property levy. These are both taxes put on by Labor at a time when we know the former Premier promised no new taxes. Here we are with yet another taxation bill from a Labor government that only knows how to spend money and how to waste money. They certainly do not know how to manage money, they certainly do not know how to manage projects, and it is Victorians that are paying the price.

When we look at this bill, why should it be adjourned for one day? Only because Labor want to hide what they are doing, which is applying more and more taxes on Victorians. They are driving up household bills and they are putting more and more cost-of-living pressures on individuals in our communities, on families in our communities – the families who are struggling to make ends meet. The businesses who employ these people cannot make ends meet. They are looking to go interstate. Almost 8000 businesses from Victoria have moved interstate because they could not be supported by the Victorian government. They know that this is not a good place to do business, and do you know why? It is because of bills like this from the Labor government that just want to tax Victorians to the eyeballs to fill their budget black holes.

We have only just seen this bill, and I am very surprised that part of it is not an element around the mental health levy. That is the one thing the government likes to do when it comes to mental health –

continue the mental health tax on businesses. They are not pausing that. But what are we seeing with mental health reforms? All of those recommendations have been kicked into the long-distant future. They are putting a pause on rolling out those recommendations. When it comes to the tax they have an opportunity to put it on hold, to pause it. Does the government stop for a moment to pause the tax on Victorian businesses? Absolutely not. I encourage the government to take the opportunity to reconsider allowing just one day until we debate this bill and then have only a couple of hours on it tomorrow. They are giving stakeholders and Victorians no opportunity to provide any contribution or to see it and are diluting the time that we can allocate to gender-responsive budgeting.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (11:38): We are seeing a fair bit of confected outrage, as per usual. I should note that the government sought to move the second readings of the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024 and the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024 on budget day. Those opposite were more than happy to make one public but not the other. That was a disservice to the Victorian people, and it was a political stunt.

**Emma Kealy**: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member appears to be reading. I ask her to table the document that she is reading from.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**: Is the member reading her speech or referring to notes?

**Nina TAYLOR**: Referring to notes.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**: The member is referring to notes.

**Nina TAYLOR**: I think I am well renowned for speaking to the chamber, as I always do. Thank you for welcoming me to speak more and even more freely than I do already. Thank you so much to the member for Lowan; I am truly touched. Obviously she really wants me to speak voluminously and expressively and vocally to everyone, so I shall continue to do that. Thank you so much for bringing that forward. That was very generous of you. I am truly touched.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**: Through the Chair.

**Nina TAYLOR**: Sorry. I am simply responding to the generous invitation from the chamber to speak in a more profound and more extensive way to the chamber. That is absolutely an honour.

**Cindy McLeish**: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member knows full well that she is defying your previous ruling and that she is not anywhere near the motion.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**: The member had strayed somewhat from the procedural motion. I ask her to come back to it and continue.

**Nina TAYLOR**: Yes, thank you. I take your very considered comments there, Deputy Speaker, duly with the utmost respect that they deserve. I think it will be recorded that I am speaking vocally and broadly to the chamber. I hope that this is being noted by those opposite, although at times I do like to refer to specific elements of bills or otherwise so that we are accurate in the chamber and not necessarily just speaking on flight of fancy or other thoughts as well, so referring to legislation can be very helpful.

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, while the member is on a flight of fancy, I would draw you to the fact that you have ruled that the member should get back to the motion, and I am not sure when we will start to hear her contribution on the motion.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**: The question in front of the house is the procedural motion on the adjournment of the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024 for tomorrow. I would appreciate it if the member for Albert Park would continue on that debate.

**Nina TAYLOR**: I welcome it, absolutely. It is absolutely fantastic to have this opportunity to speak on this procedural motion. I do note that the member of the opposition has said that people will be

excluded from speaking on the budget, and I would like to put it on notice that this is absolutely untrue. We have made it clear on this side of the house –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, there will be an opportunity tomorrow to debate what the government has introduced by way of a motion explicitly, but that is not what this motion is about, and I would ask you to draw the member back to this motion.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I do not uphold that point of order. The member was actually responding to debate previously. There has been a bit of latitude. The member was actually coming back to it.

**Nina TAYLOR:** This side of the house welcomes every member in this place to make a contribution on the budget, which is why we have given notice of the budget take-note in the first place. That is why we gave notice of the take-note.

**A member** interjected.

**Nina TAYLOR:** I hope those opposite heard what I said. I could not hear it above the comment that was coming back to me, but I think I heard what I said, and that was that we have given notice of the take-note opportunity, so I would very much offer to the opposition to take the opportunity to speak to the budget on the take-note as well.

Accordingly, coming back to the fact that this is a procedural motion, we have very much hard work to attend to today. The government business program has been very clear, and I hope that all those in the chamber will take their appropriate opportunity to speak to the relevant legislation.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, with 30 seconds to go I do hope the member gets to the state tax bill and the adjournment of one day, which is what this motion is about.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Is the member for Albert Park continuing, or has she concluded?

**Nina TAYLOR:** I have 10 seconds.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** On the procedural motion, then, please.

**Nina TAYLOR:** Thank you so much. Accordingly, we propose that – oh dear. *(Time expired)*

**Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (11:43):** I assure the house that I will be speaking on the procedural motion, and as I have listened to this debate what has been very clear is that those on the government side do not understand what a procedural motion is. They do not understand what it is and in fact what bill it is that we are even talking about. This is about the adjournment by 24 hours of the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024 – by 24 hours. When a bill comes into this house, normally when it is adjourned off it is adjourned off for 14 days. There is a bit of a bunfight if it is for 13 days, but the reason it is 14 days, other than custom and protocol, is it means that we can have time to consider the bill very carefully and consult widely. I know that with this bill, the State Taxation Amendment Bill, that has not even happened on the government side. We have now been given this bill hot off the press – it is still quite warm – that they have not got a clue about, and we need to get our heads around it too before it is debated. Having one day, having 24 hours, in which we are expected to analyse and understand what is happening and to get a bill briefing at the last minute is just not good enough.

It is not fair on the opposition. It is certainly not fair on the people of Victoria, because this is about multiple taxes. It is a state taxation amendment bill, and for the government to understand, this is about fiddling with the taxes. Taxes are complex as it is. You cannot just look at one thing and think this is exactly what it means; you have actually got to analyse and look for –

**Paul Edbrooke:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, please bring the member back to the procedural motion.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** There is no point of order actually.

**Cindy McLEISH:** I began my contribution by talking about the lack of understanding by government members of what a procedural debate is. Perhaps they do need some greater guidance and some training from the clerks about what a procedural debate does entail.

We have one day now, from the introduction of this bill 20 minutes ago, in which to have a look at it and understand the complexities so as to debate it tomorrow. For the Shadow Treasurer, as the lead speaker, that gives him very little time. He has certainly got to do his budget reply today, but then he has to go out and talk to all of the bodies that need to be consulted with. As I am looking here, it affects the Duties Act 2000, the Gambling Taxation Act 2023 and the Land Tax Act 2005 – there are a lot of stakeholders that need to be engaged with. The waste levy is being increased by 30 per cent. There will be lots of stakeholders that need to be consulted about this, and I would imagine the backbenchers would be doing their own stakeholder consultations. They should not just rely on the briefing notes that are being handed to them by the department that say, ‘Say this, say that,’ and believe that what it is about without going out to speak to the real world. They too need time to go and do their own local consultation.

On the waste levy, there would be lots of municipal councils that are really hot under the collar about this 30 per cent increase. There is an alteration to the fire services levy, I believe, and that also needs to be examined in some detail. A couple of taxes could net a billion dollars. These are things that take time for us to go out and consult about. And when you consult with third-party stakeholders they will say, ‘I need a bit of time to digest this. I need a bit of time to understand that.’ On something as complex as taxes, they probably need an extra little bit of time as well.

We have got the schools tax, where they are tightening the grip further. We would like to hear from the schools about how that is going to impact them. They will need time to consider it. I think this is what the government backbenchers do not understand – that when a bill is brought to the house, firstly, people need to understand what that bill is and then why we are debating this, and one day is just not acceptable. The norm, the custom, is 14 days, and that allows everybody to do the relevant consultation. The government knows that it is going to introduce new taxes. It is something that is in their DNA – they consistently hike up taxes. They knew it, and they had time to get this organised so that they would not be bringing it in 5 minutes before it is due to be debated. That is just a failure on all levels.

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (51):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D’Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (30):* Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Sam Hibbins, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O’Brien, Michael O’Brien, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until tomorrow.**

**Appropriation (2024–2025) Bill 2024****Appropriation (Parliament 2024–2025) Bill 2024***Second reading***Debate resumed on motions of Tim Pallas and Mary-Anne Thomas:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (11:54): After a decade of Labor budgets, what does Victoria have to show for it? A decade of Labor debt, a decade of Labor deception, a decade of Labor deflection. Victorians are now paying dearly for Labor's debt-fuelled ego spending – \$188 billion in debt by 2028, with more to come, and the payments have only just begun. Victorians have been forced to pay an extra \$305 million for the suburban roads upgrade due to blowouts and mismanagement. Victorians have been forced to pay an extra \$427 million for the Victorian Heart Hospital due to blowouts and mismanagement. Victorians have been forced to pay an extra \$558 million for the Frankston Hospital due to blowouts and mismanagement. Victorians have been forced to pay an extra \$3.3 billion for level crossing removals due to blowouts and mismanagement. Victorians have been forced to pay an extra \$4 billion for the Metro Tunnel due to blowouts and mismanagement. Victorians have been forced to pay an extra \$4.7 billion for the West Gate Tunnel due to blowouts and mismanagement. Victorians have been forced to pay an extra \$21.2 billion for the North East Link. Why? Due to blowouts and mismanagement. So after a decade of Labor, with over \$40 billion in blowouts and all this mismanagement, when this government provides a costing for anything, why bother believing it? A decade of Labor shows us that Labor budget figures simply cannot be trusted.

As if that list of record-breaking blowouts was not enough, another example, proving why Labor budget figures cannot be trusted, is the Commonwealth Games debacle. Labor said it would cost \$2.6 billion, a figure which never really made much sense. Labor then cancelled it because it would allegedly cost up to \$7 billion. In fact the Premier herself managed to say something quite extraordinary on ABC radio when she seemed to see 'not a lot of difference' between \$6 billion and \$7 billion. A billion dollars is not a lot of difference for the Premier. No wonder the books are in such a mess.

Then again, why am I surprised? These are the same people that have repeatedly said 'things cost what they cost'. Well, no, no, they do not – or at least they should not. But it does beg the question: with that attitude, why does Labor even bother getting a quote in the first place? See, this is where the Labor government spin falls apart. After a decade of Labor, their spin cycle occasionally goes in reverse. Riddle me this: how can a government proudly boast that things 'cost what they cost', then cancel something when they get their numbers wrong, unless they did not get their numbers wrong and it was always just going to be the con games, played by Labor going into an election. Clearly Labor conned a lot of people, and all for the low price of \$589 million. How many votes did that buy? After all, it is only Victorian taxpayers money – an absolute and utter disgrace.

Labor have not shown public money any respect in a decade so, frankly, why would they start now? When the Commonwealth Games debacle occurred, it highlighted a common theme for this Labor government: whatever they announce has hidden hooks just lurking beneath the surface. There is always a catch: public servants get a pay rise while many other public servant jobs are on the chopping block; energy bill relief while energy prices go up, up, up; the Suburban Rail Loop while growth suburbs are being crushed by the pressure of population increases without proper infrastructure; the biggest hospital project in Australian history while the government knew for at least three years that there would be a big problem with electromagnetic interference; and a 70 per cent cut to cancer research funding at the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre alliance while the government's favourite Geelong Stadium gets a new scoreboard.

In Melbourne's north there is a bizarre situation where the headline and the outcome for the community just simply do not add up. The Wallan diamond, which includes southern-facing ramps

onto the Hume, has been promised by federal and state Labor at many elections. In 2019 the federal coalition government tipped in \$50 million, and at the 2022 election then Minister Allan took the journey to Wallan to announce \$130 million for the Wallan diamond. It was later revealed, after the election, deep in a Major Road Projects Victoria document, that then Minister Allan's commitment was actually inclusive of the federal coalition's \$50 million commitment. So in fact it was only an \$80 million commitment. Planning and a business case were promised to be completed by early 2024, and we are still waiting on that. You would think there would be 80 million bucks in this year's budget, but no, there is not. One of the fastest-growing suburbs in Melbourne let down again by another Labor broken promise.

In Narracan, there is the West Gippsland Hospital, which Labor committed to delivering. We saw last year funding delivered for planning with a promise for construction to start in 2024 in line with the former Premier's announcement. Now we see no new funding in this year's budget, meaning the community have been left in the dark about when this critical project will actually start. Labor are so hell-bent on channelling money into Suburban Rail Loop, into blowouts, that they have simply forgotten this project – community be damned. After a decade of Labor there are so many more examples like these, and as anyone can see, it really does not take much to discover the hidden hooks beneath the surface of Labor's headlines.

Labor had the title 'Helping families' on this year's budget. So let us look for the barely hidden hooks underneath this very headline. Helping families? How is it helpful to cut wellbeing support for schoolkids by \$34 million? How is it helpful to cut early childhood sector supports and regulations by \$79 million? How is it helpful to cut child protection by \$141 million? Is that Labor's vision or version of helping? Victorians have no interest in seeing their version of hurting. This, coming from a government that is spending \$5.1 billion annually on programs and support in their entire family, fairness and housing portfolio whilst at the same time spending \$9.4 billion annually to service the debt that Labor has ratcheted up over the last 10 years.

Another headline that they seem rather proud of is on delaying the train line to Melbourne's airport. The obviously rehearsed media stunt suggesting Avalon could get funding over the airport rail is such a dishonest distraction. Set aside the fact that in 2023 Avalon served around 900,000 passengers while at the same time Melbourne Airport served over 30 million passengers – there is more to this headline. Notice how last election they were branding it the SRL Airport; that branding has been quietly dropped. Now it is the airport rail link. I guess they could not accept they are delaying and potentially threatening to cancel part of the SRL, so they renamed it. Call me cynical, but I do feel this fight is less about the best outcome for everyone and more about Labor not having money to spend. And none of this needed to happen if Labor had managed money properly.

To really drive the point home, here is a simple one: the headline – the government promised 80,000 homes a year; the reality – 51,000 homes were built last year, mainly by the private sector. That pesky little fact does not stop Labor claiming them. That attitude of hook-ridden headlines proves that regardless of how Labor spin it their 10th budget is a mess, and Victorians are now well and truly paying the price.

Victorians were already paying the highest taxes in the country, and now Labor have made that even worse. Every single Victorian – every man, every woman, every child – has a yearly Victorian Labor tax bill of \$5834 floating over their head. What planet is this government on when it thinks that kind of increase is okay? Labor is even doing the old double dip this year, because Victoria is getting more in GST but this government is still raising taxes on that. Real cost-of-living relief comes from lowering taxes, something that this government just simply does not get.

There is no avoiding the simple fact: Labor's record debt is too high. Ten years ago under the Treasury leadership of the member for Malvern Victoria's debt was \$21.8 billion. After 10 years of Labor and 10 Labor budgets, Labor's debt is now \$188 billion, and that figure does not even include the true and total cost of Labor's Suburban Rail Loop. After a decade of Labor there is no plan – there is no plan

to deal with all this debt. Labor will claim that they have a plan to pay off their dishonestly labelled COVID debt, but even being generous, that plan is only dealing with about 17 per cent of the total debt.

Imagine if someone boasted about only planning to pay off 17 per cent of their mortgage, with no plan to pay off the rest. They would lose their house pretty darn quickly. They are not being honest with themselves, and after a decade Labor are simply not being honest with the Victorian people. In November 2023 the Auditor-General said:

The government have not laid out a plan for when and how the state will pay down existing and future debt.

Well, guess what, Labor still have not shown any real plan. As if nearly \$200 billion in debt, with no plan to deal with it, is not enough of a concern, a lot of that money was financed at a time when interest rates were near zero. Now the cash rate sits at 4.35 per cent. How much more is that refinancing going to cost every Victorian?

We are also hearing from the global rating agencies S&P and Moody's that Victoria's credit rating is up for review and could be downgraded further. When the state's credit rating fell from AAA to AA Victoria became the worst-rated state in the country. That costs Victorians millions more in repayments each year, and if it drops again, it will just keep adding more and more and more to Labor's record debt. You see, record high debt means record high repayments, which to this government means record high taxes on each and every Victorian.

This budget is just Labor pretending to look like they are cleaning up their own mess. None of what they have announced makes any structural change to the fiscal equation; it just kicks Labor's debt can down Labor's pothole-riddled road. By 2027–28, \$40 billion per year will be spent on public service wages alone. And, you guessed it, the increase is largely due to more senior executives and less frontline workers, meaning declining services despite a higher public sector wage bill. That is setting aside Labor's creeping politicisation of the public service, which is being eroded by a culture of fear and secrecy, as boldly identified by Victoria's former Ombudsman.

This budget is more of the same recklessness and irresponsible spending we have seen from a tired and arrogant government more focused on serving itself than the people of Victoria. That is why Victorians are paying more in taxes than any other state. Put simply, Labor just does not care. They do not care that it is more expensive to power your home, with the average price of electricity up by 33 per cent since Labor took office 10 years ago; they care about a loop. They do not care that it is more expensive to keep warm in winter, with the average price of gas going up by 90 per cent since Labor took office; they care more about a loop. They do not care if it is more expensive for car registration, with light vehicle rego increasing over 250 per cent since Labor took office; they care about a loop. These are the things a state government should care about, not just a loop. Instead the government have added to record debt and only care about their loop. Generations of Victorians, some not yet born, will be forced to pay more for what, a loop? That is not vision, that is vanity – vanity that will conscript Victorians into generational debt. Victorians are not being looked after the way that they should be because Labor wants a legacy. But make no mistake, Labor's legacy will be debt.

In the lead-up to this budget we had been hearing about tough decisions being made. Everyone knew that that meant cuts – \$5 billion in cuts in fact. Ambulance services and medical research funding, Labor says cut it. Community crime prevention and seniors programs, Labor says cut it. Family violence and mental health support, Labor says cut it. These are not tough decisions, these are cowardly decisions. It is very simple: these decisions did not need to be made. If money was not being wasted, programs like these would not have to be cut.

The Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre Alliance getting their funding cut makes no sense whatsoever. Meanwhile the state government spends more on SEC-branded clothing. They are spending money on costumes before cancer prevention. Why are they doing that? It is just simply wrong. Cuts to family violence support and mental health support in particular should deeply concern

each and every Victorian. Other cuts include: road maintenance funding – cut; housing assistance funding – cut; disability services funding – cut; tourism and major events funding – cut; creative industries funding – cut; youth justice funding – cut; dental services – cut; aged and home care services – cut; access to public IVF – cut; and Labor’s much-heralded sick pay guarantee – cut. The list goes on and on and on.

Then you have got the abandoning of surgery targets, the abandoning of hospital builds, the promise of neighbourhood batteries but not actually delivery of them, the overpromising yet underdelivering of trainee nurses and ripping \$2.4 billion away from the TAC. In addition, they are leaving the following programs unfunded: protecting children’s safety and wellbeing – unfunded; child safety reforms implementation – unfunded; mental health support for emergency services workers – unfunded; wildlife care and protection – unfunded; and the court case management system – unfunded. Despite the alleged tears from Labor members after they were told all this and more, tough decisions do not look like this. A tough decision for this government would be to put people ahead of spin, to value humans over hubris, to tend to the future and not to tax it. Instead we are left with a list of unfunded and cut programs. Labor waste, Labor tax, Labor cut, and Victorians pay the price.

That brings us to debt. S&P director and lead analyst Martin Foo warned the government to rein in their ‘infrastructure binge’. Notice how the advice was not to cut any of those programs but just to rein in the infrastructure binge. After a decade of Labor, debt in Victoria remains more than that of New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined. It is time to back off the bingeing, because Victorians simply cannot afford it.

To really put in perspective how monumental the debt that Labor has created is, here is something truly absurd. You see, if Labor had not created so much debt via their irresponsible spending, they could have scrapped stamp duty entirely. Instead they need that \$9 billion a year just to pay back the interest payments on their debt – not to build anything or fund anything, just to repay interest that is now almost \$26 million a day. Let me repeat that: if Labor did not waste so much money, they could scrap stamp duty entirely. Can you imagine what that would do for housing affordability? Imagine scrapping it just for first home buyers and downsizers. But thanks to Labor and their near \$200 billion debt, it cannot be scrapped. They cannot even consider scrapping it. But it could have been a real conversation if they had managed money better.

This Labor government is so desperate for cash after wasting so much money, and that is why the cost-of-living pain is so much worse for Victorians than in fact it should be. In one year the average electricity bill has gone up by 24 per cent. In one year the average gas bill has gone up by 35 per cent. In one year the average rent bill has gone up by almost 17 per cent. People are paying 9 per cent more for a Myki than they should be. If I listed every cost-of-living increase Victorians face thanks to Labor government decisions, I would simply run out of time.

Victorians know that the cost of living is worse after 10 years of Labor. But it is not just the cost of living that Labor is hurting; it is also Victorians’ quality of living. You see, every playground in Victoria should be having its soil tested for asbestos contamination at the moment, but the government is dragging its feet and avoiding doing so, potentially leaving kids at risk. Why? Because Labor waste money. The Alfred hospital is severely run-down, with patients even seeing rats running around. The government is doing little about that. Why? Because Labor waste money. Victorian roads are in an absolute mess, particularly country roads where you could practically fit a small market garden in some potholes. In fact 91 per cent of Victorian roads are rated poor or very poor, yet Labor has no credible plan to fix this. Why? Because Labor waste money.

The surging crime rates, schools in desperate need of repair, a lack of public transport services particularly in growing areas like Clyde or Wyndham, ambulance ramping and code oranges, surgery waitlists, a jammed-up court system – and the list goes on – are the consequence of Labor’s decade of debt. It is not just about the big numbers in red ink on a page; it is the quality of life of every Victorian that is being hurt, that is being punished. When hospitals are not funded properly, fewer people get the

care they deserve. When schools are not funded properly, kids do not get the quality of education that they deserve. When roads are not funded properly, people do not get the safe drive home to their families that they deserve. When public transport is not funded properly, people do not get the reliable system that they deserve. Victorians deserve all these things, but while Labor is in charge Victorians do not get what they deserve. Quality of life is going backwards in Victoria, and it does not have to be like this.

Imagine a world where Labor did not destroy the budget. What would that actually look like? What would \$9 billion a year in spending look like if it was not going to pay off Labor's debt? Let us make it a more manageable figure. Let us talk about Labor's daily interest bill of \$25.6 million. In one day you could pay for 128 ambulances. In one day you could pay for two breast cancer centres. In one day you could pay for 2715 elective surgeries. In one day you could pay the yearly salary of 315 nurses or pay for 510 Victoria Police recruits or 305 paramedics or 488 Parks Victoria rangers, but Victorians get none of that thanks to this Labor government and their debt. Instead of paying for such things every day, that money just vanishes every day to pay off Labor's interest bill.

It is now clear why Labor ministers have haunted looks on their faces. Labor ministers are haunted by the ghosts of budgets past, present and future. So here is an idea. How about, instead of cutting funding to mental health, this government hold off building a bronze statue of their former leader. I am certain that the pigeons really, truly would not mind. Of course Labor probably will not hold off doing that – no they will not. Why? Because this government is so out of touch that they probably think the price of a pie and a can of Coke at the footy is a good deal.

Here is another idea – pause the Suburban Rail Loop. It is going to cost too much, and it is going to take too long. Victorians know it and so does every member of this government. So many people are doing it tough right now, so pouring billions into a project like that during times like these makes absolutely no sense. Pause it, prioritise people and improve quality of living instead of just infrastructure. If Labor do not start to improve quality of living, it is only going to get further and further out of reach.

Although maybe, just maybe, the Labor government is listening to our advice. You see, the costings for the Suburban Rail Loop are still labelled 'TBC'. When Labor say 'TBC', do they actually mean 'to be confirmed' or maybe it actually stands for 'to be canned'. One can only hope, and I suspect this government's federal colleagues wholeheartedly agree. Even if the government are not listening to our advice, I wonder if they will listen to the advice of their federal colleagues. The Labor federal government seems to understand the importance of gas, even though the Labor state government does not. The Minister for Resources Madeleine King said:

Gas plays a crucial role in supporting our economy ...

She went on to say:

Ensuring Australia continues to have adequate access to reasonably priced gas will be key to delivering an 82 per cent renewable energy grid by 2030 ...

Reasonably priced gas – I wonder who has been calling for that in Victoria. You see, federal Minister King went on to say:

... it is clear we will need continued exploration, investment and development in the sector ...

I certainly hope the Victorian Labor MPs are listening to their federal colleagues. This contradiction between state and federal Labor highlights just how broken things are in Victoria. There is a simple solution to slightly easing the cost of living for Victorians. The federal government can see it, but the state government here ignores it. Every member of this Labor government simply ignores it – instead, the state government just simply increases taxes on Victorians at a time when they can least afford it.

Victorians have now been hit with 55 new or increased taxes thanks to this Labor government. That is quite the increase, considering that on the eve of the 2014 election the then Leader of the Opposition

Daniel Andrews promised that there would be no new taxes or increased taxes on coming to power. Labor's budget last Tuesday saw an increase to two taxes: the fire service levy and the waste levy. If you go to the tip, you will pay more to get rid of your rubbish. The other increase pushes up council rates, which will add to the cost pressures on families. But Labor, they are not done with taxes – there are more coming. There is the holiday and tourism tax, which would make taking a holiday in Victoria more expensive, and that is imminent. What sort of government would tax a Victorian family for wanting to take a holiday? Then there is Labor's new home ownership tax, a new building levy across all postcodes, meaning that building any residential property will become more expensive. This is on top of Labor's more than 30 new increased property taxes in the last 10 years – and they wonder why we are in the middle of a housing availability and affordability crisis. Well, if you tax something, it becomes more expensive – it is as simple as that.

When MPs go out and talk to people they get an idea of what is really going on. If members opposite have actually been outside since the budget was released, they will also have heard the truth that so many Victorians are worse off because of this budget and this government. There is not a corner of the community that is not hurt by Labor's decisions, but Labor simply do not care. This Labor government prioritises nothing but itself. That is what this budget is and that is what this budget shows – dodgy decisions made not for the betterment of Victorians but purely to serve Labor, with the Victorian people paying for that privilege. A budget shows a government's priorities, and Labor's priorities are quite simply all wrong.

Victorians do occasionally ask me, 'What would you do?' Firstly, we would grow Victoria's economy by incentivising investment and providing policy certainty rather than forcing businesses to simply pack up shop. For example, we would support Victoria's incredible defence industry to pitch for the opportunity that AUKUS presents. Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland and New South Wales are welcoming the opportunity of AUKUS to get their manufacturers, service industry and cyber and security industry into the global supply chain of the United States and of the United Kingdom. It begs the question then, doesn't it: why hasn't Victoria done the same? Instead, Labor have raised the white flag of surrender, leaving Victorian industry without the government support they need to take Victorian-made products and services to the world. We already have a recipe for success in contributing to the defence industry in this state. Take, for example, Marand in Moorabbin. They are part of the global supply chain for the Lockheed Martin F-35 joint strike fighter. From their Moorabbin facility they produce vertical tail fins for the F-35. These tail fins are assembled in Moorabbin, put on the back of a truck, driven down Nepean Highway and shipped out of Tullamarine airport for the F-35 global assembly line.

We have done it before, so let us do it again. To those businesses and to those investors who are considering leaving Victoria because of the pressure of Labor's taxes, I say to them: please, please stick with us. Labor will not always be in charge; it will not always be like this. The next election in Victoria is 2½ years away and change is coming. Lower, fairer, simpler taxes are coming. A government that enables businesses to thrive is on its way, a government that will roll out more red carpet and less red tape to investors.

To those people considering leaving Victoria because of the quality of living under Labor, I say to them: we will better fund schools so that kids are not exposed to toxic mould like they have been recently at Balnarring Primary School. We will better fund hospitals so that patients do not have to wrestle with rats for a bed. We will better fund roads so that they are safer to drive on for all Victorians – no more playing dodge the pothole in country areas. We will reduce red tape and get out of the way of more homes being built to help with the housing crisis, not to make it worse. We will have better procurement processes to ensure value for money and to help prevent waste. We will not prioritise a loop – we will prioritise people. That is what a coalition government will do.

What does Labor give Victoria? A decade of debt, a decade of dumb decisions. The change in Premier has clearly changed nothing. The cost of Labor is too high in Victoria. To the government we say: stop wasting so much money. Everyone in this building, in this state, knows that we on this side of the

house will be the ones again to clean up Labor's mess. And we will clean it up. We will make sure hospitals and schools are not neglected any longer. We will scrap Labor's schools tax. We will scrap Labor's health tax. We will make sure people feel safe again on the roads and in their homes. We will help the community, not hinder it. We will legislate in this chamber a debt cap. We will reinstate a Victorian productivity commission. We will make housing more affordable. We will maintain frontline services. We will have a credible plan to pay down Labor's debt. We will end waste. We will axe tax. We will shout from the rooftops to every Victorian, especially those who have recently left our state, that under a government we lead Victoria will again be open for business. We will do all these things while Labor put a loop before people. Labor can try to spin all the headlines they like, but only we, the coalition, Victoria's alternative government, will in fact govern for all Victorians.

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (12:28): Well, we have heard from the Rowsell opposition. It was a scattered argument. It was messier than a painter's radio, I reckon. We heard no alternative plan. We heard not even the mention of COVID once during that. We will get to the opposition in a second. I think it is fair to say that times are tough for many around the world, and Australia is no exception. We hear our communities' concerns about inflation, interest rates and the cost of groceries, bills and petrol, and that is why this budget is focused unashamedly on helping families. From the cost of living to investments in education and health care, road and rail, we want to make it easier. This is a budget focused on fiscal discipline and making sensible decisions that respond to the challenges ahead. Of course we have the gender-responsive budgeting overlay on this budget as well.

This budget considers two large issues that I guess give us some unique economic issues that I have not seen in my lifetime. They are basically the result of high inflation and workforce shortages. We have got record unemployment, which gives us workforce constraints, and labour and materials costs at 22 per cent higher than in 2021. Just on employment, for the sake of credibility in this debate, in September 2023 Victoria recorded the lowest unemployment rate in the nation at 3.5 per cent – the lowest in 50 years. The unemployment rate is currently below 4 per cent. Now, I do not want the Shadow Treasurer to think I was not listening. We heard about some metrics between 2010 and 2014, but debt is not the only metric the economy is measured by.

If they were given the responsibility to govern again, we have heard what they would do, but let us have a think about what they did. When the Liberals were elected in 2010 the unemployment rate was 4.9 per cent. By the time of the 2014 election, unemployment had risen to 6.8 per cent. In 2014 the Andrews Labor government inherited the highest unemployment on the mainland in Australia. In contrast, since we have been in government our budgets have been fertile land for 800,000 new jobs to be created in Victoria, including 560,000 jobs created since September 2020. The opposition, in contrast, despite what they have just spoken about, created just 39,000 jobs in four years between 2010 and 2014. I refer to this not to bash the opposition but because unemployment is one of the many key metrics in measuring an economy and measuring the success of a government and this is the coalition's record. Regardless of what they say they will do, the record shows us clearly what they have done.

We want our prosperous economy to stay strong, and this is the budget that does not just consider tomorrow, it gets in front of tomorrow. With that being said, we are shrinking the size of government as a share of the economy. Expenses are growing at 2.2 per cent a year on average in this budget, below the average nominal economic growth at 5.3 per cent. We are also responsibly managing our capital program, with new capital investment lower than in recent years. In fact infrastructure investment is expected to decline from a peak of \$24 billion in 2023–24 to \$15.6 billion by the end of the forward estimates. We are progressively returning the capital program to pre-COVID levels to better align with the ability of our economy to deliver.

Indeed if there was a misunderstanding about a post-COVID budget, it is that funding must be brought back to pre-COVID levels. During COVID the most important step was to let the Victorian government's balance sheet absorb the blow of the pandemic, protecting jobs, businesses, family and the community. Good governments are able to adapt to and overcome unexpected issues, and that is what we have done. We have achieved an operating cash surplus in the 2022–23 budget, which

continues over each year of this budget and forward estimates, and this budget forecasts an operating surplus in 2025–26 that is higher than previously predicted. The government is forecasting operating surpluses of \$1.5 billion in the 2025–26 budget and \$1.6 billion in the 2026–27 budget – an improvement from the 2023–24 budget update. The operating surplus is then forecast to increase further to \$1.9 billion in the 2027–28 budget. As a proportion of gross state product (GSP), net debt is projected to be 24.4 per cent in June 2025 before reaching 25.2 per cent at a high and then declining to 25.1 per cent in 2027–28.

At its core, financial management is the practice of making a business plan and then ensuring you stay on track. The state budget is no exception to that, and we are on track. Economic indicators show our plan is working. Our economy is now estimated to be almost 11 per cent larger in real terms than before the pandemic. That growth is predicted to continue, with Deloitte Access Economics forecasting Victoria's economy will outpace all other states over the next five years. Let me repeat that: Victoria's economy will outpace all other states in the next five years.

The disciplined and sensible decisions that we are making now mean that we are able to deliver on the next step of the post-COVID financial management plan – stabilising net debt as a percentage of GSP. That is the first time that has happened since the pandemic and the next step is obviously the reduction of net debt to GSP. This updated fiscal strategy is right for our times, with a firm focus on driving new growth across the state while also acting to reduce debt. To put this into perspective, our economy is worth about \$600 billion today, but by the end of the forward estimates it will be worth nearly three quarters of a trillion dollars. The strength of this growth is helping drive a reduction in the net debt to GSP.

The opposition have seized as usual on the most emotive media targets they can. I have found myself correcting people who have been peddled some fairly innocuous mistruths. I guess the ones that I have been hearing about have been about funding for health. I often wonder who actually looks at the budget papers on the other side, because we have heard that the Frankston Hospital had a blowout. As the Shadow Treasurer said, riddle me this: how can a project be accused of a blowout in this budget when it is reflecting the figures in the budget papers from last year? That is, budget paper 4, page 69, in the 2023–24 budget. You cannot have a blowout if it was reflected in the previous budget. That is fiscal illiteracy. It should be made very apparent to those opposite that they need to individually have a look at their budget books. You cannot say there has been a blowout in this budget; it was reflected in last budget. It is not how it works.

Also with this in mind, regarding discussions on cancer treatment and funding I say eight years ago it was the Labor government who opened the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre. The five-year survival rate for Victorians diagnosed with cancer has increased from 59 per cent in 2017 to 71 per cent in 2021. We clearly support our health professionals and their delivery of the best for our community. On cancer treatment, we have heard about reductions in funding. There is no reduction in base funding, and what is not mentioned is that a previously funded extra \$40 million for a strategic cancer plan is complete and therefore not recurrent in the budget.

But regarding those opposite and their concerns for their communities' health, I actually found myself thinking on the way in here today: how many people went without cancer treatment and how many people died due to late diagnosis when their hospital closed down? I look across the aisle and I wonder how many of those opposite were not Liberal Party members when Kennett's coalition closed hospitals in Eildon, Koroit, Mortlake, Murtoa, Red Cliffs, Macarthur, Clunes, Beeac, Birregurra, Lismore, Elmore and Waranga. What happened to the thousands of those patients who had cancer treatment at their local hospitals and it was taken away from them, just like that. This was former Premier Kennett, who is fanboyed by some of those across the aisle and still held in high esteem. This is the former Premier that I think still influences some of the decision-making across the aisle. He was urging the feds to abolish Medicare up until 2001. Can you imagine what happens when you do not have subsidised screening for people who need a cancer diagnosis? Yet not one of those opposite will

reflect on that, but they act like they are holding our feet to the flames as we still repair some of the damage that happened back then.

There is a different way to balance the books. A government could have, for instance, sold off \$33 billion in public assets to the highest bidders. We could have redirected more than \$1 billion in services to private contractors. We could have cut 45,000 jobs from the state's bureaucracies. We could have slashed hospital funding and closed down hospitals. We could have closed more than 300 government schools. We could have abolished 7000 jobs in education and stripped a range of entitlements from state-based industrial awards. But who would do that? Well, the question is actually: who did that? Because those statistics form the coalition's response last time they were governing our Victorian economy under fiscal pressure. When Victoria's economy was under pressure from a string of financial collapses and the heat coming out of the 1980s speculative bubble, this is what the Kennett government did. And some who are still sitting in the chamber today are fans of that Thatcher-esque-type accounting. So any commentary coming from those whose manifesto is still, it seems, to cut health is just embarrassing – and to have the gall to be up here today and say that Labor does not care.

But you will not see that in this budget. Under an Allan Labor government you will see the health system supported; hospitals, schools and major projects being built; and housing of course, and that is while driving a reduction in net debt to GSP. It is these projects that also provide jobs. I find it very confusing that the opposition will talk about supporting Victorians through cost-of-living pressures while at the same time saying they will cancel projects and blow up industrial relations, with anti-union policies again, because without a job the average Victorian's battle with the cost of living just gets a lot harder.

For anyone asking themselves right now, we heard from the Shadow Treasurer, but what we did not hear really was a feasible alternative plan. They have got a lot to say and they look angry, but if they were in government throughout COVID, what would they have done when they finally cleaned up their mess based on that easy option of 'Let it rip?' Well, I guarantee – and history tells us the story from the 1990s – if the coalition were delivering a 2024–25 budget it would be no different to the 1990s: there would be no balance, it would be slash and burn.

Budgets provide us a multitude of choices, and the choice that our Treasurer has made, the choice that this side of the aisle has made, on this enormous and difficult piece of work delivers a sensible and balanced budget focused on families. Locally for Frankston the budget reflects the enormous growth in my beautiful community funded by the state government. We have got the Village 21 Kids Under Cover housing project and the hospital – I think we were all surprised to see a supposed 'funding blowout' for it for this year of \$1.1 billion even though it was in last year's budget papers. We have got the Chisholm stage 2 soon to open, the 500 free car parks at the commuter car park at Frankston train station and upgrades to schools at Mount Erin secondary, Mahogany Rise Primary School, Aldercourt Primary School, Naranga specialist school, Overport Primary School and David Scott School. We have also got the Pines Football Netball Club, and that building is looking amazing. We will open that soon. We have got a new justice department, which means jobs and obviously custom for Frankston. We have got an improved Fletcher Road crossing coming, as well as a tech school, an early parenting centre, what will be an amazing Frankston & District Basketball Association project and some potential bus route changes with the cross-peninsula bus route plan.

As many people have talked about in the chamber, we have also heard about the \$400 school bonus. We did hear a member of the opposition say before that it is not cash so people do not care about it. Tell me they do not care about it when the bill comes in for that school camp, those uniforms or an excursion and they do not have to pay it because it is already credited to their account at their school. They will not have to put their hand in their pocket. We have also got those free brekkies for kids. I know the member for Sandringham loves a free brekkie, but we still have those cost-of-living measures that we had put in place and are supported through this budget. I will just run off a couple: we have got the council rate capping, free nursing degrees, free priority care clinics, free dental in schools, brekkie clubs and state schools relief funding. We have tripled Glasses for Kids. We have the

campus and sports fund, free access to pads and tampons, kinder kits for three- and four-year-olds, free Zoos Victoria entry on public holidays – I know the member for Bayswater took his little man George to the zoo for the first time, and he liked the elephants – free learner and P plates, short-term car rego, safe driver discounts, the Victorian Eyecare Service, free rego for young apprentices, health care in Victoria for dental health care, pensioner concessions, the veterans card, reduced regional rail fares, a rental increase cap, the Services Victoria Savings Finder app, the first home buyers grant, expansion of the community pharmacy pilot, the energy compare program, previously the \$250 power saving bonus, free kinder, the utility relief grants, free TAFE – which now offers 80-plus courses – and of course the Victorian default offer.

Can I quickly thank the Treasurer, the Treasurer's office and Department of Treasury and Finance for their work on this budget. Working as part of that team gives you a real insight into the dedication of a team working on an enormously difficult piece of work. They put their heart and soul into delivering a sensible budget focused on families, as it should be, and I commend it to the house.

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (12:43): The 2024–25 Labor government budget in Victoria just reinforces the view that Labor cannot manage money, Labor cannot manage major projects and Victorians are paying the price. If you think about the major project component of that statement, who was the minister that oversaw that \$40 billion in cost blowouts of major projects in Victoria? Who was the minister? The now Premier oversaw \$40 billion in cost blowouts on major projects here in Victoria.

What is a billion dollars? A billion dollars is 1 million thousand-dollar piles. Forty billion dollars is 40,000 million dollars. It costs a million dollars to upgrade a kilometre of highway, so that is 40,000 kilometres of highway we could upgrade in Victoria. I have done the arithmetic – you can check it if you like – and 40,000 kilometres of road could be upgraded. That is more than five times to Darwin and back that could be upgraded with the cost blowouts on those major projects. To put it in a Victorian context, there are 23,000 kilometres of freeways and major arterial roads in Victoria, so we could upgrade all those roads and have \$17 billion left over to fix the health system or to get more police or to get more ambulances so we do not have ramping.

We could upgrade all the major highways in Victoria and we would have enough money left over to fix all the other issues. That is what the cost blowouts mean in the context of this budget. That is why we say Labor cannot manage money. That is why we say Labor cannot manage major projects. And Victorians are paying the price with roads that are dangerous. We are paying the price with roads that damage cars. We all have people come to our offices saying, 'We've smashed a rim, we've blown a tyre,' because the roads are as bad as they are. That is the cost that Victorians are paying just from those major project overruns here in Victoria.

This budget also perpetuates three of the greatest lies in state politics here in Victoria. The first of those lies is when Peter Mitchell on Channel 7 asked the then opposition leader, the former Premier: 'Do you promise Victorians here tonight that you will not increase taxes or introduce any new taxes?' The then opposition leader, former Premier, looked down the camera, looked all Victorians in the eye through the camera on the Channel 7 news, and said, 'I make that promise to every Victorian.' What have we got now? We have got 55 new or increased taxes in Victoria and more taxes to come with the legislation we will see in the future. We got an absolute lie, and that is being perpetuated in this budget. It is absolutely deceitful.

In this budget there are two taxes that most people will not know they are paying. One is an increase in the waste levy, or the bin tax. Everyone is now going to pay more to have their rubbish picked up when that rubbish goes to a municipal waste dump because there is an increase in that charge. If you go to the budget papers, there is millions and millions of dollars in the waste levy stored away in the budget to help prop the budget up. It is not actually being spent for what it was supposed to be spent for; it is being used to prop the budget up. But they are going to increase it. There is more money stacked away in there, and people are going to pay more for their bin tax. The bin tax will be on the

rates notice; people will see that there and they will blame the council. But it is not actually the council's fault; it is the Labor government's fault.

The other one is the fire services levy. If you read the footnote for the fire services levy, it says there that they are taking it up to the maximum amount allowable. They are taking it all the way to the top, not because people are going to get better fire services but because they need the money to pay for the things that they promised. If you are a CFA member, you will still not have your fire trucks on time, you still will not have your CFA sheds upgraded, but the government will have money to pay for the United Firefighters Union's demands for the metro fire sheds. Those two new taxes that came into the budget we are talking about today will be buried in someone's rates notice. They will blame the council, but it is actually the Labor government.

If you think about the cost-of-living pressures here in Victoria, it is not international circumstances – it is not the Ukraine war, it is not the conflict in the Middle East – that are driving cost-of-living pressures here in Victoria; it is actually the Labor government's policy decisions and those 55 new or increased taxes that are doing that. They are embedded into people's cost of living. The policy decision to ban natural gas in Victoria has put gas prices through the roof. A policy decision by the Victorian Labor government means that your gas bill is ridiculously higher than it was before.

The other great lie that is being perpetuated in this budget is Labor's claim that young people are no longer interested in home ownership. What planet was the person that made that statement living on? Young people want to get a foothold into the property market. Their parents and their grandparents are desperate for them to get a foothold in the property market. For those on the other side, go and google it and just see who did say it from your government, because it is one of those lies that is perpetuated. Why can't young people get into the property market? If you actually look at the cost of a new home, more than a third of the cost of a new home is charges and taxes of the Victorian Labor government – more than a third of the cost of a new home is actually taxes and charges of the Labor government. If you look at those 55 new and increased taxes, 27 of those taxes are property-based taxes. That drives up the cost of a home.

Imagine how easy it would be for young people to get a foothold in the property market if they did not have to pay more than a third of the price of a house in tax. And that does not talk about the fact that it now takes years for a property developer to get a subdivision to market, so they have the holding costs on doing that because of all the red tape and restrictions that are there from this government. The holding cost of land means the price of a block of land has increased. We met with some property developers recently. They actually said the cultural heritage charges, they believe, actually put \$10,000 on a block. So for someone that is buying a house they have got the red tape, they have got the green tape and they have got the cultural heritage tape, which costs \$10,000 a block in this state. That is where the third of all government charges and taxes come into the cost of a house.

The third great lie in this budget that is perpetuated is that Victorians do not have to choose between infrastructure and investment in health. We had a government that said, 'You can have both. You can have the infrastructure, you can have the health system upgraded and you can have the elective surgery waiting list reduced, because you can have both.' If you actually go to the budget, we have now got neither. Major infrastructure projects, except for the Suburban Rail Loop, have been stalled – no rail to the airport or major projects in regional Victoria. If you go through the budget papers the completion date of all those projects has been pushed out because the government want to extend the payment structure because they cannot do it. If you actually look at some of those big promises around infrastructure and health – to justify Melbourne Metro and the Arden Street station, the government said they were going to do a major rebuild of the Royal Melbourne Hospital and the Royal Women's Hospital. Both those are no longer being proposed, so the business case falls over. In reality, we have built Melbourne Metro. We have got a station there, but we are not going to have the precinct built that goes above it, because the government has run out of money. So this promise that you can have both infrastructure and health is just a perpetuation of a lie.

I was interested in the member for Frankston's contribution about what happened last century. The member for Frankston spent quite a substantial amount of his time talking about what happened last century. Victorians are actually interested in what is happening now and what is going to happen in the future. They are not interested about what happened last century. He talked about hospital closures. Those on the other side would do well to read the reports of the government's plan to merge and close a whole heap of regional hospitals. I have read the proposal from December, which is being updated now. You are going to find in my electorate all the hospitals in north-west Victoria are going to be run out of Bendigo – so no CEOs, no directors of nursing, no boards, no community involvement, but all being run out of Bendigo. And there is a footnote there that says, 'We might actually have advisory committees.' What is an advisory committee going to be able to do for a country hospital when it is being run from hundreds of kilometres away – driving across those roads that are absolutely useless?

If you think back to a lot of those hospitals – I take my home town, but everyone here could talk about their home town, their local hospital – and to when those hospitals were first built, they were built with the community raising money. They were built with the community running cake stalls, running raffles and running events to actually build those hospitals. What we are going to find – because the minister has put out a letter saying 'We are not going to give those hospitals any more money into the future other than what they have been promised now, irrespective of how many people walk through the door, irrespective of what it costs to deliver those services' – is those hospitals that started with the community raising money to build them are now going to have to have community cake stalls again just to keep a hospital in their town because the government is not going to fund those hospitals properly in the future. That is an absolute travesty for regional Victorian people. They do not want to drive 200 kilometres, with the condition of roads we have here, to get to a health service. They actually want a health service in their own town, and they do not want it run from a major regional city where they do not care. Those who watched this happen with Grampians Health, where all the hospitals and health services west of Ballarat were merged into one, know what has happened to their hospitals and the services that have been stripped out of them. That is what regional Victoria, tragically, has got to look forward to in the future.

Like the Shadow Treasurer mentioned, people say, 'What would you do differently?' The key thing that the Victorian Labor government has lost sight of is that the more taxes you put on business and the more restrictions you put on business, the more private capital will not invest. Private capital is actually leaving this state – 8000 businesses have left Victoria in recent times. That is 8000 families, let alone the employees and their families. They have gone interstate because they see other places as better to do business. We have got a housing crisis in Victoria, and we have got a rental housing crisis in Victoria. People are selling their rental properties in this state because of the tax system and investing in other states. That is one of the reasons we have a housing crisis here. The thing that a Victorian Liberal and Nationals government would do is we would put in place an investment framework and an investment climate, and we would make Victoria open for business again, making sure that private capital wants to invest to solve the issues of this state. If you want to see investment in housing, you need to make it attractive for people to invest capital.

The Labor Party somehow think that they can tax and tax and tax and people will keep investing. They will not do that; they will take their investment somewhere else in Australia, because it is more attractive to do that. Government is not a good investor. We have proven with the cost overruns on major projects that the Victorian government cannot manage major projects and cannot manage money. Victorians are paying that price. Let government get out of the way and let private business build the things that this state needs, and then we will have a much better place to live in the future. At the moment Victorians are paying the price of the inability of the government to manage money and manage major projects.

I will just finish off on some of the cuts in the budget. Regional Development Victoria is a shadow of what it was before. If you go back to when the Liberals and Nationals were last in government, we had the \$1 billion Regional Growth Fund that put money into country communities to upgrade

sporting facilities, to upgrade community halls and to make sure those communities had the livability that we needed for people to live there. There are none of those programs in this budget. There is no money effectively for Regional Development Victoria to administer, and effectively most of the staff have been made redundant. What was once a proud part of the Victorian government system is effectively no more, and regional Victoria is paying the price for that. Labor cannot manage money and they cannot manage major projects, and all Victorians are paying the price.

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (12:58): I look forward to the budget and reply every year because it gives an indication of the plans that an opposition might have after a budget has been handed down. As previous speakers on this side of the house have said, this has been a tough budget. We have had to look at the spending that occurred during the COVID period and have a really responsible pathway to get the budget back into surplus, and the Treasurer is doing a great job in delivering on that.

But I tell you what, the member for Sandringham came in here – I was so surprised, because the member for Sandringham is a nice bloke – and he put everyone to sleep. There were people on their phones at the back looking for some way to get out of here and there were people doing their emails. I have never seen anything like it. Even the journos up in the gallery were looking to get out of the place. It was a non-event. It was lucky we had the Leader of the Nationals get up straight after that. It was not inspiring, but his line and length are always there. He was just back to the old lines about regional Victoria, and I think he steadied the ship a little bit. But if people are looking for a bit of vision from the opposition or if they are looking in a forlorn way for some sort of policy from the opposition, they are again going to be very deeply disappointed.

I will no doubt continue this after the lunchbreak, but I will come to the budget papers because I want to point out a few important facts in the budget papers that I think highlight the reason that there is pressure on infrastructure here in Victoria, and I want to take to task statements that were made straight after the budget was announced.

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

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### *Members*

**Minister for Government Services**

**Minister for Planning**

*Absence*

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I rise to inform the house that for the purposes of question time today the Assistant Treasurer will answer questions for the portfolios of government services, consumer affairs and public and active transport, and the Minister for Precincts will answer questions for the portfolios of planning and suburbs.

### *Questions without notice and ministers statements*

#### **Payroll tax**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners has said that Labor's 2024 budget will 'worsen the cost-of-living crisis for Victorians'. Will the government remove the health tax to ease the cost of living for Victorians?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): In answering the Leader of the Opposition's question, can I make it absolutely clear to the house and to the Leader of the Opposition that he is referring to a tax that does not exist. There is no health tax.

*Members interjecting.*

**Jacinta ALLAN:** You are going to send that out, are you – that you make stuff up? Send it out everywhere. The Leader of the Opposition makes things up. That is what he is proud to send out everywhere, as he is just muttering across the chamber.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! This is not a good start to question time. The Premier will be heard without assistance.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** In answering the Leader of the Opposition's question, I am not going to answer the part that is a fabrication. I am just not going to answer the part of the question that is a fabrication. What I will say about supporting GPs is that this government has had to step in after 9½ years of failure from the former federal Liberal government. We had to step in and establish 29 priority primary care centres. Why did we have to do that?

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Members will be removed from the chamber without warning.

**John Pesutto:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I ask that you draw the Premier back to the question, which was about the health tax and whether they will remove it.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** The question went to supporting general practice. This government has been a big and strong supporter of general practice, because the Medicare system has been brought to its knees in this country by the former federal Liberal government. We did not hear those opposite raise their voices at any stage; not at any stage did they raise their voices. There was not even a whimper of a protest.

*Members interjecting.*

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

**Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.**

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is now debating the question.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** That is why, in addition to rolling out 29 priority primary care centres, we have also recognised –

**John Pesutto** interjected.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I am getting to EDs; just hold your horses. He gets a little excited when he comes into question time. We not only have established 29 priority primary care centres; we have also recognised, because of the failure of the former federal Liberal government, that that was placing significant pressure on our emergency departments. And what has this government done to support our hardworking emergency department staff? We have introduced the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department. It is the busiest emergency department in the state. The member for Yan Yean can speak very well about its importance, the difference it has made and the great service it provides to families right across the state. We will continue to step in and provide support to our hardworking GPs and continue to work with the Labor federal government, which is boosting support in this area.

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): The college said that:

The Government knows –  
medical –

practices can't afford the state's extra payroll tax, and neither can their patients.

Why are vulnerable and sick Victorians being punished because Labor cannot manage money?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): He seems to have changed the question. Which is it? I am just not sure the Leader of the Opposition is being consistent in his substantive and supplementary questions.

**A member** interjected.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: No, that is true. Why start now? If the Leader of the Opposition would like me to provide a list of how we are supporting vulnerable and sick Victorians, let me start sharing with the Leader of the Opposition what we are doing. In last week's budget there is a record amount of funding to our hospital system. I have already spoken of the priority primary care centres, the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department, the record number of healthcare workers –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER**: Order! The member for Eildon can leave the chamber for an hour.

**Member for Eildon withdrew from chamber.**

**Jacinta ALLAN**: There are 13,500 healthcare workers that we have employed just since the pandemic. Those opposite during the pandemic were not interested in vulnerable and sick Victorians when they said let it rip. They were not interested in vulnerable and sick Victorians. We are, which is why we will continue to support our health system and our healthcare workers.

#### **Ministers statements: school saving bonus**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:08): Our government continues to be firmly focused on supporting families – families particularly – as families around the country are experiencing ongoing cost-of-living pressures, and we know this. We know particularly for parents of school-age children that there can be from time to time additional challenges for particularly those things like school uniforms and school camps and excursions. Those latter areas are particularly part of what makes school fun, but at times these costs can add up for families.

That is why in addition to the significant support we provide to families in our schools – the Smile Squad, breakfast programs, Glasses for Kids, we have a long list of areas where we provide support to families in our schooling system – we were delighted last week to add to that with the \$400 school saving bonus. This will be provided to 700,000 students across the state. All students in our government schools and the most needy students in our non-government schools as well will receive this really practical support for families. Again, whether it is for school uniforms, camps, excursions, incursions or sports programs, all of these things will be supported through our school saving bonus. We will be rolling out this advice to families and schools from term 3 so that the payments can flow from term 4 so parents can start planning now. As we are starting the enrolment process for next year, parents can start planning now for the start of the 2025 school year with the school saving bonus. Those opposite cut Fresh Fruit Friday. They cut the education maintenance allowance. They cut vital supports to families in our schools. We are going to support them.

#### **School saving bonus**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (14:11): My question is to the Minister for Education. Corpus Christi is a low-fee Catholic primary school in Werribee. While 50 per cent of students come from disadvantaged

families, only 9 per cent of students will be eligible for the government's \$400 payment. How is it fair that these disadvantaged students will not benefit from the \$400 school payment?

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:11): The answer is a very clear and concise one: non-government schools are predominantly funded by the federal government. We are the state government and we fund state government schools. That is what we do. We fund state government schools. Can I also say, non-government schools are not closed off from applying for the school saving bonus, providing the family has a healthcare card or a disability support card, because we are a government that supports the most needy and most vulnerable kids. We are a government that will not leave anyone behind. We will stand up for all education and make sure every child that needs any support will get it.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (14:12): During the budget lock-up the minister joked about another Labor minister who will be \$2000 better off because his children attend government schools. Why are Labor ministers, who earn over \$365,000, able to claim this payment when disadvantaged students at Corpus Christi in Werribee miss out?

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:13): It is a bit like asking the shadow cabinet to fess up on all their investment properties and all the benefits they get over there. But let me say, on this side of the chamber we are making sure –

*Members interjecting.*

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

**Member for Sunbury withdrew from chamber.**

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I would ask you to bring the Deputy Premier back to this important question.

**The SPEAKER:** The Deputy Premier will come back to the question.

**Ben CARROLL:** We know on this side of the chamber that it does take a village to raise a child. That is why, as the Premier said, there are the school saving bonus, our support for state school relief and making sure every child gets the education they deserve. We are very proud because we also know that our business managers and our school principals do a marvellous job.

*Members interjecting.*

**Ben CARROLL:** I am getting to it.

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

**Member for Narracan withdrew from chamber.**

**Peter Walsh:** On a point of order, Speaker, I would ask you to bring the Deputy Premier back to actually answering the question as to why Catholic students in Werribee are missing out.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister was being relevant. The minister to come back to the question.

**Ben CARROLL:** I have got 27 seconds. As I said, we are making sure that the funding goes to where it needs to go. We know that our business managers and our principals want no application process. They want to get it done and out to those students that need it. To educate those opposite, we are in the state Parliament and we know that as the state government we fund state schools. And while I am on my feet, the Morrison government did not put one dollar into our state school system.

*Members interjecting.*

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

**Member for Malvern withdrew from chamber.**

**Ministers statements: budget 2024–25**

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:15): I am really pleased to update the house on the positive feedback on last week’s state budget. Parents Victoria welcome the school saving bonus, saying it was very welcome to families struggling with cost-of-living increases. Jesuit Social Services said that the budget contains positive investments in early intervention for at-risk groups and demonstrates that we are assisting those with complex needs. Infrastructure Partnerships Australia – that is the good IPA, not the bad one – said that the government has commendably made the tough, albeit necessary, decisions to deliver a smoother and more sustainable infrastructure pipeline. The Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that they were pleased that there were no new taxes on business while three taxes and charges that stifle business growth will be reduced from 1 July 2024. The Early Learning and Care Council of Australia said they commend the Victorian government on their ongoing, nation-leading reform in early learning and care.

Last week’s budget delivered for Victorians. In this time of nationwide cost-of-living pressures, our budget was sensible and it was disciplined and it delivered for families and for vulnerable Victorians when they needed it. It took the sensible steps required to factor in the workforce pressures that we are facing across the state, and it sees net debt to gross state product fall for the first time since 2017. Unlike those opposite, we are here not to grandstand or to fan the flames of conspiracy and hyperbole; we are delivering for Victorians.

**Energy policy**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:17): My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. The Deputy Premier proudly told ABC Drive that ‘I have gas at home ... We’re keeping it’. Is it government policy that all Victorians who have gas at home can keep using it?

**Lily D’AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:18): I am really delighted to have this question come my way, because what I can tell you is that there is one thing that is absolutely fact in this state: that no-one is having their gas appliances ripped off them. Nobody is having their gas appliances ripped off them. As for my good friend the Deputy Premier, he has been known to walk the corridors of the Parliament with Saul Griffith’s book under his sleeve, *The Big Switch*, on electrification.

Those opposite can talk all they like about this question, but one thing is for sure: we put geology ahead of ideology, okay? We put geology ahead of ideology. The fact is this: they can guffaw all they like, but a government that is strong on leadership understands the facts of the matter – that Victoria’s gas supplies are dwindling. Therefore we need to ensure that the steps we take do three things. One is that we conserve the supplies of gas that we have in this state for those that need it – the manufacturing industry, industry generally – and of course develop a plan to reduce our reliance on gas, especially in the home. It is also about having conversations with people across the state, which is what we always do. We know that every gas appliance that is swapped out for an electric appliance saves people on their energy bills each and every year.

Those opposite do not care about the cost-of-living pressures on Victorian families. They do not care about it at all. What they are interested in is giving people nuclear energy.

*Members interjecting.*

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

**Member for Laverton withdrew from chamber.**

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is now debating the question.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister to come back to the question.

**Lily D'AMBROSIO:** There is one party that the Victorian public can trust when it comes to cost-of-living pressures and putting downward pressure on energy bills, and that is this side of the house – protecting consumers against greedy, privatised businesses on the other side, whether they are electricity businesses or gas businesses. That is what our agenda is, and we will get on and get it done, reducing people's energy bills.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is now defying your ruling.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister has concluded her answer.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:21): The federal Labor Minister for Resources has said, 'We need gas to help us achieve our commitment to net zero.' The Deputy Premier has said that 'a lot of Victorians like cooking with gas'. In light of pro-gas comments by federal Labor MPs, why does the minister persist with her ideological ban against gas?

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:22): I thank the member for the supplementary question. Can I make it very, very clear that the only ban on gas in Victoria is a ban on fracking. Maybe those opposite have changed their minds on supporting the Victorian government's ban on fracking. But I can tell you what, on this side of the house this government is absolutely committed to reducing people's energy costs. We do that and we fight that every single day with policies, with programs and with ways of assisting people to meet cost-of-living pressures. We are not blinded by ideology, unlike those on the other side. We see the facts of the matter, we tackle the challenges that our state is facing on dwindling supplies of gas and we make sure that Victorians can have the options available to them to actually save every single year on their energy bills. That is what this government delivers to Victorians, unlike those opposite, who simply want to send energy costs skyrocketing through the reintroduction of nuclear.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The behaviour of members in the chamber today is disgraceful. More members will be removed for disgraceful behaviour.

#### **Ministers statements: youth support**

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (14:23): I rise today to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is backing our young people with the support they need to build a bright future. In this year's budget our government has delivered \$3.6 million for the Living Learning partnership program, building on our \$13 million investment, because this budget is all about helping families, children and young people at the heart of our state. Partnering with Melbourne City Mission, the program is providing tailored, practical support for vulnerable young Victorians. We know that sometimes young people need a bit of help to get them back on track, and that is exactly what this program is all about. The program connects young people to education, skills, training or employment with the help they need to make it work.

Together with the member for Albert Park, we have seen firsthand the flexible education at Hester Hornbrook Academy and the wraparound support that youth workers and allied health services are providing for young people. This means kids can finish school while building their next steps and planning for their future. We have already seen many young people successfully complete this program and a new group starting this year. We know the benefits of providing early support for our young people so that they can reach their potential. Thank you to the team at Melbourne City Mission and also at Hester Hornbrook Academy for all the work that they do to support our young people. It is only Labor governments that make these important investments for young people as they navigate through their journey. The Allan Labor government will work every single day to help families and young people.

### Income support

**Sam HIBBINS** (Pahran) (14:25): My question is to the Premier. Today the federal budget is being handed down, and the low rates of income support for people on JobSeeker and youth allowance are keeping many Victorians in extreme poverty, making it harder for women to escape violence and pushing people into already stretched and underfunded state-based homelessness and crisis services – cost shifting of the worst kind. Given the impact the low rate of income support has on so many Victorians, why isn't the Victorian government publicly advocating for the rate of income support to be raised above the poverty line in today's federal budget?

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Minister for Transport Infrastructure will come to order. This is your second warning.

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:26): I will confine my comments to matters of state government responsibility. The Greens political member for Prahran would like to perhaps go and join the federal Parliament, like his upper house colleague. Perhaps that is what he is more interested in, because he very rarely asks a question that is directly related to state government administration. Perhaps he would like to follow his colleague, a member for Northern Metropolitan Region, off into the federal landscape. It is a unity ticket over there.

What we are focused on here – and I am very pleased to advise the member for Prahran – is that we have recognised that many Victorians are facing those cost-of-living pressures that are being experienced around the country. We know that with the impact of the cost of utilities, the cost of food and the cost of rent there are those inflationary pressures that have come as a result of successive interest rate rises, global uncertainty and workforce shortages that have combined to see pressures go on costs right across our community. That is why I mentioned earlier the school saving bonus. That is why last week's budget included additional support. In addition to the long list of support we provide to schools, we have added to that at this point in time with a dedicated payment that recognises at this point in time families are doing it tough.

But we do not just stop there. The reason we focus on state government work is because it is where we can make a difference. Where we have been making a difference is – and I have a long list here for the member's interest – in transport, where we have capped regional fares for regional passengers to be the same as for metropolitan Melbourne, saving regional passengers substantial amounts of funds.

**Sam Hibbins:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question went to the state government's advocacy to the federal government on this issue, and the question also had a direct link between the low rate of income support and pushing Victorians onto state-based services. So I would ask you to bring the Premier back to actually answering the question.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked. It was in relation to income support.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** It was. The question went to the pressure it is putting on state-based services, and I am giving a state-based response as to how we are providing support for families. There is free car rego for apprentices. We have free L- and P-plate licensing and online testing and short-term vehicle registration. When you look at the energy sector, on power bills we have got winter gas discounts – those opposite might like to get onto that – and electricity discounts as well. We have got of course the Victorian default offer, which is saving families significant amounts of funding. There are utility relief grants. I can also talk to free kinder, free TAFE, baby bundles and the Get Active Kids vouchers. The Minister for Community Sport would absolutely want me to refer to that and how we have extended that in this year's budget. The list is even longer than what I have read out, but this is what we will focus on.

**Sam HIBBINS** (Pahran) (14:29): I join the Premier in agreement that the Greens member for Northern Metro will be heading to federal Parliament, but the state government has been –

*Members interjecting.*

**Sam HIBBINS:** You said it. But the state government previously has not been shy about weighing in on federal matters that impact Victorians. The national cabinet regularly meets on issues of national significance. And given the importance of raising the rate of income support and the benefits it would have to Victorians living in poverty, experiencing family violence or homelessness, will the government commit to advocating for raising the rate of income support at the next national cabinet?

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, the supplementary question was in fact just a re-run of the substantive question. I ask that you ask the member to rephrase his question.

**The SPEAKER:** No, the question was fine. The question was not the same. The question was marginally different.

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:31): Well, there's a slogan: 'Greens political party – taking Victorians for granted'. The arrogance to suggest that the member for Northern Metropolitan Region is on some cake walk to Canberra – the absolute arrogance of the Greens political party. What we are focused on is not taking Victorians for granted. We are working incredibly hard. The member asked about national cabinet and the support we are providing for women and children fleeing family violence. We called for a national cabinet meeting to be held on this very issue. The Prime Minister has been working with us and other state and territory leaders on this very issue. Indeed last week in response to work we have been doing with the federal Labor government, which is not taking Victorians for granted in the Northern Metropolitan Region, we have added substantially to housing support through this weekend's announcement of an additional billion dollars of funding for housing just in this area.

#### **Ministers statements: priority primary care centres**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:32): On the cost of living, I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is supporting families, ensuring access and cost are no barrier to Victorian children getting the care and the treatment that they need. We have now invested more than \$125 million into our priority primary care centres. We have led the nation with the delivery of this new treatment option, and I have got to tell you that families are embracing the opportunity that this presents to save them a trip to the emergency department. It saves them waiting on the phone trying to get an appointment with their GP.

I had the great pleasure of being out with the member for Essendon yesterday in his electorate, at the Moonee Ponds priority primary care centre. It was an opportunity to see how our government's investment is helping PPCCs to continue to deliver for families in the suburbs and indeed across the regions. Mums and dads know that PPCCs are there for them. Indeed at Moonee Ponds we were told that 40 per cent of their patients are children and indeed 20 per cent are children under five. So we know that this is meeting a real need for our community. With family members being the single biggest referrer to PPCCs, it shows Victorians trust and value these clinics.

Along with our ongoing investments in early parenting centres, in the baby bundle and in ensuring that we are making sure that every child in a government school has access to free dental health check-ups through the Smile Squad, we are making a real difference for families. We are helping families with the cost of living, making sure that their children's health and care are never, ever compromised under an Allan Labor government. We are getting on, helping families, delivering for the people of Victoria.

**Economic policy**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (14:34): My question is to the Treasurer. The annual interest bill on Labor's record debt is \$6.5 billion, yet funding for the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing is \$4.97 billion. Why is the government spending more on interest than on services for vulnerable children, families and housing?

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:35): I thank the member for Sandringham for his question, and I welcome him back from Siberia. It is good to see that he has been relegated to last drop. I rather hope that those opposite realise there was a budget last week. The only time he got the Treasurer on his feet is the last question.

*Members interjecting.*

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

**Member for Mildura withdrew from chamber.**

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I would ask you to bring the Treasurer to the question.

**The SPEAKER:** The Treasurer will come back to the question.

**Tim PALLAS:** One thing this government will not do is make our budget issues first and centre of how we protect Victorian families going forward. We did it all the way through the pandemic. We made sure that we used our balance sheet to protect Victorians. Those opposite were basically saying let it rip, return balanced budgets through the height of the economic event of COVID –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Treasurer is clearly debating the question.

**The SPEAKER:** The Treasurer will come back to the question.

**Tim PALLAS:** This government has made it very clear to Victorians that there are a variety of options that you can adopt in terms of budget management, and the first and most important one you should adopt is to put the interests of the economy, and therefore its performance and growth, front and centre of our economic and budgetary strategies. That is exactly what this government is doing. Those opposite can get up in this chamber and call for debt caps to be put in place. Can you imagine anything more ludicrous as a piece of public policy than a debt cap? Let me give you an illustration of what a debt cap would do to the Victorian economy during COVID.

*Members interjecting.*

**Tim PALLAS:** Oh, you do not want to hear?

**Brad Rowswell:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Treasurer has been on his feet for a minute and a half. My point of order is on relevance. The Treasurer is currently nowhere near the simple question that I asked relating to debt versus the government's spending on the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order. The Treasurer was being directly responsive to the question, and I ask that you enable him to get up and complete his answer.

**The SPEAKER:** The Treasurer had strayed from the answer. I ask him to come back to the question.

**Tim PALLAS:** As I was asked by the member a question about the level of interest and debt, can I be very clear that the average amount of interest paid for the state is 7.8 per cent over the next four years. That is well below the 1990s level. And might I say, in circumstances where those opposite say we should have a legislative cap on debt, that would effectively shut down government. We have seen it played out in the United States. We have seen services to the needy effectively played out. That is

their formula for Victoria. Make no mistake: they want to consign Victorians as secondary beneficiaries or the losers out of an economy that is being run for accountants and for a balance sheet. Those are their values lived large.

We as a government will continue to grow the economy. We are the only government that have demonstrated a now five-step fiscal strategy, the only government that have held ourselves to account to its performance and attainment and the only government who have now set a fifth step that will ensure that debt as a percentage of the size of the Victorian economy will fall. That is what achievement means when you put Victorians first.

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (14:39): The government is on track to spend more on interest repayments than on medical research funding. The Victorian chair of the Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes Professor Ricky Johnstone said the government's \$50.8 million cut to medical research funding will really 'affect our ability to conduct medical research at the highest international level'. This cut equates to three days worth of interest payments on Labor's record debt. Has Labor's interest bill forced the Treasurer to cut critical medical research funding?

**The SPEAKER:** I will allow the question.

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:40): I thank the member for their question. To make the obvious point, as a government we are one of the world leaders when it comes to medical research and support. In fact we are rated the third metropolitan location in the world, behind Boston and London, for medical research. And it did not happen by accident. There is only one city on the planet that has two mRNA manufacturers preparing to open up – in this state, in this city – that is Melbourne. BioNTech of course was announced recently, but before them it was Moderna, who we are expecting will start producing population-scale vaccines early next year. On top of that we will have therapeutic cancer treatments being produced by BioNTech – therapeutic cancer treatments from the laboratory table to the client's bedside. That is critically important for the future of the state.

#### **Ministers statements: schools funding**

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:42): On this side of the house we know health and education go hand in hand. We know that what children are taught is just as important as how they are taught. That is why we know well that all the evidence shows that the interventions you make early give you a lifetime of dividends. That is why we are investing in free glasses for children. It is very hard to learn if you have impaired eyesight. It is why we have rolled out more than 40 million breakfasts in this state as a government, and it is why the latest budget has more money for our breakfast program so that every school across Victoria that wants to be part of it can be part of it. That is the equivalent of adding six grand finals of students every year to the school breakfast club program. We know they can concentrate better and the classroom is calmer if they are there on a full tummy. More than that, it is a program where every meal is a collaboration. From Foodbank – and I thank Dave McNamara, the CEO of Foodbank – our farmers and our manufacturers to our volunteers like the Lions clubs and Rotary clubs, they are all part of our breakfast program, because we know we will never leave children behind.

We also know the budget has great money and investment for school upgrades, including a big school upgrade in the opposition leader's electorate of Hawthorn, because under our government 50 per cent of schools built across Australia have been built right here in Victoria over the past decade. That is what building the Education State is all about – making sure you put investments where you are going to get the biggest dividends. We know that every year of education post year 12 adds between 6 and 12 per cent to incomes in our workforce. Growing the economy, investing in education and investing in health, the Allan Labor government stands with Victorian people, stands with Victorian families and stands with Victorian students.

## CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Tuesday 14 May 2024

Legislative Assembly

1663

**Gabrielle de Vietri:** On a point of order, Speaker, I have the following questions awaiting overdue responses, some of which are up to six months late: question 725 on vacant public housing; questions 869, 870, 872, 1031, 1033 and 1034, all on public housing; question 880 on the disability royal commission; question 881 on funding community legal centres; question 892 on accessible tram stops; questions 935, 936, 937 and 1128 on rental disputes; questions 999 and 1000 on air conditioning in high-rise public housing; question 1030 on rentals headleased by the government; question 1032 on staffing costs for Homes Victoria; and question 1039 on fees for people wanting to change their sex on birth certificates.

**The SPEAKER:** Please hand your list to the Clerk.

**Bridget Vallence:** Speaker, I wish to raise a point of order on a vast number of questions that have failed to be answered by the ministers in this Labor government: 535, an adjournment matter to the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC; questions on notice 943, 945, 957, 1050, 1051, 1052, 1053, 1055, 1076, 1077, 1078, 1079, 1081, 1083, 1085, 1086, 1087, 1112 and 1113 to the Minister for Jobs and Industry, the Minister for Public and Active Transport, the Minister for Skills and TAFE, the Minister for Economic Growth and the Minister for Education. My community wonders what they are doing. Could you please have them answer my questions.

**The SPEAKER:** That is not a way to raise a point of order. Please give your list to the Clerk.

**David Southwick:** On a point of order, Speaker, I have one unanswered question, and that is to Minister Shing, question 983 re Grosvenor estate. I have raised this several times with the minister since January 17, and I ask that you direct the minister to answer question 983.

**Tim Bull:** On a point of order, Speaker, I have 28 questions overdue at the current time. I will not read through the full list, but 22 of the 28 date back to 2022.

**Kim Wells:** No way!

**Tim Bull:** I'm serious, Kim – two years old. I know that you have raised these before, Speaker, but I would urge you to please raise these important matters with the ministers again. They are important issues to my electorate.

**The SPEAKER:** Please pass the list to the Clerk.

**Emma Kealy:** Speaker, I raise a point of order regarding question 583, which is in relation to wild dog management. It has not yet been responded to. I ask you to follow that up, please.

**Tim Read:** On a point of order, Speaker, I have got three questions overdue: 693 to the Minister for Outdoor Recreation, 816 to the Minister for Health and 817 to the Minister for Development Victoria.

### *Constituency questions*

#### **Nepean electorate**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (14:48): (630) My question is to the Minister for Ports and Freight. It is in regard to the rebuild of Dromana Pier. The upgrade of Dromana Pier is front of mind for many locals in Dromana and surrounding areas, but so far they have been kept in the dark as to the progress of which design and when the works will begin on the pier. Minister Horne has confirmed via writing the commitment to getting this built, but with the pier being a centrepiece to that Dromana area, we need to see the works moving ahead, not just words. I ask the minister: when will the government begin work on the Dromana Pier rebuild?

#### **Tarneit electorate**

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (14:49): (631) My question is to the Minister for Education. How will the construction of Riverdale North primary school benefit students and families in the Tarneit area?

Construction of Riverdale North primary school, which is of course the school's interim name, is underway with \$573.178 million allocated in the 2023–24 budget. This school is set to open in term 1 of 2025, so term 1 next year, providing access to quality education for up to 650 students upon its opening. Our community of Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing is rapidly growing, with more families choosing to put down their roots in our fantastic patch of Melbourne's west. In the last year we have built two new schools, Brinbeal Secondary College and Wimba Primary School, which are now open and thriving. It has been fantastic seeing updates on the construction of the school, and I look forward to opening it next year.

#### **Gippsland East electorate**

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (14:50): (632) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the information I am seeking is: who is responsible when trees on road reserves fall across private boundary fencing causing significant damage? I am asking the minister to clarify that for me. Landowners are only allowed to clear within 1 metre of their boundary fencing. They know that these trees are going to fall when we get a storm, and we have had a lot in East Gippsland lately where a significant number of trees have fallen over private freehold boundary fencing. These farmers and these landholders know these trees are going to fall. If they clear them themselves, they are charged, but when they then fall over private boundary fencing, they are left with the costs of that – so it seems. So I ask the minister to please clarify for me who is responsible for the costs when these trees fall from road reserves across boundary fencing causing significant damage.

#### **Northcote electorate**

**Kat THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (14:51): (633) My question is to the Minister for Ageing, and I ask what supports are available to older residents of Northcote? Thirteen per cent of locals are aged over 65, and they are a diverse mix of cultures and languages, from Irish, Greek, Italian, Mandarin, Vietnamese and Arabic. They enrich our suburbs but also face challenges, whether that is accessing health care as they age, finding social connection and financial security or simply traversing our suburbs with ease. Last week I celebrated Orthodox Easter with the Greek community in the inner north alongside colleagues – the member for Preston, Ged Kearney and Sheena Watt. Among the many conversations was the cost of living and the need to support our cherished seniors groups. Over the years I have been proud to support these organisations with grants for events or upgrades to their meeting places, from the Irish Australian bureau to the Darusalam Society, U3A Darebin, Navarino, Papaflessas and many more. I believe the strength of our community is in part measured by how we treat our elders, and we have a duty to honour and care for them. I look forward to the minister's response and hearing about the ways our Labor government is supporting older members in our community.

#### **Warrandyte electorate**

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (14:52): (634) My question is to the Assistant Treasurer, and my question is: when will my constituent Suzanne Ralph receive the \$160,000 owed to her by the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority to finish her home after the Porter Davis Homes collapse? Suzanne, a local mother of two, has already spent over \$100,000 of her own money trying to complete her unfinished house; however, there are still over 50 defects with the home, which the VMIA acknowledged in writing and agreed to pay for in November last year. Yet six months later they still have not paid and are now refusing to pay. When Suzanne appeared on Channel 10's *The Project* to share her story out of sheer desperation, the VMIA said that they would pay if she provided the receipts for the \$160,000 of repairs. There are no receipts because the house has not been repaired yet. How can she fix the house without the money? The VMIA must pay the agreed amount so Suzanne can have the home that she and her family have worked so hard for.

**Laverton electorate**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (14:53): (635) My question is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. I have been a renter for some time now. I cannot say I like it very much. I know how difficult renting can be even at the best of times. In my electorate there are a lot of folks like me renting, and as you get closer to the city, there are lots of older rental properties scattered throughout suburbs like Sunshine and Braybrook, some of which are really not in the best condition that they could be. We know that the vast majority of landlords do the right thing by their tenants and ensure that their houses are fit to live in, things like making sure that windows can open, that there is no mould growing anywhere or even just making sure that there is appropriate heating and cooling, especially with winter now on its way. Unfortunately we know that there are rental providers and real estate agents who are not doing the right thing, which is why in March our government established a rental taskforce to investigate and crackdown on landlords and estate agents who are not doing the right thing. My question for the minister is this: how will this rental taskforce deliver for renters in the Laverton electorate?

**Melbourne electorate**

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:54): (636) My question is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs. Melbourne's rental crisis is out of control. Rents are up \$200 a week since before the pandemic, so when will the minister finally make unlimited rent rises illegal? Roughly half of my electorate rents, and that is roughly double the state average. In the last year alone, landlords have increased rents by more than 14 per cent, nearly four times CPI. A recent report confirmed there are zero rental properties or even share house rooms affordable for people on youth allowance, yet last week's Labor budget delivered no rent freeze, no laws to free up Airbnbs for renters and no new public housing. If Labor instituted a rent freeze, renters would save \$2500, so when will this government finally listen to the Greens and institute a rent freeze and caps?

**Pascoe Vale electorate**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (14:55): (637) My constituency question is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. How will the Victorian Labor government's \$950,000 investment to support the Bachar Houli Foundation help empower local young people through education, health, wellbeing and sporting outcomes? Bachar Houli is of course a legendary AFL player with a career spanning almost 15 years across Essendon and Richmond, playing 230 games and winning three premierships. Bachar is also known as the first devout Muslim to have played the game at the highest level. Whilst he may have retired in 2021, Bachar's incredible work to inspire the next generation of young people very much continues through his foundation and the Islamic College of Sport. Established in 2012, the foundation has worked to develop young leaders through employment, education, sport and active recreation pathways. Starting off with just 50 participants in 2012, the program has grown to support 35,000 young people since, and inherent in the foundation's approach is to always inspire and embed social cohesion and harmony amongst young people. I was pleased to have welcomed the foundation and college to Coburg City Oval, their new campus, officially opened by the Minister for Youth in November 2023, to meet with foundation director Ali Fahour and college principal Hassan Ellahibi to discuss the foundation's work and future opportunities.

**Rowville electorate**

**Kim WELLS** (Rowville) (14:56): (638) My question is to the Minister for Education. When will Carrington Primary School receive its \$10 million major upgrade funding? At the last state election the state Labor Party, through the minister, Legislative Council members and the Rowville Labor candidate, proudly stood in front of Carrington Primary School in Knoxville, along with the principal, teachers and excited parents, to announce a \$10 million major upgrade. Now we find that the Carrington school community has been misled by the state Labor government. The Rowville electorate has not received one cent of any major school funding upgrade since Labor took office in 2014 –

10 years of zero funding for any school. Then in 2022 Labor promised \$10 million for Carrington Primary School, and we find out now that they cannot deliver. How pathetic is that.

### **Sunbury electorate**

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (14:57): (639) My question is for the Deputy Premier, an outstanding Minister for Education. Minister, when is the expected date of completion of this government's upgrade of Gladstone Park Secondary School in my electorate? As the minister would know, this outstanding local school received more than \$11 million in last week's budget for the next stage of their master plan. This is of course a significant investment and builds upon a strong and solid record of investment in capital school building projects right across the electorate. The staff, students, parents and friends of the school work incredibly hard, and this funding has been incredibly well received. The project now sits with the Victorian School Building Authority, and I look forward to seeing the next steps as we continue to get on and build the Education State right across our community.

### ***Bills***

#### **Appropriation (2024–2025) Bill 2024**

#### **Appropriation (Parliament 2024–2025) Bill 2024**

#### ***Second reading***

#### **Debate resumed.**

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:58): Before the break there was an Acting Chair in the chair, who was doing a great job. The member for Wendouree was in the chair, and she was doing a great job chairing the Parliament. I was saying at the time that I thought that the budget-in-reply speech from the member for Sandringham – who is, as I said, a lovely guy – was one of the most low-energy budget replies, full of no policy at all and bereft of any new ideas. I was reflecting on the fact that his backbench were all either on their phones sending off emails or heads down. I note the member for Mornington in the chamber, who does a good job as Opposition Whip. I reckon he had a tough job herding all of the backbenchers in there to listen to that particular speech and that contribution.

Then I reflected on the fact that the Leader of the Nationals got up and gave a pretty solid Leader of the Nationals performance. He raised issues on behalf of regional Victoria and I think brought things back onto an even keel. He talked about infrastructure and infrastructure funding. I want to come to that, because there are a couple of graphs in the budget papers – budget paper 4, pages 4 and 5 – that I want to just reflect on. The fact is that from 2014–15 to 2022–23 Victoria received about \$8.3 billion less than its population share of infrastructure funding from the federal government. That is a significant budget black hole in terms of infrastructure funding, predominantly through that period when we had the Tony Abbott, Malcolm Turnbull and Scott Morrison governments in Canberra. That graph on page 5 shows that through those years the average difference in terms of a per capita amount was around about \$100 per capita. That means that in terms of infrastructure spending, Victoria has had to do all of the heavy lifting through that period.

But also, before coming to some of the positive aspects of this budget, I just want to reflect on our friends in the Greens political party. On budget day last week the Greens went straight out of this place and said that this budget delivered no new money for public housing, affordable housing, social housing, community housing – nada. I was shocked at that because I have had some experience in the housing portfolio and I was pretty sure that this budget would have had some housing funding. But no, the Greens are quite adamant that there was no money for public housing, affordable housing, social housing, community housing – nada, to use the word that was actually used. So I had a flick through the budget papers and lo and behold without too much trouble I found on page 150 of budget paper 4 a table listing new projects under Homes Victoria and then another table that flows onto

page 151 with existing projects where there is funding delivered for housing in this coming financial year in this budget.

Just to run through those, there are housing upgrades 2024–25, \$24 million; housing renewals, \$70 million; public housing revitalisation program, \$72 million; Regional Housing Fund, regional, \$200 million; the social housing accelerator program, which I acknowledge is federal money coming through this budget, \$134 million; Big Housing Build, \$398 million over the next year; family violence refuge redevelopment, \$10 million; Homes Victoria ground lease model, which is all about renewing old, run-down social housing that provides more social housing for people who need it, \$82 million for ground lease 1, ground lease 2 is \$290 million in the budget papers; homelessness, \$24 million; public housing renewal program, \$10 million; refuge and crisis accommodation, \$13 million. The list adds up to some \$1.3 billion of investment in social and affordable and public housing. So there is either a case here where the Greens have deliberately misled Victorians about what is in the budget and what is not in the budget, or they cannot read the budget papers. I think it is important, even for minor parties, that there is a level of honesty or accountability in terms of the representations they make to the Victorian people about what is and what is not in a budget paper.

In terms of the actual budget and the outcomes for my community, and I will come to my portfolio areas in a moment, the budget has delivered funding as we have committed for Bundoora Secondary College. That program started last year, an upgrade program. The bulk of the funding is contained in this year's budget, so that school will see the upgrade continue. I was out at the school last week to see the slab being poured for the new science building, and so that school is very excited about the work that is being undertaken. It is a school that runs a great agriculture program for a metropolitan, suburban school – a really good agriculture program to encourage young people to look at different careers in agriculture and agricultural sciences. That is on top of funding that we have provided already to Bundoora Primary School for a complete renewal of that school and a complete renewal of Greensborough College. Watsonia Primary has had an upgrade, Watsonia Heights has had a new building built, Watsonia North Primary has a building being constructed as we speak and Streeton Primary School, that I work very closely with the member for Ivanhoe on, has also had an upgrade.

I was really pleased to see the budget contain funding for a pedestrian crossing on Diamond Creek Road, which is a boundary road that I share with the member for Eltham. Unfortunately there was a young woman, a girl, hit by a car some time ago and quite seriously injured and then a further accident where the person was less injured, but obviously there is a problem there. The local community were very concerned and petitioned both me and the member for Eltham. We had a number of meetings with the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and are really happy to see a budget outcome for installation of a signalised pedestrian crossing on Diamond Creek Road as well.

I am rapt to see the \$400 school payment. I think that is going to help many families in my electorate and of course right around state to take the pressure off household budgets, particularly when it comes to things like buying those essentials for sending your kids to school.

My local hospitals are both outside my electorate, but the ones that my community relies on include the Austin hospital, which of course many years ago was saved from privatisation from the Kennett government by a Labor campaign and the incoming Bracks government. We have continued to invest in the redevelopment of that hospital, and the next tranche of that sees this budget containing \$41 million in the coming year across a \$275 million capital program of redeveloping the emergency department there. The Northern Hospital has \$48 million of an \$812 million capital program for a new emergency department there. So what we are seeing is a Labor government continuing to invest in the services that people need in the northern suburbs of Melbourne and for my community in particular.

In terms of my portfolio there are some good outcomes in this budget for my precincts portfolio, including funding for work we are doing in the Arden precinct. Very shortly we will be going out to EOI for that precinct. That is a precinct that will obviously benefit from the opening of the Metro rail tunnel a year ahead of schedule in 2025. It is just one stop away from the incredible Parkville precinct,

an incredible innovation precinct. People will effectively be able to, as someone said to me, go to bed in Arden and go to work in Parkville, a wonderful opportunity brought to life because of the investment in that Metro rail tunnel. Of course the Arden precinct will also involve the significant delivery of housing. I think that is a really important aspect in terms of the targets we have got in our housing statement. East Werribee precinct is a really important opportunity as well, with 600-plus hectares of government land. Through the planning work we have done we are starting to roll out the development of that particular precinct. That is off the back of investment around that precinct: three level crossings removed from that area; the Wyndham law courts, a \$271 million investment in a justice precinct; the Werribee zoo upgrade; the new Wyndham police station; the Sneydes Road interchange, which is a \$45 million project; and the expansion and upgrades to the Werribee Mercy Hospital. The investment in the planning work for these precincts is critical to unlocking the housing that sits within those particular precincts.

To move on to my creative industries portfolio, Victoria is undoubtedly the cultural capital of our nation. It is a wonderful \$38 billion part of our economy. One in 11 workers in this state work in the creative industries, so it is an important part of our economy. We have invested some \$3 billion since coming to government into our creative industries. Two billion dollars of that is in infrastructure, and a large portion of that is in our \$1.7 billion arts precinct transformation. That is a complete redevelopment of our arts precinct. If you go down to the arts precinct in Melbourne today, you will see the first stage of those works being completed now. The second stage is to follow shortly after that. That will see the new Fox: NGV Contemporary gallery built – a wonderful contemporary gallery will be constructed there. There will be a large public realm between the new contemporary gallery, the existing NGV International and the arts centre. The Arts Centre Melbourne of course is being redeveloped as part of the first stage of the works, and we have got the wonderful State Theatre closed at the moment while renovations take place. It is sad to see it closed for three years, but it will open bigger and better than ever in three years time.

I mentioned the National Gallery of Victoria. It is one of our wonderful cultural agencies which are supported with funding through this budget. The National Gallery of Victoria of course hosted the recent successful *Triennial* exhibition over the summer months. The Winter Masterpieces exhibition is *Pharaoh*, which again will be a blockbuster no doubt, and then of course there is the recently announced summer exhibition *Yayoi Kusama*, which is going to be another drawcard no doubt.

The State Library Victoria is smashing visitation records off the back of the \$88 million redevelopment and refurbishment of that library. In the refurbishment of both the library and the national gallery and arts precinct transformation I want to highlight the important role that many philanthropists have made through generous donations to help support those capital upgrades. The state library is no different. Important contributions have been made by philanthropists, and that has seen our state library become the third most visited library in the world. So it is a very popular and well used library because of the programs that are run in that library because of the investments that have been made through the refurbishment. At Museum Victoria there is the wonderful *Titanic* exhibition. They continue to do great work. Then there are other great organisations like ACMI, the Wheeler Centre and so on.

The other aspect of this package that I am really pleased to talk about is that I was with the member for Northcote recently in her electorate to announce the \$10 million festivals and gigs package supporting our live music sector. We were at a wonderful live music venue in the member for Northcote's electorate. She is a strong supporter of that sector. The work that we have done here is off the back of a lot of policy work that I know the member for Footscray has been involved in over the journey. To be able to announce that funding means that organisations right now can apply for funding for festivals to support them. And of course to reach our 10,000 gigs over four years commitment, people will be able to apply for venues to run up to 20 gigs a year. That is about supporting our live music sector while it is going through a tough time at the moment. That is on top of \$2 million that we provided for Support Act, which provides welfare to musos and people in the music industry who are doing it tough, and \$2 million for our SongMakers program, which is run by APRA AMCOS, a

national body, effectively about songwriting in schools and teaching kids in schools about songwriting and getting them involved in that as well. So there is a lot happening in the cultural and creative space at the moment. I could go through a long list. I will not take up any more of that time.

I will finish with the comedy festival, which is a wonderful festival run here in Victoria, one of the three big comedy festivals in the world – they would say probably the biggest in the world, but certainly one of the biggest in the world, one of the big three. It has finished here in Melbourne this year, but it is now on its regional roadshow. What I love about the comedy festival is that they do it big in Melbourne, and then they hit all of the regional towns on this roadshow, which means it is accessible to Victorians right across the state, proudly supported with funding from the Allan Labor government.

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (15:11): After a decade of Labor, life is certainly getting harder, and if you actually went out there and spoke to people and you said to them, ‘Are you better off now than you were 10 years ago?’, overwhelmingly you would get people saying that they are doing it tough, things are a lot more expensive and they are struggling to make ends meet. So it is very clear that this budget delivers on one thing, and that is Labor is wasting and mismanaging money, and Victorians are all paying the price. We see that each and every time. We heard it today from the Treasurer, who actually said in question time that debt is not a problem, and we should just keep on spending and spending and spending. What this government has got themselves into is an absolute debt crisis.

We have a triple threat by this government, an absolute triple threat. The first one is a housing crisis, and we know people are struggling to get into a home. We know even trying to get a rental, there are queues around the corner of hundreds of people to find a rental. This government is doing absolutely nothing, except for introducing more taxes. We have over 20 property taxes that have been introduced by this government since they came into power in the last decade. So we know that the only way this government sees for themselves to try to get out of trouble and out of debt is to tax themselves out of trouble and tax themselves out of debt. But is that happening? Is that ultimately what we are seeing? No, that is not what we are seeing, because debt keeps on continuing to rise. We have seen that in terms of what we are currently paying for debt, the highest amount of debt of anywhere in the nation – in fact, more debt than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined. It just continues to rise, and Victorians are all paying the price for it.

If you look at the near-on \$187 billion worth of debt – almost \$200 billion; we are heading that way – what does that mean? That is \$26 million a day for each and every Victorian – \$26 million a day just to pay the interest bill. Could you imagine if you had a credit card, and you racked up that much debt to a point where your interest bill was causing you such a problem that you had to sell things just to be able to pay off the credit card? We have lots of products at the moment where banks will say to you, ‘We’ll consolidate all of your debt into one credit card and just roll it over to the next one.’ Ultimately that is what this Treasurer is doing. His debt is not a problem, we will roll over the credit card, but ultimately we are all paying for it – \$26 million a day. If you look at that, the result of spending like there is no tomorrow – absolutely this government is spending like there is no tomorrow, that is what they have been doing for a decade – is that Victorians have been paying for it, and they will to continue to in the cost of living, because what that means is all the basic costs continue to rise. For example, we have seen a 9 per cent increase in food costs, so when you go to the supermarkets you are paying 9 per cent more than you were a year ago. A 12 per cent increase in housing – that is because of a building supplies shortage and the higher cost of labour, particularly with the Big Build, which I will get to shortly. And ultimately all of this taxation means less housing stock and more costs.

If you look at electricity, we have had a 28 per cent increase in electricity costs. The Minister for Energy and Resources keeps talking about prices going down, down, down. I have not met one Victorian that says to me they are paying less for their energy today than they did a year ago, not one. So this energy minister must be in fairyland. And we know that the energy minister’s absolute solution for energy costs is to turn off gas – no more gas – and ultimately that is going to affect so many people

in terms of having a supply of energy and being able to make a choice. It will cost all Victorians more. On top of that we are seeing a 27 per cent increase in gas prices, a 22 per cent increase in insurance costs and, because of the cost of living, a 22 per cent increase in services from Vinnies. I spoke to the Salvation Army the other day, and they were saying to me that they are seeing more people coming to them for help now than they have ever seen before. These are not people that are unemployed, these are people that have jobs but still cannot make ends meet. They need food vouchers to top up their budgets simply because their costs do not meet their revenue. That is what this government does absolutely not understand.

We have seen in this budget such an issue when it comes to blowouts, such an increase when it comes to health. We have got a new health tax, which means visiting the GP will cost you more each and every time – \$20 more to go and visit the GP. People cannot afford that. People cannot afford basic insurance. People cannot afford basic health. Ambulance costs are going up. We have seen cancer research funding going down. We have a reputation in terms of being world leaders in research, particularly cancer research, but we have a \$50 million cut to medical research. This is atrocious, particularly when we are spending so much money on so many other things. We are wasting and mismanaging money, yet we will not put vital money into things like cancer research.

Transport is an absolute joke. This government is absolutely determined on their Big Build, which is resulting in a big bill that all Victorians are now paying the price for. We have seen that with the pet project of the Suburban Rail Loop. The SRL is \$216 billion and counting. \$216 billion – what does that buy? \$216 billion buys \$83,000 per household that Victorians would have to deal with the cost-of-living crisis. \$83,000 would buy a whole lot of things. If you look at \$83,000, which is what SRL will cost just for one small sector of the eastern suburbs at the expense of the state, let us just have a look at this SRL in terms of what \$83,000 is: rent for a year, \$27,000 for metro Melbourne; a child in government school for a year, \$6000; public transport using your Myki, \$2700; and an entire year's worth of energy, \$1300. If you add all of that up, you are still going to have near on \$40,000 left after paying for all of those things in your budget. You could pay effectively three years worth of grocery bills for each and every Victorian household just for the cost of the Suburban Rail Loop. And get this: if the government wants a transport solution, \$83,000 per household equates to two Teslas for every home. Each home could be equipped with a couple of Teslas to travel wherever they like, save on the environment and give two people cars. If you want to go and look at other vehicles, you could probably get yourself four vehicles for the average home if you wanted to. I am not suggesting that is what we do. What I am suggesting is the huge amount of waste on the Suburban Rail Loop means all Victorians are paying the price for this project.

On top of that, nobody agrees that this is a good idea – the Auditor-General does not, Infrastructure Victoria says it is a dud of an idea. Even the federal government have fallen short of providing the funds. We are all looking very eagerly tonight to see how much money the federal government are going to give the Victorian government to top up the Suburban Rail Loop, because if they fail then this government is absolutely, for sure, on the hook for money that it simply cannot afford and this will be another project that will not be delivered under this government. We saw the Commonwealth Games scrapped, we saw the airport rail scrapped, and now the Suburban Rail Loop – a big question mark. We know that because, if you have a look at this budget, it talks about 'TBC' in terms of the forward estimates – to be confirmed, to be cancelled? Who knows. But this is a pet project completely unfunded, completely uncoded and completely focused on the government's intent to win a couple of seats at the expense of hurting each and every Victorian.

This is not a budget that is helping families. This is a budget that is absolutely hurting families. We know how much this is really hurting when it comes to cost of living. One of my interns, Isabella, has been looking at some of the budget. We have been talking about some of this cost-of-living stuff. Even the cost to students of going in to university each and every day could be 40 bucks a week – that is 40 bucks a week that it is costing them in terms of cost of living and those expenses, the basics for families and the money that people are paying at the moment. We are the highest taxing state in the

nation when it comes to taxation. We have got the highest costs. We have got businesses leaving the state. We have got zero business confidence. We have got more taxation. We have got 55 new taxes since the government came into power 10 years ago – 55 new taxes, when the government said that when it came into power it would not introduce any more. This is a government that is so focused on trying to tax its way out of trouble that it is ultimately hurting each and every Victorian and each and every small business. People are really, really struggling under a government that simply cannot manage money, and Victorians are all paying the price for it.

Let us delve into my electorate of Caulfield. I watched everybody in the chamber, and as soon as the budget papers were released and they received their copies they all went to their electorates and they said, ‘Great. What’s in it for Waverley?’, ‘What’s in it for Box Hill?’, ‘What’s in it for Bentleigh?’, and I looked for what is in it for Caulfield. I thought there was maybe a typo or maybe the Treasurer had just left it off by accident, but I could not find a single thing – nothing. This is a situation where the government – particularly in a cost-of-living crisis, particularly in a debt crisis – needs to deliver right across the state, not the Suburban Rail Loop for one section at the expense of everybody else but projects that are going to support the state.

I looked at a number of projects. We did our work, we spoke to our constituents, we went and got them to put submissions in to the government. We only put forward really important projects that we thought needed to be funded. We have a Caulfield Grammarians senior women’s team that have change rooms that predate the 1950s; they are really, really old change rooms. They are not fit for anybody. You would not put anyone in these change rooms. All we wanted was a basic upgrade of the change rooms – nothing, absolutely zero, absolutely bupkis. We had a similar situation when it came to our bowls club. Our bowls club does not even have facilities for disability access – Caulfield Park Bowling Club. Again, this is not squillions of dollars; this is hundreds of thousands of dollars to vitally upgrade this bowls club to provide disability access – zero, donuts. The same thing applies to Caulfield Junior College – nothing, absolutely nothing, zero.

Caulfield South Primary School was promised an \$11 million upgrade before the last election. Everyone was very excited about the \$11 million upgrade, an idea that we put forward, where my opposition in Caulfield said, ‘Yep, we’re going to back that.’ It was a lick and a promise – let down, with zero. Caulfield South Primary are still waiting for that money that was promised. This is what this government does: it goes out with big fat promises and gives big fat nothings, and unfortunately we are all paying for it.

The government spends money like there is no tomorrow on its mates, spends money on big, big infrastructure where it does not fit the state, and Melbourne’s north and Melbourne’s west completely miss out on infrastructure projects, all because of things like the Suburban Rail Loop. I say this is a government that is completely about blowouts and mismanagement.

I will just come back to transport and infrastructure in the last minute or so that I have got – transport blowouts and the SRL. The former Minister for Major Projects the current Premier oversaw the North East Link – that has blown out by \$21.2 billion; the West Gate Tunnel, \$4.7 billion over budget and three years late; and the Metro Tunnel, \$4 billion over budget. These now equate to \$40 billion – \$40 billion worth of budget blowouts that have been overseen by the former Minister for Transport Infrastructure and major projects minister, now the Premier. This simply says you have a Premier in control now that could not manage money when this Premier was the transport infrastructure and major projects minister. She is now for certain in the main seat, and those projects have continued to blow out, so much so that Geelong fast rail – gone; airport rail – we are not going to see that in our lifetime; and the *Western Rail Plan* – gone. We have got people that are missing out in Victoria. This is not a fair budget. This is not a budget that is helping families. This is a budget that is hurting families, and Victorians are all paying the price for Labor’s mismanagement.

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (15:26): All right. Good to go. Excellent.

*Members interjecting.*

**Jackson TAYLOR:** Sorry, I do not look at the cameras myself normally. No-one is going to be watching this one.

It is a great pleasure to rise to speak in support of the Treasurer's 10th budget. Can I say from the very outset congratulations to the Treasurer on his 10th anniversary, his 10th budget, a fantastic budget that continues to deliver for all Victorians. A big thankyou to him and to his team, who are always incredible. And of course right across government all government departments would have been involved and would have had a great level of input, so thank you to everyone for their input into this year's budget, which absolutely is another Labor budget that delivers at its core for health care, for education, for transport and for jobs.

I do not normally pick up on the stuff that is said opposite, but I think the member for Caulfield was talking about delivering things in certain parts of the state. We are delivering the West Gate Tunnel, we are delivering the Metro Tunnel and a massive record investment into regional roads. We are building a hundred schools. We have got the North East Link. We have got the Suburban Rail Loop. We have got all this record spending, whether it is in metro or regional areas. Even when you look past that, you just have to look at what our base level of funding is compared to what those opposite had when they were in government, it does not even come close. We are absolutely investing more into Victoria in every part of the state. The previous member also said something about giving money to mates or something like that. I am pretty sure they were level crossings. David is a good mate of mine, clearly, because we removed level crossings in his electorate. I know that we are investing in every single electorate in this state, because that is what this government is about. We are about fairness and we are about delivering outcomes for every single Victorian and every single Victorian family. This budget is absolutely no different.

We have seen a big feature of it is, importantly, that people are doing it tough out there. It is a story that is spoken about in every single electorate. This is not a Labor- or Liberal- or Greens-specific thing, this is every single electorate. People are doing it tough. I am sure the federal government will have some responses to that tonight in their federal budget that they have already foreshadowed, and that is a good thing. They have got obviously more levers to pull. They do have a much larger expenditure than any individual state government. They have obviously a lot more revenue coming in. I know that every single Victorian and indeed Australian will be looking to Jim Chalmers, the federal Treasurer, and the federal Labor government. And I know that they are going to have some very good news to make sure we continue to help Victorians and Australians through what is a difficult period.

But our government in this recent budget announced and have funded really, really important things that everyday Victorians will have relied upon – for example, the \$400 school saving bonus. I have already spoken to a handful of principals about this, and they are absolutely pleased that this is just one less thing for many families in their school communities to have to worry about. This will help with the cost of camps, uniforms and a whole range of things. I know that this has been very well received and will go a long way to helping families who are doing it really tough.

We know – the Premier mentioned it as well today, and others – about tripling our free Glasses for Kids program, and there are more vouchers to cover the costs of kids' sport, which is incredibly important. We continue to invest record amounts of funding into education. I think that is the single most important thing that this government does. We absolutely are the Education State. That is something that I am incredibly proud of. Of course it is more than just numbers and results. You just look at the work that they are doing in Victorian schools – the amazing work of our teachers – and you know that they are absolutely second to none. I am very, very proud of our teachers and very proud of our schools, our leadership teams and our support staff, and our government backs them in. We have got the continuation of the tutor learning initiative. This is something that started during the COVID

days, and it is one of the most popular programs I have ever seen rolled out to our schools. It is incredibly important work, making sure kids who need help in the classroom are getting that important one-on-one attention and support. Our disability inclusion package, which is rolling out, has already come out into the outer eastern region that I am proud to represent, in Knox. That is making a huge difference, supporting more children with disability in the classroom, making sure they get the attention that they need and deserve.

When it comes to education, we are continuing to build schools. Of course we know the history and the context of – when I was six or seven years old – all the school closures. It was a little bit before my time, but it was a very sad feature of politics and of our state. That has meant a lot of work for our government to build lots of new schools – 100 new schools. This is a huge task. We are well on the way to delivering them. Of course it is not just about the new schools, it is about providing the school facilities that we know our kids deserve. From my perspective, in the seat of Bayswater that is my job; my job is to advocate for the electorate of Bayswater, which covers fantastic suburbs like Wantirna, Bayswater, The Basin, Boronia, Wantirna South and Ferntree Gully. We love the Gully. We love all of them. Just to clarify that, we love all of them; I will just preface that, absolutely.

**Steve McGhie** interjected.

**Jackson TAYLOR:** No, the Gully is a solid area. We have invested record amounts into school capital infrastructure in the electorate since I was elected in 2018. That has been done through priorities, and that is through the budget. A government states its priorities through its budgets, and we have invested, time and time again, into schools in my local electorate – in fact around \$90 million into capital infrastructure.

**Mathew Hilakari** interjected.

**Jackson TAYLOR:** Absolutely, member for Point Cook. We have just started construction on Wantirna College. I think it is the single biggest investment into education and infrastructure in my electorate. It is a double-court, competition-grade gym and new performing arts spaces. It is a school of some 1500 kids, and it absolutely deserves every single cent of it. I was out there with principal Carrie Wallis and the students, and local elder Thane Garvey, to kick-off construction – a really, really wonderful day, so well done. They do everything so well, Wantirna College. They had engraved shovels. I felt bad chucking them into the ground. But they gave them a wash, I am sure. We have started Wantirna College. We have just opened –

**Mathew Hilakari** interjected.

**Jackson TAYLOR:** That is a good question. I am coming to that.

**Mathew Hilakari** interjected.

**Jackson TAYLOR:** Yes, true. We have just opened up the new middle and senior school buildings at Bayswater Secondary College. We have opened up the new central learning hub at Boronia West Primary School. We have just opened up the new STEM and music and arts performing space at Fairhills High School. We are about to open the new senior learning building at Templeton Primary School. It is a beautiful school. We will re-use the shovel for Templeton Primary. I have been told that the building at Templeton Primary has been nicknamed the White House. As you could guess, it is white. I guess that makes Principal McKinlay President McKinlay. I am now just going to refer to him as Mr President; I think he will enjoy that secretly – actually not even secretly. I am very happy to share a copy of this *Hansard* with him, and I know he will get a kick out of it. He is also a fellow Richmond supporter, so I love him that much more.

When it comes to education, we are absolutely doing plenty of work in my electorate of Bayswater. From last year's budget, in the out years, we are continuing to fund the upgrades we promised at the last election. We are getting on and we are delivering the huge upgrades at Bayswater South Primary School, a fantastic school – one of only a few truly bilingual schools in the state, something to be very,

very proud of. I am very proud to have them in my electorate. Principal Bret Mottram, significantly a great bloke and a great advocate, worked tooth and nail to secure this funding commitment, and I am really, really proud to see that. We will hopefully see work kicking off later this year, in quarter four.

We have got the new oval and the new running track at Kent Park Primary School in the Gully, Mr Kieran Denver doing the fancy footwork out there. And we are also upgrading St Joseph's Primary School in Boronia, a fantastic Catholic primary school in my electorate, and I am very proud that we upgraded that Catholic primary school. We have upgraded St Bernadette's Primary School as well. We are absolutely delivering for many, many schools. I believe nearly every single school has had capital infrastructure upgrades, something I am very proud of.

When it comes to education, this budget, when we also talk about putting money back in the pockets of Victorians, does something incredible: it continues to fund a revolutionary, game-changing program in free kinder. This is putting up to \$2500 per child each and every single year back into the pockets of everyday Victorian families, I know making a huge difference. We are continuing to support workforces. We know we are going to need more early-years educators, and that is something we continue to work on with the sector as we are continuing to reform this space to deliver more support moving to our pre-prep program. Of course we have now got our 15 hours of three-year-old kindergarten, a fantastic initiative from this government as well.

When it comes to health care, in this budget we continue to deliver record funding, so \$11 billion for our healthcare system, helping our hospitals care for their patients, and of course that is in a whole range of different ways, whether it is supporting our nurses and midwives or whether it is training them up with free degrees. That initiative is incredibly popular as well as, I might add, the free degrees for secondary teachers. I know it is encouraging so many more people into the teaching field in our universities as the Deputy Premier has mentioned in this place a number of times – a really, really fantastic initiative of this government. We are continuing to recruit thousands of new healthcare workers. A bit of a health care and education sort of thing at the same time is our dental vans. I have visited a number of schools and seen the dental vans in action. This is making a huge difference, again helping to put money back in families' pockets. This is around \$400 per child per year, so for families that have two or three children this is hundreds if not thousands of dollars of savings each year over the course of the journey in their life in school. We know that poor oral health care can be a huge leading cause of other significant illnesses later in life, so I am very glad that we have brought back dental vans. They are now in action right across the state. They are visiting schools right cross my area in Knox, they are being very well received and they are doing a fantastic job in helping that little bit extra from a cost-of-living perspective.

I am really proud we are very soon to start major construction as well on the Angliss Hospital. This is a fantastic local hospital in my electorate. It is some 84 years old – I think it is about 83 or 84 – and of course our government through its budget have delivered a major upgrade of this hospital. It will mean we are upgrading to have more and newer beds, more and newer elective surgery suites and – I will get this right – a new central sterilisation services department. It took me a few goes to get that one right; I have got it now. I am good.

**Mathew Hilakari** interjected.

**Jackson TAYLOR:** Thank you, member for Point Cook. Of course we are delivering other amenities as well, and this continues and builds on a former stage of that hospital as well that we did get on and deliver, and I know this will mean a lot to the fantastic staff down there. You can talk to anyone in the community in Bayswater, and I have got to tell you it is hard to get anything universal in life, particularly in politics and in policy and in health care, but pretty close to 100 per cent of people who have experienced the Angliss Hospital will talk about the staff and the care they receive, including me and my partner, being absolutely exemplary care, and I am really, really proud that we are delivering for them.

When it comes to health care, it is not just about the Angliss. We have also delivered the new aged care facility – 120 beds. Victoria absolutely has not shied away from public aged care. We have the highest take-up of public aged care of any state in this country from recollection, and it is something we should absolutely be proud of. I know at the last election we also made some other commitments about public aged care. I was there with the then Premier when we made those announcements. I think it is absolutely fantastic that our state and our government continue to back in public aged care. We provide first-class facilities in this place in Wantirna. It is absolutely incredible, and I am very, very proud that we are getting on and have delivered that, in addition to the works at Angliss Hospital.

We have now opened the new McMahons Road and Burwood Highway intersection, another thing funded out of a Labor budget delivering for transport. This has made a trip home on Burwood Highway safer. It is also something that, let us just say, others talked about for a long time, a very, very long time – lots of talk and not a lot of action, I must say, if I am being completely honest with you. But we have gotten on and delivered that intersection, a massive, massive project. Big thanks to Major Road Projects Victoria.

Of course Metro Tunnel comes online in 2025 and West Gate Tunnel is not far off. I drove in on the Eastern Freeway this morning – North East Link is really taking shape. They have got those barriers up in the median strip. It will be completed in 2028. I have just seen the designs for the Suburban Rail Loop stations, the five stations – is it five, member for Box Hill?

**Paul Hamer** interjected.

**Jackson TAYLOR:** Six – there you go, excellent. Beautiful, excellent. He has got a station at Box Hill. He is across the detail; we love it. It is all happening.

I am very, very proud to support this year's budget, a fantastic Labor budget, making sure we are delivering for Victorians, delivering for Victorian families, delivering on the things that they voted for, the things that they want to see delivered, and I not only commend the Treasurer but I commend this bill to the house.

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (15:41): It is always wonderful to hear the other contributions in the house when we are speaking on legislation but particularly when we are seeing the rephrasing of the budget. It is a much different response from what they put in words and the reaction that we saw when the budget was handed down by the Treasurer last Tuesday. I cannot recall any time in my 10 years of watching Treasurer Pallas hand down his budget where there has been no standing ovation. There was no big backslap, no shaking of hands, no celebrations. There were a lot of gritted teeth. I hear there were tears in the party room because people were being told, 'You're getting nothing,' and the backbenchers are starting to think, 'I'm in a marginal seat, I've got nothing going on here. How on earth am I going to resell bad news to my electorate? This is not what I voted for.'

But they should know at the end of the day that when you see a budget paper, whatever it says on the front is probably the biggest lie that is going to be told on budget day. I do not think that this poor little girl ever thought that she would be linked to this budget that just hands down more debt for her to pay down into the future, because we all know what should have been on the front cover of this year's budget paper is that Labor cannot manage money and cannot manage projects, and Victorians are paying the price. This is the problem that little girls like this will be paying for into the future because we have seen in these budget papers this Labor government turning it up. I will tell you what is turning up: the debt levels in this state. That is the big issue that I was just about to refer to, that we are looking at Victoria getting to record debt levels of \$188 billion.

I want to get a visual for this, because I think it is very, very difficult for anybody to understand how much money that actually is. Just for perspective, if you put \$1 into a piggy bank every second of every minute of every hour, it would take about 11½ days to save up \$1 million. Now, \$1 billion, maybe you do not think it is that much more. Well, I would just like to visualise this. How long do you think it would take to get \$1 billion in your piggy bank?

*Members interjecting.*

**Emma KEALY:** Try nearly 32 years if you put \$1 in that piggy bank every second of every minute of every hour every day. How much interest are we looking at paying every single day today? How much did the Victorian government pay to the big banks just in interest today? \$15 million. Let us just think for a little while. What does that mean? For little girls like this, it means that they could have a new wing on their school built; \$15 million will do a fabulous reno on a school.

It is something that we are not getting for local schools across the whole of the state. In fact this budget paper, budget paper 4, shows how far behind the government is in delivering on what it has promised. You might say that if you are pushing out and not building a school when you said you would build it before the election, you have one thing you say before the election and you do something else after. We have got so many broken promises. There are 10 pages of schools that have had promises to them broken by the Labor government on when they said they would build a school and when they are actually going to deliver it – and who knows when that might be pushed out further.

I notice there is a little bit of an eerie silence in the chamber all of a sudden, because a lot of those promised schools are in Labor seats. These people now are going back to look people in their community in the eye and say, ‘Well, I may have told you you were going to get this school, but that was before the election when I needed your vote. Now it comes to the actual reality, we’re going to break a promise. But don’t blame me, I promise I tried very, very hard in the party room. I’ve tried my best. I won’t call the government out publicly, though, will I? I won’t put it out on social media that I’m fighting for my community.’ No, they cannot do that because they know their preselection is at risk and they will not have a future. That next promotion that comes through might not be for them. They might not get that parliamentary secretary role or they might not get that ministerial role. Look what happened to the poor member for Mordialloc. He has been looked over how many times now? Thirty-eight times, and simply because he was willing to speak out. It is an absolute disgrace. Maybe this is why the Labor government have not replaced that parl sec role that became vacant when the member for South Barwon was sacked from his parl sec role and put over in creep corner. We have not seen another announcement yet, have we, and that is just keeping all of those backbenchers quiet. Make sure you do not speak out about the truth of this budget that hurts Victorian families. We know that Labor cannot manage money and they cannot manage projects, and Victorians are paying the price.

**A member** interjected.

**Emma KEALY:** I think we are getting very, very close to the bone here. How are Victorians paying the price? This is a very important point. Time and time again – and we have heard in earlier contributions today about record spending by the government – this is the problem: it is record spending and it is continued record spending, but we also have got record waste. We have got record project blowouts, we have got record interest payments to the big banks and we have got a record number of people waiting for hospital care.

We have got a record number of people turning up with mental health issues who cannot get help in their community health centres because the mental health locals are being kicked way on down the road – maybe up to 15 years, is what the local sector is being told. We are seeing mental health presentations at the highest level ever at our emergency departments, but people cannot get their support on that day, so they are coming back within 48 hours. We have got record numbers of people presenting to an emergency department who have already been at that hospital 48 hours earlier with the same mental health issues. Sadly, we are seeing this follow through in a horrific way, and in Victoria we also have the highest suicide rate on record.

It was very, very disturbing to hear today, in the other place, the Minister for Mental Health admitting that cost-of-living pressures were driving people to need more mental health support. Why then have we seen a \$90 million cut to the mental health budget line in this year’s budget? Why then have we

seen a key component of the royal commission's recommendation for mental health locals cut, which are the community supports that help keep people out of hospital, that make their mental health well and that make them able to contribute to their community, to their work and to their family and their friends. Instead Labor are kicking that down the curb. But they are not only kicking that part down the curb, they are holding on to the mental health levy. The mental health levy is actually projected to increase and increase and increase, while the mental health recommendations are paused and put on hold when the demand for our mental health system is only increasing. We are at a terribly horrible position when it comes to mental health supports in the state of Victoria, and that is extremely disturbing.

We look at other metrics of how Victorians are paying the price. If we look at household bills, the things that are really putting pressure on families, they are too scared to open the mailbox because there will be another round of bills in there and they do not know how they will be able to pay that. Electricity bills since Labor have been in government have gone up by 33 per cent. We know that will increase even further as transmission projects are rolled out, and we see that on our power bills as an increase in the poles and wire charges. Gas bills have gone up by 90 per cent since Labor came into government, and that is because they have got an effective ban on gas. We saw the minister walked back from that a little bit today, but we all know it is in black and white, and we have even had a policy announced about it. We have got legislation about it – that there is a ban on new gas connections. That is a ban on gas. This is Labor's policy in Victoria. It does not meet with what the federal Labor government is saying, and it does not match what the Deputy Premier is saying privately either, which is quite interesting.

Registration costs are up 250 per cent. We know people are paying more to go and see their GP, to see their optometrist and to see their mental health specialist, because Labor have imposed a health tax, which is putting pressure on every single part of the health system. We know that in this budget we have seen an increase in the bin tax. People are going to have to pay more to get their bins collected – a 30 per cent increase. I know what that will mean in my local area and in other country areas: we are just going to get more rubbish dumped on the edge of the road. We are already seeing an increased problem around it. This bin tax will just increase that and put more pressure on our environment. There is an increase in the fire services property levy. Those two taxes, the bin tax and the fire services property levy, amount to about \$1 billion. That is \$1 billion that households are going to have to pay for directly. That is what Labor do. They cannot manage money, they cannot manage projects and they pass those costs on, which means that Victorians are ultimately paying the price.

**Peter Walsh** interjected.

**Emma KEALY:** That is three, Peter. We know there are 52 new or increased taxes in Victoria, and in fact 30 of those are property taxes, which is why we see a 17 per cent increase in the average amount of rent paid in Victoria. But it is not just that. For those people who aspire to build a new home, whether it is their first home, whether it is their dream home or whether it is just a house to try and break out of the rental cycle, one-third of what they will pay for that new home will go straight to the government in fees and taxes. That is just a mind-blowing amount. We hear that products are going up – the cost of all of the timber and steel that goes into a house – and we hear about builders charging more. It is not that that is driving up new home costs, it is government fees and taxes, and Victorians are paying the price.

We know that there are so many records that are being broken by the Labor government, but it really does not stack up to the record amount of potholes we have got in country roads. We now are at a point where 91 per cent of our road network is rated at either a poor or a very poor condition. In fact what I hear quite often is, 'Well, we have to pay to make sure that our cars are roadworthy. Why don't we make sure that our roads are carworthy?' As I said, we have got rego fees up, which apparently are supposed to be put back into our roads. It is up 250 per cent, but we have seen a cut of the money that Labor are putting into our roads by 17 per cent over the past four years, so the government are putting less money into our roads, and we see the consequence of that. And of course again Victorians are the

ones paying the price. They are the ones who get their tyres flat, get their rims damaged – even horrific accidents that happen on the way through – and they often cannot claim for them through the road asset management insurance scheme because they are not high enough damage bills. Of course that impacts most of all the people who have got cars that have not got those flash low-profile rims and who are not driving expensive European vehicles. They are the people who Labor supposedly stand up for, but we know that they are the ones feeling the crunch most of all.

That is why I absolutely disagree with this title that we have got on this year's budget, that Labor are 'Helping families'. When you see all of those really good initiatives they said before the budget, like the Best Start, Best Life program, all of those funding initiatives around the early years centres across the state, and you look at budget cuts to child protection – as I said, there are 10 pages of schools that will not be delivered as promised because Labor have not delivered them, and that is in this year's budget.

Families are absolutely front and centre of our communities, but Labor are doing anything but helping families. All they are doing is pushing up the cost of living. They are making sure that they get less for their taxpayer dollar, but more importantly they are putting enormous stress and pressure on individuals and families. As I said, it is something that the Minister for Mental Health actually conceded today – cost-of-living pressures are putting so much mental pressure on individuals in our community. We need to see this turn, because we simply cannot see a government that is full of policy that is putting up cost-of-living pressure, that is putting up the costs for every Victorian. We do not want to see that then cause mental health harms and other health harms.

For all of those reasons we know that Labor cannot manage money and they cannot manage projects, and Victorians are paying the price. The only way we can fix this problem is to take away the opportunities for Labor to continue to spend. We know today the Treasurer said there should be no debt cap, we should just keep on spending for ever and ever and ever. But it is little girls like this who will be paying the price. They will be paying the price not just today but when their kids are growing up and when their grandkids are growing up. That is simply unacceptable, and that is why at the next election we need to make sure every Victorian regains hope in their future, that they see Victoria can be a great place to live, work, study and do business and that they choose to vote for the Liberals and the Nationals at the next election.

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (15:56): I am excited to rise to speak on the Appropriation (2024–2025) Bill 2024 and the Appropriation (Parliament 2024–2025) Bill 2024. Firstly, I would like to congratulate the Treasurer and his team on another excellent budget. It is the Treasurer's 10th budget, and I should congratulate him on that, such a remarkable tenure. The budget is designed to address the diverse needs of our community and pave the way for a brighter future for all Victorians and in particular our families. That is what this budget is directed at. Of course our budget reflects our commitment to ensuring this state is fair and inclusive for Victorians from all backgrounds and from all stages of life.

The Appropriation (Parliament 2024–2025) Bill 2024 allows for the appropriation of funds for agencies such as the core operations of our Parliament, the Parliamentary Budget Office, the Victorian Inspectorate, the Auditor-General, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and of course the Victorian Ombudsman. This essentially means that those hardworking parliamentary staff – our clerks, our catering, the IT services and many more – can be paid. As someone with a trade union background, we want our staff to be paid and paid appropriately and of course we want our independent integrity agencies to continue their important work ensuring the transparency of governance in this state. As a former chair of the Integrity and Oversight Committee, I know how hard those integrity agencies work and the incredible support of the IOC by the great secretariat in the time that I spent there and also I am sure currently. I thank them for all their efforts.

The Appropriation (2024–2025) Bill 2024 allows for the appropriation of funds so the incredible initiatives in the 2024–25 budget can be put into action, and that is what we want to do as the Allan

Labor government. From cost-of-living relief to schools to health care to transport to housing, this budget is about helping families and delivering what all of our communities need.

One of the most crucial investments we are making is in early childhood development. We understand that the first years of a child's life are pivotal in shaping their future. That is why we are proud to announce the continued funding for maternal and child health services. It has been one of those issues that has been raised with me in my electorate. Through universal, enhanced and Aboriginal maternal and child health programs we are certainly ensuring that every Victorian family has access to the support and resources they need during their crucial years – their early years. Again, this funding supports the delivery of the 24/7 maternal and child health line, interpreter services, the baby bundles for all new parents and last year our free kinder program, which saved around 140,000 families up to around \$2500 in fees. This saving helps with the cost of living by ensuring that cost is not a barrier to participation. Our investment in early childhood education, including the rollout of the universal three-year-old kinder and free kinder programs, is just another part of the Allan Labor government's commitment to giving every child the best start in life, and we know how important that is.

Education remains a cornerstone of our budget, with significant investments in new school infrastructure and innovative programs to support student learning. In my electorate of Melton I look forward to seeing the construction of the new Cobblebank secondary school and also the new Toolern Waters primary school, both of which will be open in 2026. These are two fast-growing areas in the electorate of Melton and some of the fastest growing areas in the state of Victoria. I am very excited for the further expansion of Strathulloh Primary School, which is receiving in excess of \$14 million to expand that school, primarily because the school when it started three years ago started with 700 students and it has now got in excess of a thousand and is growing rapidly. That area is a rapidly growing area. It is great news for Toolern Vale and District Primary School, who are receiving more than \$6 million to provide a new multipurpose building, a new fence, an external basketball court, an amphitheatre and playgrounds. I know the kids at that school will really enjoy the upgrade to that school.

The Allan Labor government is ensuring that every child has access to high-quality education regardless of their background and their location within the state. I want to make reference to our hardworking and dedicated teachers, and there is \$139 million for more professional development, for more mental health and wellbeing support and for trying to improve the workloads with more flexible working arrangements and additional recruitment of teachers, which we desperately need to fill vacant positions right across the state.

One of the statewide initiatives that was impressive is clearly the Glasses for Kids program, which is going to reach another 74,000 kids from prep to grade 3 across the 473 government schools. We know that a pair of glasses can be expensive and that it makes it easier for children to learn if they can read the whiteboard. There will be vision screening and free glasses for those students that require them, and that will assist them in their education process. This is a real game changer.

The other big one out of the budget was the \$400 school saving bonus for every student enrolled at a government school and for those families in non-government schools that hold concession cards. This is a great investment in our kids, and it will take a lot of the burden off families who cannot afford to allow their kids to go on excursions and camps and things like that. It is a fantastic outcome of the budget.

Of course some of the other things out of the budget were investments in further supports like the African communities action plan homework club. This is important in my area because we have had an African homework club for a few years now, and they do it really well. It is really important for the local community, and that budget outcome hopefully will come directly towards the Melton homework club and again support those kids that are in desperate need of that support.

The Get Active Kids voucher program again will help families with the cost of living, and it will assist the kids in being able to play sport by providing for the costs of either uniforms or membership or things like that where previously the families may not have been able to afford for their kids to be involved in local sports programs.

There is also the Active Schools program, and this is to provide support for physical education, which is really important for all of us of course but particularly for our kids. It also provides support for swimming and water safety programs. And we know it has been such a tragic year this year in regard to the number of drownings here in Victoria – 47 people have drowned since 1 July last year. It just shows how important learning to swim is in this state, if not around the country, in particular when we have those lovely days when people want to go to the beach or go to a pool, and kids are taught how to swim through this Active Schools program.

With regard to transport, we have committed to improving accessibility and connectivity across our state, with a \$996 million investment in Big Build transport projects, including the Metro Tunnel and West Gate Tunnel – and it will be exciting when they open up sometime next year. There is funding for projects like the extension of the Melton South FlexiRide bus service to Weir Views and Thornhill Park.

**A member** interjected.

**Steve McGHIE:** Yes, it is an interesting concept, the FlexiRide. There are good and bad reports about it, but it is a great initiative, in particular for the new residential developments that are only partially developed. Until you get an increased volume of usage, you would not provide a full-blown bus service to those areas. But it is great to see that FlexiRide service being extended.

Last year the Premier came out and announced the upgrade of the Melton railway station and the removal of four level crossings, three in Melton and one at Hopkins Road, Truganina, which is in my good friend the member for Kororoit's electorate. She also announced a \$650 million upgrade to the Melton line last year, which is terrific, and that will futureproof the Melton rail line for many years to come. We need those upgrades. The removal of the level crossings is going to be really important in Melton. People are really keen for that to occur because we have gridlock in Melton quite often, on a daily basis, in particular at school time because we have a number of schools that are close by to the level crossings. So that is a great injection in regard to our road transport.

Clearly there is an urgent need to address issues around family violence against women, including early intervention to keep families together. The Allan Labor government is investing \$374 million to protect children and support families through these initiatives, like the Brimbank and Melton Community Legal Centres in regard to their family violence program – and they have got a relationship with the Orange Door. I am pleased to see that injection of funding for that legal service to assist our local constituents in regard to family violence. I was interviewed on Wyndham local radio today, and we discussed family violence and that we all have a big part to play in regard to reducing and eliminating family violence against women.

I just want to talk to some of the other local issues in regard to Melbourne. I did refer to a number of schools that we are going to get. The Cobblebank secondary college – that will make it the fourth public secondary school in Melton, and that will be open by 2026. The new Toolern Waters primary school, again, will be open by 2026. The Strathulloh expansion, which is fantastic, is due to the growth there. The Toolern Vale primary school will get an upgrade. These are really important programs.

There will be replacement of 15 CFA primary urban response vehicles. In my area I know some of my local CFA stations have been seeking an upgrade to their vehicles, and I am hopeful that that will come our way. But I should say on top of all of that that our government is a government of injecting funds into education, health and transport. Just in the last three to four years in my electorate we have opened four primary schools, with another two to come by 2026 – and, as I said, the secondary school.

Those schools are Binap Primary, which opened this year; Eynesbury Primary; Thornhill Park Primary; and Strathulloh Primary.

To suggest that the Andrews–Allan Labor governments have not injected money into education is just a complete falsity by those opposite. We are supporting many of our schools. Many a school in my electorate has received funding for an upgrade, and I am pleased about that. Kurunjang Secondary College, Melton Secondary College, Melton South Primary School, St Lawrence of Brindisi primary school, Melton Christian College and St Francis college have all received money, funds, from our state government, the Allan Labor state government, for upgrades of their facilities. Al Iman College has received some money for traffic management and to provide a pedestrian crossing near the school. The other great initiative in Melton being supported by our government is the new Melton TAFE – \$55 million has been committed to the new Melton TAFE. At the moment they are trying to finalise the purchase of some land to be able to locate the TAFE in the Cobblebank area of Melton.

I should also say that we have many cost-of-living support measures: the free kinder, as I referred to before; free glasses; free zoo visits; half-price camping fees; Get Active Kids vouchers at \$200; period products stocked in all government schools; early parenting centres; baby bundles; prep bags; kinder kits; and the Smile Squad. We have capped V/Line fares, which has been fantastic, but what it has caused is a bit of a problem with the car parks. Our car parks at Cobblebank and Melton are now overflowing to the point that just recently the shopping centre near the Cobblebank railway station has started to tow vehicles away because the overflow parking has gone into the shopping centre, so there is a bit of an issue down at Cobblebank, but it just goes to show that people want to get on public transport, and that is pleasing to see. The whole idea of those regional fares is a big saving for commuters.

With the very short time I have got, our budget represents a bold vision for the future of Victoria, and of course it is based on compassion, equity and opportunity for all. I commend this bill to the house.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (16:11): I rise to speak on the Appropriation (2024–2025) Bill 2024 and Appropriation (Parliament 2024–2025) Bill 2024. From the outset, looking at the state of the budget and the state of Victoria's finances, it is very clear that this is the culmination of 10 years of Labor – 10 years of Labor budgets, of blowouts, of waste, of reckless spending and of course of record taxes. What do Victorians have to show for the past 10 years? Record debt, cuts across education and health, delays to projects and increasingly declining services right across the state. What is very, very clear is that Labor cannot manage money and cannot manage major projects, and Victorians are paying the price.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Wendouree, you are not in your seat. You can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Member for Wendouree withdrew from chamber.**

**Jess WILSON:** The member for Ripon does not have to take my word for it. The *Age* itself called this budget a bad news budget featuring soaring debt, stalled major projects and abandoned promises. That sums up this 10th Labor budget, in which we have seen once again debts soar, taxes rise and a decline in services for Victorians.

Let us look at the facts across this budget in black and white in the budget papers. Victoria's net debt will increase from \$21.8 billion in 2014 to a projected \$187.8 billion by 2028. The total tax revenue will increase from \$17.8 billion in 2014 to a projected \$45 billion in the same period. Interest repayments on Victoria's record debt will reach \$26 million a day by 2028. This budget lays bare the consequences of Labor's financial mismanagement, with hundreds of cuts to critical services at a time when Victorians can least afford them. There have been cuts to education, cuts to health and to housing services and infrastructure and major projects have been delayed. Wellbeing programs in schools have

been cut, and election promises for much-needed school upgrades have been broken. Victorian hospitals, many of which are already on the brink and operating in deficit – we have seen these hospitals come to the government and ask for bailouts – will be forced to do more with less.

This government claims to govern for all Victorians, but they have deliberately ignored the electorate of Kew in their state budget, and our community deserves our fair share. Our government schools are desperately in need of upgrades. Local transport infrastructure needs updating, and the accessibility of public transport needs improving. I have consistently called for much-needed upgrades to Kew's local schools in this place, for Kew East Primary, for Balwyn Primary, for Canterbury Girls' Secondary College, for Kew High School and for Chatham Primary, but nothing again from this government in this budget. And, sadly, just a few days of interest payments under this government could fully fund these much-needed upgrades in the schools in Kew.

If we turn to debt and deficits under the Labor government over the past 10 years, we have seen economic conditions in Victoria continue to deteriorate, with government debt only adding to inflationary pressures in this state. Net debt is forecast to reach \$188 billion by 2028, which is a blowout of \$10 billion from last year's forecast. That is nearly \$47 million added every day since the last budget – \$47 million added to our debt bill since the last budget. That comes down to a staggering \$67,000 for every Victorian household. Every Victorian household in this state carries \$67,000 worth of that record debt. And this year's deficit has worsened by a billion dollars since the end-of-financial-year update. This is despite the fact that the Treasurer received a \$3.7 billion GST windfall. We have seen the deficit deepen.

On top of the \$188 billion net debt figure, the budget shows that Victorian government agencies – the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority, WorkCover, the Treasury Corporation of Victoria, TAC, the Victorian Funds Management Corporation and the State Trustees – will be \$68 billion in debt by 2028 and are projected to fall into negative net financial worth by 2026. The state's public non-financial corporations – the water corps, the ports, the housing corps – will be \$37 billion in debt by 2028 and have accumulated deficits of \$65 billion, paying \$1.4 billion in interest. So whether it is the state's public financial corporations or non-financial corporations, their accumulated debt is greater than when the coalition left office in 2014. This deterioration comes despite these agencies levying higher fees on Victorians, including a 43 per cent increase in domestic building insurance last year and a 42 per cent average increase in WorkCover premiums in May last year. I think every member on this side of the house will say they are yet to meet a small business that only paid a 42 per cent increase in WorkCover premiums. I have heard 60, 70, 80 and 90 per cent increase on small businesses at a time when they can least afford it, at a time when they are getting hit with higher taxes and higher electricity bills. This level of debt right across Victoria's agencies is why the ratings agency S&P expects Victoria's gross debt to reach nearly a quarter of a trillion dollars in the coming years, with interest on Victoria's soaring debt to reach over \$14 billion per year. What is absolutely clear is that Labor cannot manage the books, they cannot manage their agencies and Victorians are paying the price through higher premiums.

Those opposite like to blame COVID for the state's record debt, but we know that COVID-related debt only makes up 17 per cent of the state's debt, and this year the Treasurer added a fifth step to his COVID debt repayment plan. Net debt to gross state product is the new measure that the Treasurer is pointing to. Let us take a look at those figures. When Labor took office in 2014, net debt as a percentage of GSP was sitting at about 5 per cent. In 2024–25, it will be 24.4 per cent, climbing to 25.2 per cent in 2026–27. And in what the Treasurer is lauding as his debt repayment plan working, net debt as a proportion of GSP will fall to 25.1 per cent in 2028 – a meagre 0.1 per cent decrease. That is cold comfort to Victorian taxpayers, who will be paying \$9.4 billion in interest in 2028, or \$26 million a day.

Imagine what that money could fund. As I said, it could fully fund the upgrades to many schools across the state in just a couple of days. If that is the government's and the Treasurer's answer to our soaring debt, then sadly I think we have only started to see the cuts and delays from this government. Just

today we heard from the Treasurer, who wanted to travel back to the 1980s in question time. Let us just revisit net debt as a percentage of GSP when it peaked at 16 per cent in 1993 under the Cain–Kirner recession. His financial management makes that Cain–Kirner debt level look manageable. Victoria’s growing debt has serious consequences. Not only is it an intergenerational burden, with generations to come forced to pay down this debt through higher taxes and poorer services, but it means real-time cuts, delays and broken promises in last week’s budget. Let us turn to some of those broken promises and cuts and delays.

Looking to education, we have seen funding for several important education services, including vital services to support student health and wellbeing, cut – a \$34 million cut to wellbeing at schools. It also significantly delays the rollout of desperately needed early childhood education and care centres and will see hundreds of hours missed for children through their key four-year-old kinder program. We are also seeing a \$75 million cut to early childhood sector supports and regulations.

Then of course, as we have heard others speak to today, there are the unfunded school project upgrades in this budget. This budget lays bare the broken promises to dozens of schools across this state – 29 capital upgrades that were not funded in this budget. And while Labor promises to govern for every Victorian, when you look at an analysis of both the funding commitments as well as the funding delivery to schools by electorate, it shows once again that politics trumps need time and time again. Of the schools Labor made commitments to in 2022, 70 per cent are in Labor seats and only 26 per cent are in coalition seats. And 80 per cent of those schools in Labor seats have received funding, while only 41 per cent of coalition seats have received funding. Those opposite might like to point to the fact that they have more seats in this place, but that does not equate to the funding that has flowed right across to these electorates. You cannot claim to govern for all Victorians and then funnel money to buy votes at an election.

If we turn to Victoria’s health system – a system that is already at crisis point, where ambulance wait times have blown out, we are seeing patients left stranded outside crowded emergency departments – we are seeing cuts to the health system right across the board. We are seeing the Minister for Health point to amalgamations, reducing services for Victorians who need it most. We have seen public health have a \$207 million cut, ambulance services a \$20 million cut, aged and home care a \$43 million cut and IVF public services \$42 million cuts. And then of course when it comes to capital investment we have seen health infrastructure projects delayed and cancelled – delays to the establishment of 10 new community hospitals with three sites cut entirely. We have seen the Arden health precinct cancelled. It was spruiked by this government as the biggest hospital project in Australia’s history on the eve of the 2022 election, yet that has been cut, that has been cancelled, because of the misleading advice this government has not provided to Victorians. The budget papers also revealed that the number of patients admitted from the planned surgery waiting list will be reduced from their own target of 240,000 in 2022–23 to 200,000 in 2024–25. This reduction comes despite more than a 40 per cent increase in Victoria’s urgent category 1 surgery waitlist across the March 2024 quarter, as the total number of Victorians waiting for elective surgery remains well above 60,000. If we turn to the 75 per cent cut to the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre while this government has prioritised a \$4 million scoreboard in Geelong, it once again demonstrates that this government have their priorities all wrong.

When we look at where the spending is going, the reckless spending by this government, there is \$40 billion in waste and cost blowouts on infrastructure projects – the North East Link, a \$21.1 billion blowout under this government. In one day alone last year the Premier announced a \$10 billion blowout on that project. The West Gate Tunnel has a \$4.7 billion blowout, the Metro Tunnel has a \$4 billion blowout, and now we know that the airport rail link is delayed at least four years, costing Victorians, I might add, \$67 million just to demobilise that project in the meantime. All while these projects blowout and are delayed because of the mismanagement of this government, we are of course seeing the prioritisation of their pet project, the Suburban Rail Loop, which has a ‘TBC’ next to it in

terms of funding in the budget. Once again they are not being up-front and transparent with the Victorian people about the true cost of their mismanagement.

We have seen taxes rise in this budget once again, after we saw last year taxes on business, on rents, on schools and education, and of course we see the public service wage bill blow out time and time again. We have seen over the past 10 years the Labor government once again cook the books in terms of how much the public sector wage bill is going to cost, missing that target every single time.

This is a culmination of 10 years of Labor, a culmination of reckless spending and complete disregard for taxpayers money. It is a culmination of waste and mismanagement. Labor cannot manage money and they cannot manage projects, and Victorians are dearly paying the price.

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarnet) (16:26): It gives me great pleasure to rise this afternoon to contribute to the Appropriation (2024–2025) Bill 2024. As many of my colleagues have said before me and of course as we said on budget day, this budget is all about Victorian families. It is all about investing in critical services and ensuring a strong future for Victoria, and indeed it is all about helping Victorians with those cost-of-living pressures that they are facing at the moment.

It is about education and making sure that all Victorian students, irrespective of where they live and the family that they come from, have the best opportunity to get a fantastic education. We do not call ourselves and we do not get called the Education State for nothing. It is because of the outcomes that you see in the budget this year. It is all about prioritising health care. It is all about prioritising infrastructure, and it is all about –

**Jess Wilson** interjected.

**Dylan WIGHT**: Settle, you've had your turn.

**The SPEAKER**: Member for Tarnet, that is inappropriate. Through the Chair.

**Dylan WIGHT**: Yes, I withdraw. It is all about prioritising infrastructure and indeed prioritising community infrastructure. We have heard from those opposite in this contribution, but we hear from those opposite week after week, sitting week after sitting week, and day after day after day, that Labor cannot manage money and that Labor cannot balance the books and indeed talk about spending in particular and talk about debt. As I have said in this place before, let us not forget that those opposite took to the last election \$20 billion of new spending, which was twice as much as what we on this side and the government at the time took to that election. They took \$20 billion of new spending to the last election with no plan as to how they were going to balance the books to be able to do that. They also did it while saying that they were going to legislate a debt ceiling, a policy that every financial institution and, frankly, everybody in this place that had a clue what was going on knew was horrendous policy. Then day after day, time after time, they come into this place and lecture us about spending.

We have spoken at length and the Treasurer has spoken at length about this budget being about sensible and disciplined decisions. There are a factor of combinations that have put pressure on the Victorian budget, on the Victorian balance sheet and on the Victorian economy, but as I said and as every marker shows, the Victorian economy is tracking along fantastically and is in fact the best in the country.

But there are a combination of factors that have made this budget complicated. Historically low unemployment is one of those. We have gone through a two- or three-year period now since COVID when we have had close enough to full employment in Victoria as we have ever had. In fact we are at an unemployment rate at the moment of 4.1 per cent, which is historically low. We have had high inflation, and it is not just Victoria that is experiencing high inflation – Australia as a country, as a nation, is experiencing high inflation and in fact most countries in the Western world are the same. That is because of a combination of factors. There are obviously a couple of conflicts on the other side of the world that are putting serious pressure on oil prices, which are reflected then in petrol prices. There are also shipping costs in the Northern Hemisphere, which are driving up prices at supermarkets

and retail stores and driving up everyday costs for Victorians. There are also, obviously, the continued impacts of COVID-19, which are creating challenges, both workforce challenges and materials challenges as well.

As a state we need to balance the competing challenges, and now is the time to recalibrate. The International Monetary Fund's recent report on Australia advises governments to implement infrastructure projects at a more measured pace due to supply constraints. We all know that we have a significant pipeline of infrastructure here in Victoria, and we have done this since 2014: we have built a reputation as a government that builds things, that delivers projects that it says it is going to deliver and that gets things done. But due to this advice from the International Monetary Fund, that infrastructure pipeline has been moved back some years. That does not mean that we are coming out and cancelling projects; that does not mean we are coming out and changing our mind and not doing things that we said we were going to do. We have just had to move the start or finish dates of some of those infrastructure projects back a few years to enable the workforce capacity – and help with the constraints around that workforce – for those projects to catch up. That is an incredibly important thing.

This budget addresses the challenges of low unemployment, high inflation and that post-pandemic recovery. It also, as I just said, focuses on recalibrating of some of those infrastructure projects. As I said earlier, there are a combination of factors, most of which are outside of this government's control, that have put pressure on this budget. But make no mistake: irrespective of that, Victoria's economy is performing as well as or better than any other economy in Australia. We have created over 560,000 jobs since September 2020. As I said, we are as close to full employment, and have been over the last few years, as we have been in this state for several decades. That does come with some challenges; it comes with some workforce shortages, and that is why it is incredibly important to recalibrate some of those infrastructure projects, to allow some of that workforce capacity to catch up.

We have returned to an operating cash surplus, just as we said we would. We returned to an operating cash surplus in 2022–23, and we are on track for continued surpluses and economic growth in the years and budgets to come. We are also stabilising net debt – the first time there's been stabilisation since the pandemic – with a focus on reducing net debt to GSP levels.

But it is not just the stabilising of debt, it is not just the recalibration of those infrastructure projects and it is not just how well our economy is going. As I said at the start of his contribution, this budget is all about delivering for Victorian families, and it has done that in several ways. I think one of the biggest ways is one of the fantastic outcomes to come out of this budget. As I said earlier in this contribution, we are not called the Education State for nothing. It is the \$400 school saving bonus for eligible families. If you are a family at a government school or a family with a healthcare card at an independent school, you will be eligible for that \$400 payment for each student that you have in school. Essentially what that means is you get \$400 that you can put towards uniforms, you can put towards camps, you can put towards fees or you can put towards excursions.

At the end of each year or during the year when those excursion costs come, when those uniform costs come and when those camp costs come, they are incredibly difficult for so many Victorian families. I know they are incredibly difficult for some of my constituents through Hoppers Crossing and Tarneit. I know that because they have come to my office and they have spoken to me about it. We have run fundraisers to be able to help children from schools go on excursions. That is what this is all about. It is being able to contribute to those cost-of-living pressures that so many Victorian families are feeling right now. Like I said, we are not called the Education State for nothing, and I think this is one of the great initiatives that I have seen in my time in this place and in fact one of the great initiatives since we have been in government since 2014.

There is also record investment into health care: \$11 billion to enhance hospital care and recovery from the pandemic. There is education investment in terms of capital works as well. There is the \$400 school saving bonus, which helps families with cost of living, but do not underestimate how incredibly

important school facilities are in educational outcomes. Curriculum is important, being able to go to excursions and afford uniforms et cetera is important, and we have done the heavy lifting on that over a period of time, but do not underestimate ever how important world-class facilities for kids are to educational outcomes. There is \$1.8 billion to build and upgrade schools, with a commitment to 100 new schools by 2026. That is an enormous investment and will pay absolute dividends in the education of our kids in the future. It will pay absolute dividends to Victorians in the future with those educational outcomes.

I am pleased to say amongst all of that that Tarneit did not miss out. Tarneit did really well in this budget just as it has in previous budgets as well. For my community of Tarneit, in fact this reserve is in Hoppers Crossing. The Wyndham Rhinos are a Rugby Union club out in Hoppers Crossing. For anybody who has not been out to the west to Hoppers Crossing there is a very large Pasifika community through Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing. In fact it is one of the largest Pasifika communities in all of Australia. There is \$100,000 for a brand new digital scoreboard at Mossfiel Reserve. I was lucky enough to go out to Mossfiel Reserve and meet the committee and some of the players and the club there at the Wyndham Rhinos. I was absolutely blown away by the participation. Games start at 8 o'clock for juniors. They run all day all the way through and finish at 5 o'clock after their seniors play, which I think have a start time of 3:20. There were hundreds if not thousands of local players and families there enjoying the day. I was lucky enough to get on the microphone and make the announcement, and honestly you would have thought that I was giving them \$10 million. They were so happy as a community to have \$100,000 for their brand new scoreboard, and I know how important it will be to that community.

It was very convenient for me. At the exact same reserve at Mossfiel there is the Hoppers Crossing Netball Association. There is also \$75,000 for upgraded lighting for the Hoppers Crossing Netball Association. Also a huge attendance at that netball association – I think they have something like 70 teams that play over a couple of days. There is training every single evening. There are courts there that have some lights and there are courts there that are unable to be utilised at night for training because they have no lights. Seventy-five thousand dollars will go a long way to making sure that young boys and girls in Hoppers Crossing can play netball and can train adequately.

There is also the safer Victorian faith-based schools package, which is a \$6 million total package for security improvements which will focus on Jewish and Islamic schools. I have one of the larger Islamic schools in Victoria in my electorate of Tarneit, the Islamic College of Melbourne. They have spoken to me over the last little bit of safety concerns for some of their kids arriving and leaving school, and this \$6 million will go a long way to ensuring Islamic kids' safety in Tarneit.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (16:41): I rise to speak on the state government's 2024–25 budget and the associated appropriation bills. A budget should set out the vision for this state; that is the purpose of a budget. What we saw this year was a new Premier, and even the opposition came into this place expecting to see the Premier set out her vision for the future of this state, her vision having taken the premiership after 10 years as a part of the government. Her leadership should have been stamped onto this budget. By the end of the Treasurer's speech, what was clear was, as has been written, the Premier is at best pedestrian. There was no vision in this budget.

The budget included one thing. Obviously somebody devised a budget, drafted a budget, put a budget forward and said, 'But hang on, there's no announceable. There's nothing in this budget.' So someone came along and said, 'Why don't we take core business of government' – that is, providing, effectively, capital required funding into schools – 'rebrand it, rebrand core business of schools, put a badge on it and make that an announcement?' That is what this budget does, and that is the only announceable in this budget.

It is shameful to think that a new Premier has not taken the opportunity to set out her vision for this state – and that is what is clear. What is clear is that the Premier does not have a vision for this state. What we know from this budget is that the mismanagement of the last 10 years is now recognised

both nationally and internationally through the ratings agencies. Ratings agencies are calling out the impact of this budget on the nation and the mismanagement thereof. That is clear. We also know that the economic vandalism of this government is now coming to a point that requires punitive tax measures which are killing investment in Victoria.

You only need to talk to the property sector to understand the damage that has been caused because of the government's tax regime. In fact it is a regime that was described on budget day as hostile. This budget has shown the clear issues in terms of the government's mismanagement – the economic vandalism – but also the blatant pork-barrelling. We have seen for year after year the way that funding is directed straight into Labor electorates over need. So when an assessment measure is done by the department, ministers are overruling those assessments and pork-barrelling funding in some of the worst ways we have ever seen. We have seen government member after government member get up and talk about funding going into their electorates. Of course they have received funding, because the government is pork-barrelling investment in Victoria. If you do not live in a Labor seat, you do not get government funding; that is the way it now works.

It is appalling when it comes to schools especially. Our children are receiving funding based on the political affiliation of the seat they live in. It is absolutely outrageous, and the statistics show it. Before this year's budget 93 per cent of capital investment in schools went into Labor seats – 93 per cent. You almost have to get up in the morning with a red pen if you are the minister and actively try and cross out any proposal for funding in a seat that is not a government seat to get to 93 per cent. I mean, you have to really work hard to make sure that you do not share out funding in the way that it should be shared, and that is what this government is now known for. All of the things that we have known about this government have now been put on display for all to see, and that is what is so clear about this budget. Because it lacks any vision, there is no cover for the truth behind what this government is doing in terms of its economic vision and strategy, or lack thereof, for the future of our state.

I do want to mention for a moment one of the most important issues that should be considered by policymakers and government in this state, and that is housing affordability and the capacity for people to get into a home, because it is clear that more and more young people do not believe that they can get into a home. They do not believe that their dream of owning a home is achievable. Before he left, former Premier Andrews identified the need for improving the number of homes available to Victorians as a key priority for his government. Since he made an announcement – an announcement that will never be achieved – of 80,000 homes a year over each year for the next 10 years, you could not have seen that stone drop quicker into the water than has been the case when it comes to housing. I have not seen an example of the Premier talking about or prioritising this issue to the level that it deserves. It is almost as if the former Premier left and took the commitment with him, because we know that over the coming year there will only be 51,000 homes built of the 80,000 promised, so we are 30,000 short of the promise. It is little wonder that the government has walked away from its promise. The projections show that over the next two years less than 55,000 will be built in each of those two years. So it is no wonder that the government has completely walked away from its promise and its commitment and changed its language. It has gone from talking about 80,000 homes each year to a total of 800,000 in the 10th year, so I suspect that what we are going to see at some point is a year when the government will walk up and deliver us all of those missing homes in that year. We know that is not true. We know that this government has dropped the ball on one of the most important issues facing all Victorians, and that is delivering homes to Victorians.

We know that the government will be unable to deliver on their promise. I referred to the property council talking about the tax regime as hostile. We know that the budget confirmed \$21.5 billion in property taxes. Almost half of state tax take is made up of property taxes – 29 of the 55 new or increased taxes over the last decade have been foisted on the property industry. So is it any wonder that the impact of these new or increased taxes, 29 of them, is crippling the sector? The government could not have its hand deeper in the pocket of the sector. What that means is that on the cost of a home – on the cost of an apartment in an urban area – roughly 30 per cent of the cost is tax. Almost

30 per cent of the cost is tax, and in greenfields areas it is 45 per cent. When you buy a home, almost 45 per cent of the cost in a greenfields site is tax. When you go to buy an apartment, 30 per cent of the cost of that apartment is tax. These taxes are causing incredible damage in terms of housing affordability, and we know that these taxes are parasitic. That is what they are. They are parasitic. These 29 taxes are parasitic, and the government is causing the biggest movable damage to the sector through these 29 taxes.

I also want to speak about some of the funding issues in my local community. I note that this budget has walked away from the promise to deliver upgrades to 29 schools. Of those 29 schools, two are in my electorate. Hampton Primary School and Gardenvale Primary School were both promised funding and told by the candidate that that funding would be delivered in the first year after the election. That is what the schools were told. How outrageous to rip away that promise. We know that when it comes to the schools that were promised in the election to be funded, 70 per cent were in Labor seats – of course they were – and 26 per cent were in coalition seats. When it came to ripping away the funding, 80 per cent of the schools that did get the funding were in Labor seats and only 41 per cent of those in coalition seats that were waiting for funding were funded. When it comes to Hampton Primary School and Gardenvale Primary School, hundreds of children have been ripped off by this government.

They are not the only schools that need funding in my community. I have spoken about it in this place before, but I refer to Brighton Primary, where we have 14 demountables. In those demountables we have one of the few assisted hearing units in Melbourne. Those demountables are placed next to the train line, so you have kids with genuine hearing difficulties who are learning in demountables that are 40 years old next to a train line. It has been over 40 years since that school received any capital funding. It is absolutely abhorrent that the government pork-barrel in the way that they do.

There is another school, Brighton Beach Primary School, which has not been reported. There is mould in that school, and we know how dangerous that is. The government has known for six months about the mould – the open mould – which has now been sheeted over to try and stop children taking it in. Six months that mould has been there with children walking past. What an absolute disgrace. That is a clear health and safety issue for those primary school aged children. It is an absolute disgrace, and for the government to have known for six months and done nothing about it is an absolute shame.

Budgets should set out a vision. This budget we saw a new Premier, who should have walked into this chamber with her Treasurer, and the two should have announced a budget with some vision, with some sense of purpose, with some sense of direction. Not that I was a fan of his in any way, but I am absolutely sure the former Premier would not have allowed a budget to be delivered this way. I am absolutely sure the former Premier would not have allowed a budget to be delivered in the way this budget was delivered. The new Premier walked in, and a budget was announced that was at best pedestrian – kindly put, beige – and they had found one announceable to take in when in fact it was a budget with mismanagement, economic vandalism, pork-barrelling but, more than anything else, a lack of vision. This government is now hurting Victorians, and that is on display for every Victorian to see. It is time for the Labor government to go.

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh) (16:56): It is indeed a privilege to speak on the state budget 2024–25. Ladies and gentlemen, for those of you watching from home, you can turn your volume right up now, because that loud rant is over. I am looking forward –

**Matthew Guy** interjected.

**Nick STAIKOS:** The former and next Leader of the Opposition has just interjected from the table; I am not sure what he said. But here we are, with the state budget 2024–25, a budget I think characterised by sensible and responsible decisions. We can ignore what we have been hearing from those opposite today because it does not paint an accurate picture of what this budget and this government are all about. This is a budget that forecasts continuing record low unemployment, not the high unemployment we inherited when we came to government – the highest unemployment rate on

mainland Australia. It continues to record and forecast low unemployment. It is a budget that forecasts an economy that is outpacing the rest of the country when it comes to economic growth. It is a budget that forecasts massive business investment, and it is a budget that forecasts operating surpluses into the forward estimates. It is also a budget that forecasts a stabilisation and then a reduction in debt.

If we think to the last budget, something very significant has happened since the last budget, and that is that this government released its housing statement, a big, bold and ambitious plan to build 800,000 new homes over the next 10 years. This has been done against the backdrop of a housing crisis and also a cost-of-living crisis. If you do a bit of travelling, next time you are speaking to a cabbie overseas, ask them what the big issues are in their country, and they will say it is about being able to afford a home and it is the cost of living. Victoria is not immune to these global issues. Post pandemic there is a supply chain slowdown. There are workforce issues. There is a post-pandemic cost-of-living crisis and a housing crisis. Victoria is not immune to any of these things. The government has been proactive and has released a plan that sets out how we are going to deal with this unprecedented housing crisis. It is also a matter of actually being able to identify that now is the time to recalibrate, and that is what we see in this budget.

The budget makes it very clear that since 2021 in Victoria the cost of construction has gone up by 22 per cent, and that is why this government is bringing annual infrastructure spending back to prepandemic levels, which will free up capacity for the private sector to build more homes. That is what we want to do, and it is a centrepiece of this budget and the housing statement. My electorate of Bentleigh is part of the middle ring of Melbourne. It is an electorate that should accommodate more homes. It should accommodate more people to live in suburbs like Bentleigh, McKinnon, Moorabbin and Cheltenham, and we are doing just that. One of the major activity centres identified in the housing statement is Moorabbin. Moorabbin is already starting to accommodate more apartment living, and it should accommodate more in the future. Then just down the highway over at Cheltenham, the Suburban Rail Loop East precinct as it is now known will also accommodate more housing around the Suburban Rail Loop station. These are all important measures to secure Victoria's future.

But what is in the budget? There is \$11 billion for our healthcare system, a record investment in our healthcare system. We have heard a bit from those opposite about health today. It is a bit laughable, because I sat in this chamber during the pandemic and, you know, the 'Let it rip' mantra from back then really does not match up with the rhetoric today. But we in this government are proud of the investment we are making in our healthcare system in this budget, which also includes \$1.7 billion to build and improve our hospitals and health facilities. One of those hospitals is Monash Medical Centre. This budget invests \$535 million in Monash Medical Centre, including a new seven-storey tower above the emergency department, which this government expanded, and it will include new operating suites, birthing suites and pre- and post-op beds. We talk about outcomes: this upgrade will allow for an extra 7500 surgeries each and every year.

The budget also includes \$1.8 billion to build, maintain and upgrade schools across our state and deliver on our promise to build 100 new schools by 2026. We are spending \$1 billion on the remaining 16 new schools to get to the 100 new schools that we promised. That is 100 new schools for a state that is growing and for a capital city that is going to be larger than Sydney in a few years time. One hundred new schools: if you contrast that to the last government, they built zero new schools. Our government is taking a much different approach. In fact over the last 10 years this government has invested a total of \$16.7 billion on school infrastructure – \$16.7 billion. That is for new schools and also upgraded schools, and that includes, I should point out, nearly a billion dollars on capital for non-government schools over three terms of this government. That contrasts with zero dollars from those opposite when they were in government – quite a stark contrast.

If I am specific about my electorate of Bentleigh, I am really proud that over the last 10 years there has been a massive investment in schools in my electorate of about \$230 million.

**Paul Edbrooke** interjected.

**Nick STAIKOS:** Not a bad member, member for Frankston, even if I do say so myself. Around \$230 million: that includes the second campus of McKinnon Secondary College, and that is one of the 100 new schools built by this government.

The budget also includes \$996 million to switch on our Big Build transport projects. One of those is the Metro rail tunnel, and I know members on this side of the house are really, really excited about the Metro Tunnel. Thinking back to the 2014 election campaign, it was very much a key issue, including in my own electorate, because it is that one infrastructure project that is going to change the way we commute in and out of the city. The Metro Tunnel will mean that the Dandenong line – the Pakenham–Cranbourne lines, which are just over the border of my electorate – will be connected to the new Metro Tunnel, which will connect that line to currently disconnected parts of the city.

You think of Anzac station, you think of the new Parkville station where the university and hospital precinct is located, you think of State Library station, of Town Hall station and of Arden, which will no doubt be a significant residential inner-city area in the future. This will be a game changer for my constituents who commute on the Pakenham–Cranbourne line. But because the Pakenham–Cranbourne line will be connected to the Metro Tunnel, it will mean that the Frankston line, which is in my electorate, will connect to the existing city loop tunnel. That will be a significant boost to rail services for my electorate, and we are very much looking forward to that. Melbourne is a global city, it is a great city of the world, and it warrants this important transport infrastructure that is befitting a great city of the world.

There is also in the budget \$129 million to continue the statewide rollout of our early education reforms, and that includes universal three-year-old kinder and also free kinder. When we talk about cost-of-living relief, I think saving families up to \$2500 per year per child with free kinder is significant cost-of-living relief. I know it has made a difference to families in my electorate.

There is also in the budget \$18 million to build and upgrade community sport infrastructure and create more opportunities for Victorians to get involved. I am very pleased that in amongst that \$18 million there is \$325,000 for the Highett Reserve pavilion. What we are going to be doing in partnership with the City of Kingston at Highett Reserve pavilion is upgrading the umpire rooms, because I think sometimes, when it comes to planning new pavilions or upgrading existing pavilions, we do forget about the umpires. The umpires are very important, and I am really, really proud of the Southern Football Netball League, because we have got increasing numbers of women who serve as umpires. But it is fair to say, when Highett footy club showed me the conditions that our umpires change in over at Highett Reserve, we can do a whole lot better than that. I am really pleased that in partnership with the City of Kingston we will be delivering the best possible umpire facilities, because they deserve no less. I have already got the Instagram reel planned for that; we will be filming next week.

In addition to looking forward to the state budget each and every year, I also look forward to the budget reply. The member for Sandringham is in the chamber; I watched his budget reply speech from my office. He said a few things, and I do want to do a bit of a fact-check in the last 3½ minutes that I have left of this contribution. I do not know, I think he spoke for about half an hour, and he tried to suggest the Victorian economy is weak. But in fact ABS data shows that the Victorian economy grew by 9.1 per cent over the past two years – more than New South Wales, more than Queensland, more than Western Australia, more than Tasmania – and the economy is also forecast to continue outpacing every state over the next five years. The Victorian economy is now 11 per cent larger in real terms than before the pandemic. He also pleaded with businesses to stay in Victoria, because he said that businesses are leaving Victoria. In fact business investment grew by more than 13 per cent in the last calendar year, the largest increase of all the states and almost 6 percentage points higher than national average growth. Then he doubled down and said people are leaving Victoria. In fact I only know members of the Victorian Liberal Party who are leaving Victoria. I know of at least two former members of the Victorian parliamentary Liberal Party who are now in the UK. But the fact is that Melbourne is going to be bigger than Sydney in just a few years time. Then, if that was not enough,

he decided to talk about Dan's statue, like that is the biggest issue. Well, the former Premier lives rent-free in their heads, it is pretty clear.

I also happened to listen to a bit of the member for Caulfield's contribution. He asked: are you better off now than you were 10 years ago? Well, when I drive around the member for Caulfield's electorate do you know what I see? Four former level crossings. Do you know why they are former level crossings? Because we removed them, and the reality is we have done that despite the member for Caulfield. The people of Caulfield could have elected a cactus and we still would have actually removed those level crossings. We have done that despite them. The member for Caulfield asked the question: are you better off than you were 10 years ago? Well, for all those people who were out of work when those opposite were in power, over four years only 39,000 new jobs were created in Victoria. The people who enjoy the dignity of work now who did not 10 years ago, I would say they are better off under a Labor government.

At the end of the day, I think we as a government recognise that this state is the best place to live on the continent. We are pro-Victoria on this side of the house, and we also are the custodians of a very fast-growing capital city, Melbourne. It is a great city of the world, a global city which in a few years will be bigger than Sydney. This government is making the right investments to ensure that we are keeping pace with that growth because we are proud of this city and we are proud of this state. This is a sensible budget. It is a responsible budget. I commend it to the house.

**Sam HIBBINS** (Pahran) (17:11): I rise to speak on behalf of the Greens to the 2024 state budget, a budget that is coming for the second year in a row at a time when so many people are looking to their governments to do all they can to tackle the housing crisis, to tackle the cost-of-living crisis, to tackle the fact that people cannot afford food and health care or pay the bills, and to improve the dire and shocking circumstances that so many people find themselves in.

The difficulty that so many Victorians find themselves in is stark. There is not a single home on the private market that someone on youth allowance can afford – not even a share house. For someone on the minimum wage working full-time, less than 1 per cent of homes are affordable. People are having to pay on average \$200 more rent a week than they did before the pandemic. The public housing waiting list has grown by over 120,000 people. The most vulnerable on it, such as women fleeing family violence, are having to wait nearly two years. Thirty thousand Victorians are experiencing homelessness every single night. Over a third of all households are facing hunger and food insecurity. People who have never faced food insecurity are now struggling to afford groceries, skipping meals or going without. They are worried, anxious that food will run out. Community service organisations are overwhelmed with requests for food and material aid. Calls to Lifeline are going through the roof because of the cost-of-living pressures people are facing.

Could there be a clearer, more striking example of a failed economic system, a failed economic ideology that for too long has put the interests of those doing well – big corporations, wealthy property investors, people who own multiple homes, developers – ahead of the interests of everyday people, that has treated housing as a commodity rather than the fundamental human right that it is, a system that treats big corporations that people rely on for essential services like banks and supermarkets as untouchable and that has left it up to the private market to decide how much people should pay for essentials.

This budget represented a momentous opportunity for the government to turn the corner, to break with the status quo. It was an opportunity for government to be bold, to step in, to stand with everyday people, to make sure that everyone has a safe and secure place to call home, to make sure that people can afford to feed their families. At a time when the problems are so clear, so obvious, the needs of people so significant, so urgent, it is not a time to stand still or to stand back or to go backwards or to continue with the status quo, but that is exactly what we got from this government with this budget – a do-nothing budget.

So much of the commentary around this budget has been around the size of the debt. How far would the budget go in reducing it? But the number one issue that this budget should have addressed is how well does it tackle the massive social deficit Victoria is facing. People who cannot afford to pay the rent or pay the bills, pushed into homelessness, stuck on the public housing waiting list, unable to afford basic health care, living in poverty, living in disadvantage – these are the biggest economic and social problems facing the state.

A generation is facing lower living standards than the previous one. A generation is locked out of ever owning a home, locked into housing insecurity and economic uncertainty. To those who say it is the time to shrink government, to make cuts and to go into austerity, I say you are wrong. To people who are struggling, who are living everyday through the housing and cost-of-living crisis, I say to you there is an alternative, there is another way. The Greens have put forward a very clear path, a very clear vision, one where the government steps in to make housing affordable, steps into make food and groceries affordable.

Our vision is one where the government steps in to freeze rents. If a rent freeze had been put in place 12 months ago, Melbourne renters would have saved on average \$2500. Just think of what that would mean for someone who is struggling to keep their head above water and is potentially a rent rise away from homelessness. That is money straight out of a property investor's pocket and into the pocket of a renter. The government could have joined governments around the world that have implemented rent freezes – Ireland, France, Berlin. Instead it continues to rule it out as if the unintended consequences are worse than the very real and devastating consequences of allowing unlimited rent rises. Now the government does have a chance to change course and support the Greens rent freeze bill that is being debated in the other place tomorrow. The Greens' vision would have seen thousands of short stays being pushed onto the rental market and put an end to the practice of potentially thousands of homes being used exclusively for profiteering through platforms like Airbnb. They could have, again like governments around the world, put a cap on the number of nights a home can be made available on short stays. But again the government are standing on the side of investors with multiple homes instead of renters.

The Greens' vision would see a massive build of public housing, housing that would be there for people in need. It is something that governments used to do, something that governments used to see as their core business – to build houses for people. Instead, in the middle of a housing crisis there is a budget with no new money for public housing, and the government continues down its path of knocking down and privatising our public housing estates for a measly uplift of 15 social housing homes a year while swathes of public land are used for private housing. In my electorate in Prahran public housing residents are forced to stuff newspapers to plug gaps in windows. Vast numbers of units in towers have gone unrenovated for decades despite government promises. And we are expected to trust a government that refuses to do the basics but is going to knock down an entire estate to have public housing residents' best interests at heart.

This budget was an opportunity for the government to finally take action on the supermarket duopoly. Every time someone goes into a supermarket they are faced with massive unfair price hikes on basics like bread and dairy. It is next to impossible to do a cheap shop anymore. This is all happening while supermarkets are posting massive profits and increasing their profit margins. We are hearing a steady stream of evidence of outrageous behaviour from the supermarket duopoly, from screwing over consumers, farmers and workers to locking out would-be competitors. If ever there was a time for the government to use the powers it has – that previous Labor state governments have used – to stop the supermarkets from price gouging, to regulate prices and to get out-of-control groceries prices back under control and to see groceries as the essential service that they are, this is it. Instead the government continues to wash its hands of responsibility. The Treasurer in his budget speech said this budget considers how best to manage inflation but then did nothing to actually bring the price of essentials down.

The Greens' vision is one where profiteering corporations pay their fair share of tax. The government could have raised billions from profiteering corporations like the big banks, like the gambling industry and property developers, revenue that could go towards paying for things that people need, to urgent cost-of-living relief. With so much commentary around this budget around Victoria's financial situation it is staggering that this budget contains no major revenue initiatives: a big bank tax, one that recoups the effective subsidy that banks are given because they are too big to fail, could have raised \$5.3 billion over the forward estimates; develop a windfall profit tax, \$8.2 billion; a social housing levy like the one Labor abandoned after pressure from the property industry could have raised \$760 million and gone directly into funding public houses; and doubling the online gambling tax, \$600 million. The idea that this needed to be a budget that needed to rein in spending is patently false.

Victorians have every right to be profoundly disappointed in this budget by the Labor government. At a time when they needed government the most, they have been let down. Whole generations are looking to government to do more, to do better. They wanted an end to fossil fuels, not an expansion and exploration of new gas. They want a stand taken against the war in Gaza that has killed thousands of civilians and children, not secret agreements with a military that is under investigation for genocide or agreements with weapons manufacturers whose weapons are being used to kill civilians. They want secure jobs, good pay and good conditions, not for casuals to have their sick pay guarantee taken away or for injured workers to be kicked off workers compensation. They want to be able to access mental health support when they need it, not to have recommendations from the royal commission to go unfunded, delayed or later abandoned. They want the murder of women by men to be seen and acted upon as the national crisis it is. They want progressive drug law reform that saves lives, not a government that walks away from another safe injecting room and refuses to implement pill testing. They want animals treated humanely, not a government again that are walking away from their own recommendation to end duck shooting.

People have a right to be disappointed, to be frustrated, to be angry, not just in the government of the day but in the apparent alternative in the opposition. There is hope: the Greens are showing there is a different way. There is an alternative to the economic straitjacket that the old parties have put themselves in. The Greens are on the march in Victoria and across the country. To all those who are looking to their governments to stand up for them, I say: we hear you and we will never stop fighting for you.

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (17:22): I rise to speak on the Appropriation (2024–2025) Bill 2024 and the Appropriation (Parliament 2024–2025) Bill 2024. I follow the Greens, and I have got about 15 minutes of speaking time and I appreciate that. The member for Prahran had a full hour as the lead speaker on this budget and unfortunately could just muster up 10 minutes. It is what I would think is a fairly ordinary performance. He had more time. You could have gone again; you could have gone for 50 minutes more. I know for the Greens that my concern always when they raise public housing and social housing is that they have not supported it anywhere but in their words. When they have had the opportunities to support it – and they have all left now, because why would they stay – they have continually blocked social and public housing. He went through a cavalcade of issues that he had in his community, and yet he does not support improvements being made. I was disappointed to hear that, as well as the statements about austerity when this budget continues to deliver building across our state. We all experience that every day whenever we are getting around the community, whether it is by public transport or by road or by the infrastructure that we just continue to build, so I am disappointed that he has mischaracterised the budget in the way that he has.

I would like to thank the Treasurer for delivering his 10th budget – an extraordinary thing. I think many of us would just be incredibly proud to be part of a decade-long government, but he has been Treasurer for that entire time and delivered 10 really good budgets, this one the most challenging of them all, and I want to just pay tribute to the staff that he would have had over this decade and their efforts in it, because politics is a team sport and the member for Werribee has been ably supported

over this time by many great people who have worked in his office as well as in the department and by other ministers and their staff who have put so much effort into this budget.

There are some really good things both in this budget and in previous budgets for the communities that I represent, the communities of Altona Meadows and Seabrook and Point Cook and Werribee South. I just want to touch on, firstly, some of those projects. I hope I have enough time to then talk about some of the more statewide issues as well. But the really big delivery in this budget is for Laverton Creek and a user path, a 60-metre bridge in fact, across Laverton Creek. I see the member for Kororoit is in the chamber. She is a person who knows exactly how important this is. It is called a creek, but it is pretty wide – 60 metres at that point. It is more of a river, really, in terms of the size of it. It is incredibly important because it connects communities.

In the inaugural speech that I made to this Parliament, I did note that the Treasurer, in his own inaugural speech, had talked about building bridges. I let him know that I was keen on building bridges as well, so I am glad he has heard that call and the call of the community more broadly, because many people have spoken to me for a long time about just how important this shared user path is. The bridge is not safe for pedestrians or for cyclists to travel across, and the alternative arrangement is to go a great distance out of their way. The connection between Altona and Altona Meadows is significantly diminished by not having this bridge in place, which is why I am so glad to hear that it has been announced in this budget. I thank in particular the Minister for Public and Active Transport for her support of this project – a really good minister. But I have been hearing about this project since before being elected and have been advocating for it since that time. Another big advocate who has been on this path is of course Minister Horne, the member for Williamstown. Both she and I have recently run a petition to see this piece of infrastructure get built. It is so popular in the community that just over a couple of weeks we saw more than 1100 members of our community say, ‘Yes, we too want this bridge, and we’ve signed up to it.’ This is one of those really great pieces of infrastructure. It is alongside the Altona Sports Centre. Hundreds of kids every week are going down to play basketball and netball, and to play at the soccer ovals there, so it will be well used and really great for the safety that our community needs.

I want to reflect on some of those other projects that we are building across the community and that are part of the budget and previous budgets. One I would like to bring to the attention of the house is at Point Cook Road and Sneydes Road. We are on a really great journey there of making that intersection safer, because there is this really critical need for safety at many of the roads that have just got busier and busier in the communities that we represent, the communities of the south-west of Melbourne. I should say that the work that we have already been up to at the Point Cook Road–Sneydes Road intersection has been really significant.

I want to draw the house’s attention to a few matters: 904 metres of new electrical cable have been installed, as have 109 metres of new NBN cable, 579 metres of new water pipe and more than 16 kilometres of new and existing telecommunications cable, because you have got to get the underground works done right. Not often enough have they been done right in some of the communities that I represent. We are just at the very final services move – that is going on right now – which is 176 metres of new gas piping. If you come down Point Cook Road after 9 pm, at the present time you do see those gas works being undertaken. That is the very last of the underground services that will be relocated. Then we are getting on with the main works above ground, and we will deliver for this community a safer intersection, with lights there and with double lanes going in both directions from Jamieson Way to Gramercy Boulevard. It is a matter that members of the community raise with me all the time. It is about safety because that intersection – I myself do avoid it – has not been safe enough. That is why we are getting on with that work.

There is another intersection on the same road – Point Cook Road. Members in this place will no doubt at some point get sick of me talking about Point Cook Road, but this is an outstanding piece of infrastructure work that we need to do. It is at Point Cook Road and Central Avenue. I appreciate the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, who is at the table, has taken such a strong interest in this

particular project as part of the Big Build – an election commitment that was delivered by his predecessor, the now Premier, who is a strong advocate of making sure that we get the Big Build up and running and delivered so well.

It was not even in time for the last budget that we started work on that and the community consultation. The Big Build came back and said 95 per cent of the community want to see improvements at this intersection, and 100 per cent of businesses. I spoke to the department at the time, and I said, 'This can't be right, only 95 per cent saying they want it. I know it's 100 per cent.' But fortunately to the department's credit they came back and said, 'No, the 5 per cent just want it to go even further and do more.' So 100 per cent of our community was in support of these projects and 100 per cent of businesses were in support of these projects. In those community consultations they did almost 800 surveys and a further 120 connections with the community in the electorate that I represent. We are now in the planning phase, and I just cannot wait for that to be finalised. We have a brilliant plan to improve that intersection, so Minister, I thank you and your staff for all the work that you have been doing in delivering that project, because it is going to be a real game changer for the community that I represent.

Further on roads, this budget delivers what is one of the really important projects for the south-western suburbs of Melbourne, which is around East Werribee. Several budgets back we put \$2.8 million into planning to kickstart that process. The community of Wyndham already has more people living there than Geelong, so it is a huge community, and it is going to keep on growing. This is about making sure that we have great jobs locally. For people who know that area well, they will know that the law courts are being built there, the Wyndham law courts, which will be the largest law courts outside of the CBD. That is alongside the police station that has already been built there, which again is the largest outside of the CBD, and that is going to bring great legal jobs to the community that I represent.

Many in the community are really excited to see that happen, but on top of that investment and effort, in this budget we put \$20 million towards services and roads to start to bring that community forward. That includes the support for a special development school, because you need to build the roads and the pipe and the infrastructure to get them started into an actual school site. The special development school is supported here. It is one of the budget commitments. Of course we are committed to building 100 new schools across the state, of which 75 are already built. There is another billion dollars just in this budget alone to see those election and ongoing commitments reached. On that site there will be a specialist school as well as a new P-9, much-loved schools across our community. One of those schools that is much loved already is Alamanda K-9. It is a really big school, and it is a really big school for a good reason – great teachers, great leaders delivering great education. It is a much-loved school, and we have been doing a lot of work there. Just over a month ago I visited the school to see stage 1 coming out of the ground, and the concrete footings were in place. I went back there just last week and already the walls are going up, so they are doing great work on that stage 1 project, which we committed more money to in the last budget, but in this budget is \$28.8 million for the next stage of works. That will replace single-storey portables, because it is a constrained site, so we are willing to put the funds in to make sure that we can go up and give those kids who need more space in their play areas more space. We are going up and getting rid of some of those single-storey portables. It is a really exciting project for the community I represent, and that is in addition to Saltwater P-9 receiving \$37 million in the previous budget as well.

I do just want to talk about some of the zone changes that are going on in the community of Altona Meadows. Altona Meadows, as a community which is quite compact and a really great community, was distributed across four different high school zones, and it is really hard when your kids mainly are going to two schools, and a few to a third primary school, to see those communities broken up. So I thank the Minister for Education and his office for making sure that the zones are what they should be. The zones should take Skeleton Creek as being a hard boundary between the community of Point Cook and the community of Seabrook for high school. We are now down to two zones, to Altona secondary college as well as Laverton P-12. That is a really big win for the community. I failed,

actually, to thank them for the Laverton Creek support as well, but I want to thank the mayor of Hobsons Bay Matt Tyler and Cr Diana Grima, who have both been advocates for both of those things, for making sure that schools are delivered well in Altona Meadows and that people have access to the schools that they need to go to as well as access across Laverton Creek there. I want to do a bit of a shout-out to both of them and thank them for that work.

I give another shout-out to a minister in the other place, Minister Blandthorn, who accompanied me to Jamieson Way kinder, where we are building an additional room to complement the great program we have got around three-year-old kinder and supporting parents back into the workplace and making sure that kids get a great education and a great start to life – saving \$2500, no less, every year for every child involved in kinder. I was there with the rosella and indigo groups at that kindergarten, and they are just so excited about the construction works that we are doing there to build that new room and build up that community centre into something even better than it is right now. We have committed \$2.75 million to that, alongside council's really handy contribution there as well.

You know how kids are – they just love the construction sites. Well, they are going to be loving them at Williams Landing train station as well. The member for Laverton, who is such a great advocate for public transport across our community, is just fantastic. We were there at Williams Landing on Wallace Avenue, on the Point Cook side. It was fine to be on the Point Cook side. They are putting in place a Parkiteer because the Parkiteer is just so well used on the Williams Landing side of Williams Landing. They just love it. It is one of the most well used across the state – fantastic advocacy from that member to get that in place. I am certainly so pleased to see that we are going to have a Parkiteer at Williams Landing, as well as a lift, making access to the station so much better.

I have got very little time left and I have got so much to say, but we are doing amazing things in Point Cook with the support of budgets exactly like this. I commend its speedy passage so we can get on with building the state.

**Matthew GUY** (Bulleen) (17:37): Imagine gloating over a budget that leaves and encumbers our state with \$200 billion – a fifth of a trillion – of debt after coming to government a decade ago when it was just \$20 billion. This was a point aptly made – very, very powerfully made – by the member for Sandringham earlier today: we now spend \$26 million a day on servicing that debt. Imagine coming in and gloating about that. Imagine coming in to gloat about a budget that spends more on servicing debt, 30 per cent or 40 per cent of which is from project overruns – gloating about that – than you spend on the mental health crisis which your government declared. Now you are spending more on servicing debt than on a mental health crisis.

Imagine coming in and gloating about a budget that cuts in half the number of schools that just a year and three months ago you promised you would upgrade; gloating about massive infrastructure that has been removed, cut or abolished because you have run out of money; gloating about a budget that has to lower speed limits on roads and puts in place pothole repair rather than resheeting roads in rural and regional Victoria, as the member for Ovens Valley will tell us, because again you have run out of money. It is a budget that cuts money to remove graffiti; that cannot replace road signs that are tired and worn out, because you are running out of money; that forces rural hospitals to amalgamate because you cannot pay their administration staff anymore; that breaks promises to multicultural groups, like the Indian community on their Gandhi park, which was a big promise of the then Premier in 2018; that presents figures that are totally inconsistent with national governments on growth; and that lies about expenditure, nominal spending figures, simply to get your books in order.

And then to have the conscience to come in here and gloat about that – I find that absolutely and utterly stunning. This is the product of a government that has run out of money. Again, as the member for Sandringham said, Labor just cannot manage money, and their only plan to fix this mess is a coalition government, because we have done it two times in the last 50 years. I sadly suspect we are going to be called on for a third time to come in and look at the books left by a tired old Labor government who have literally destroyed the state and the quality of services that Victorians can rely on.

I can talk about debt, which, as we all know, many have for very good reason. The school saving bonus – it is just completely disingenuous for local Labor members to be saying that this is a payment to parents. It is not. It is what happens in a cost-of-living crisis when many parents, sadly, cannot afford to pay voluntary school fees in public schools and you need to top them up. So you top them up and then use a government spin doctor to say, ‘Oh, it’s for the parents.’ And it is not. It is money that schools just have to make available because the parents cannot afford to pay it, because we are in this cost-of-living crisis. When you have to cut cancer services and your own public IVF services – what does that say about the state of Victoria today? And then the government, the Labor Party, come in here and gloat about this. As the member for Sandringham said: after a decade, is life easier under the Labor Party in Victoria? Is cost of living easier? Is crime lower? Why are business numbers declining? It is all because this government cannot manage money. But when they cannot manage money, it then flows on to affect all of us.

In my area as the Shadow Minister for Public Transport it has affected a number of key projects which will impact many of us in Victoria. Let us go back to 23 November 2017. I would like to read, if I can, from a speech given in this chamber actually – not in the Parliament, but in this chamber when the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) had a summit. I am going to read a couple of paragraphs from it, from 23 November 2017:

By the time the Metro Tunnel is completed in 2026, construction work will be well underway on an airport rail link.

...

In our view, the airport rail link has the potential to unlock Western and Northern Victoria.

It can create the extra capacity that we need in the congested rail corridor between Melbourne and Sunshine –

Which means we can untangle the regional and metropolitan network on the Geelong and Ballarat lines.

And finally it can give Melbourne’s booming west access to electrified metro rail services.

Ultimately, that means we can deliver real, high-speed rail to regional Victoria.

...

The dream becomes a reality.

Beginning with Geelong, and then Ballarat –

Our plan will look at how to deliver real, high-speed rail to connect Victoria.

Imagine travelling from Geelong to Melbourne in under 40 minutes.

It would change the way people work and live.

And it would change the face of our state forever.

...

A plan ... to reshape Victoria ...

said then Premier Daniel Andrews to VCCI on 23 November 2017. To go through his speech again: the airport rail link – scrapped by this government. The airport rail link, which had the potential to unlock western and northern Victoria – scrapped. And when the government scrapped it, I might add, the now Premier said, ‘Oh, this was an idea of Scott Morrison’s.’ Remember when she said, ‘This wasn’t funded by us. It was a Scott Morrison idea,’ in order to re-spin? But in fact, a year before Scott Morrison even became Prime Minister, here was her former boss coming in here to gloat about –

**Dylan Wight** interjected.

**Matthew GUY:** Have you got something to say? I thought you were the concierge, sorry. I do not know, I thought the three-piece suit man was the concierge. Sorry, I would like a glass of water, if you do not mind.

**Dylan Wight** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Tarneit is not in his chair.

**Matthew GUY:** He is a funny one, isn't he? We have in that speech the talk about the airport rail link, which, as I said, will never occur under this government certainly, because it has been scrapped. Of course it was Morrison's idea when it was scrapped. It was launched by Daniel Andrews. It was going to go to Ballarat as well – 250-kilometre-an-hour trains going to Ballarat. And of course in that speech he mentioned the western rail upgrade, which is the Melton line electrification, the Wyndham Vale electrification. They are currently being serviced by three- and six-car VLocity trains –

**Dylan Wight** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Tarneit is warned.

**Matthew GUY:** which are not built to service metropolitan traffic. These are country trains, which are ordered as country trains, which are geared as country trains. They are not there to accommodate metropolitan traffic, but that is what they have to do because we do not have a metropolitan rail plan to electrify – as was said on 23 November 2017 – Melbourne's western suburbs. That is what the eastern suburbs have got, it is what the southern suburbs have got, but of course it is not what the western suburbs have, yet they were promised that they would be able to get that with the Melbourne Airport rail link.

Let us have a look at the Melbourne Airport rail link again. The Melbourne Airport rail link as planned by this government, which was again mentioned by the member for Sandringham, was correctly going to be part of the Suburban Rail Loop. SRL Airport I think it was rebranded as, which is interesting because the Suburban Rail Loop East that is being supposedly built by the current government now is not going to be a broad-gauge 5 foot 3 service, which is what the airport rail link was being planned and built by the current government as. If you draw that line – despite the map the government spin doctors are putting out – it goes from Cheltenham all the way around Melbourne, comes to the airport and goes down as a continuous link, but of course it cannot because one set of tracks in the Suburban Rail Loop East is 4 foot 8½ apart and the airport rail tracks are 5 foot 3 apart. One has an overhead which is a DC current and one has an overhead which is an AC current. One has a loading gauge akin to Sydney metro and one has a loading gauge akin to the Victorian broad-gauge system. Where do they join? Where do they link? And of course they are not going to ever link because the whole thing is a hoax.

It was never planned to link. It has never been properly thought through. This kind of detail has never been answered by the government, because the line was never planned to go beyond the one small line in the eastern suburbs. The government's entire plan is to pump every cent it has got into a railway line with no connectivity to the existing urban rail network. What kind of insanity is that, to build an entirely new line, not even a network, just one line from Box Hill to Cheltenham, which has got a different rail gauge, a different system for the overhead, different size carriages, which is driverless, which has got no connectivity to the current metropolitan rail network, to totally screw up every bit of connectivity that we have got in the network today simply for the sake of politics? It is hard to believe that the government would press ahead with congesting our city rail network into the future when we have got every option to decongest it at this point in time. Some of those options would be an airport rail link, part of that would be the Wyndham Vale electrification, the Melton electrification, which this government announced on 23 November 2017 to the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in this chamber but then reneged on because they have run out of money.

The point of all of this is that bad governments make bad decisions, and there are consequences for bad management. Whether it is cancer research, whether it is IVF, whether it is the western rail electrification, whether it is fast rail to Geelong or whether it is the airport rail link, the consequences are that Victorians will suffer, and they do suffer, and they will suffer, because someone has to service that debt into the future. It will not be the current Premier, it will not be her predecessor and it probably will not be the current government, but encumbering our state with such an enormous financial burden – it is almost criminal that you could do this to future generations with no qualms about what is being done, with no qualms about lying to people.

Look at those budget figures. The nominal figures for spending in health and justice are absolutely almost insultingly, stupidly wrong. There is no way that with a population that is growing, in the figures put in the budget itself, that we are going to reduce that spending over time. It will be greatly expanded, but the government's surplus is built off those nominal figures. It is ridiculous. To actually look at growth figures in there, which have got no correlation to anything that has been put out by federal Treasury, is completely and utterly ridiculous, but this is what the government is basing a supposed surplus or a reduction in debt to gross state product ratio off. It is completely false but there are no qualms about it, and for this government they will feel there is no consequence about it. They just think lying and misleading and breaking promises –

**Danny Pearson:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is using unparliamentary language.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member does know that word is unparliamentary, and I ask him not to repeat it.

**Matthew GUY:** That is okay, Deputy Speaker. The member for Essendon might want to put it in any other way he likes. It might be unparliamentary, but it does not mean it is not true. When the former Premier – of which he was a minister in that man's government – walks into this chamber and at a Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry summit and talks about travelling from Geelong to Melbourne in under 40 minutes, changes the way it is going to work and says, 'It's not a promise, it's happening now' – there is his VCCI speech – and two or three budgets later it is all being scrapped because it was misleading, what other words can we think of? Untrue? Disingenuous? Any others? Incorrect? Deliberately incorrect even? What more? Or you could take the person out of it and use it in a generic term – maybe just another Labor lie? Can I say that one? No? Whatever it is, it is unfair to the people of Victoria, and they deserve better than this. They deserve a government that does not tell them deliberate untruths and gives them the services they deserve, a government that manages their money with responsibility so that we can get the lines to Melton and Wyndham Vale electrified, so that we do not have members who come in here and think it is all a big joke to lie to multicultural communities about funding in their own seats.

**Danny Pearson:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is defying your ruling. Those terms are unparliamentary.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I uphold the point of order, and I ask the member not to use that word.

**Matthew GUY:** Whatever you need me to do I will do, but I just cannot stand Sir Les's interjections over there, because at the end of the day he is part of the government that is screwing the state's budget, and he will stand condemned at the next election.

**Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (17:53):** I am very happy to rise to speak on the budget, noting of course, yes, families and households more broadly are facing a significant number of challenges: you have got rising inflation, post-pandemic challenges, the war in Ukraine, supply costs and low unemployment. It is actually a positive of course to have low unemployment, but nevertheless all of these factors mean there are delicate challenges that have to be balanced. Having said that, we have created more than 560,000 jobs since September 2020, leading all states and territories in both absolute and percentage terms. What is more, more Victorians than ever before are in work and business investment has surged to record levels. So we are not going to trash talk our state. We know Victorians are absolutely fantastic at doing their very best, and therefore we think this is a terrific place to live even if the opposition think otherwise and talk down the great people of Victoria.

There was something I did want to pick up and it is actually further to some commentary from earlier from Minister Brooks, so that is the member for Bundoora – I am sorry, I should have said that. Anyway, just to pick up on a point, I have been hearing a bit of a refrain from the Greens political party trying to assert that there is nothing in the budget for housing, which is really quite astonishing, because when you look at the budget and you look at the line items you can see line after line of

investment, really significant investment, in housing for our state. For instance, here I am at 150 on the Victorian budget 2024–25 budget paper 4, ‘State Capital Program’, and we can see ‘Public housing revitalisation program’ – look, there is investment from our government in public housing; ‘Regional housing fund’; and ‘Social housing accelerator program’.

Wow, they are new projects and actually in the 2024–25 budget. Now, I should say with the social housing accelerator program that there is an injection there from the Commonwealth government. But isn’t that great? We have got the state government and the Commonwealth government working together to get more Victorians safe and secure housing.

Talking about safe and secure housing, particularly for instance the renewal of public housing and social housing in our state, we are taking buildings that were built back in the 1950s and 60s – built pretty cheaply. They cost a bomb to heat and cool and are not fit for purpose in terms of accessibility or true amenity. So it has made really good sense to totally renew in those spaces so that Victorians get to have the standard of housing that we have come to expect. Because let us face it: building standards in the 1950s and 60s have truly evolved. What we expect now is fit-for-purpose and accessible housing. We want climate-friendly housing standards so that it is much cheaper to heat and cool. That makes really good sense, particularly for those who are most vulnerable in our community, so I am not sure why the Greens political party are so opposed to these kinds of investments. In any case, we will soldier on because we want to get more Victorians into safe and secure housing. I just thought that I would speak to that.

I should say that those are new projects, and of course there are ongoing projects, which are listed here, which are really upgrading and supporting people in our state to get more safe and secure housing. I hope that clarifies that for the Greens political party, that we are truly investing in housing in our state for Victorians and certainly some of the most vulnerable Victorians in our state.

Putting that aside, I will talk about more broadly some of the many, many cost-of-living measures that are in the budget which are truly helping so many across our state, including in my seat of Albert Park – for instance, the one-off school saving bonus to help cover costs, because they can really add up, whether it is for uniforms or school books or otherwise, for parents starting the school year. We are thinking about them, we are thinking about the pressures that they are under, and this is why this kind of funding is being provided – to support people with legitimate cost-of-living measures. Those payments are going to be made. I do not know what the member for Bulleen was trying to assert in that regard, but it is factually correct. We have announced this. This is part of the budget; it is going to happen. I hope that that might allay some of his concerns with regard to that.

Also, we are tripling our free Glasses for Kids program. As someone who has worn glasses since grade 3, I can tell you that they make the world of difference in being able to concentrate and to read. I have a stigmatism I think in my left eye and so forth, and I am afraid my eyesight is not quite what it was even in grade 3. Nevertheless, with the great help of optometrists et cetera I whack on the glasses in the morning and – yes, hey presto! – I can actually read my mobile phone. I am forever grateful for that. I would hate to think that there are kids in our community who might be actually held back, who might be compromised, in their ability to read, so it is really, really important that we are supporting this very legitimate cost-of-living issue.

Then of course there are the Get Active Kids vouchers, and I think of all the wonderful sporting clubs in my electorate and indeed across the state.

**A member:** What sport did you play?

**Nina TAYLOR:** I actually did ballet. No, I did play volleyball in primary school. That is a sport. That counts, right? It totally counts, yes. I enjoyed that. But in any case, less about me and more about the people of Albert Park. Anyway, the Get Active Kids vouchers – I will try to articulate that a little more clearly – I think are just so fantastic and so well received. There may be some families in the community who have to make the decision: ‘Do I put my kid into sport or do I not?’ In this way we

are backing them in and making sure that those kids get the opportunities that they truly deserve. We know with our sporting clubs that it is about getting fit and also about discipline, but it is actually a really important social connection, and often kids can make friendships that last for a lifetime. It is also a social connection for the parents as well. It is kind of an all-family, all-in sort of experience. Every little bit that can be done to help support kids getting into sport and staying fit has got to be a good thing.

Also of course we want Victorians to succeed in the classroom. I know I am truly appreciative of the wonderful education that I have received in this great state. I think every one of us can remember at least one or two of our wonderful teachers who have helped us along the way to be able to really perform at our best. I am really excited about this budget, particularly with Middle Park Primary School receiving \$8.8 million.

**Paul Edbrooke** interjected.

**Nina TAYLOR:** Yes, it is absolutely fantastic for stage 1 of their master plan. I popped in yesterday for an assembly. It is so great these days with the school leaders – you know, they are only about grade 5 or 6, but they get up there and they run the whole program. I do not remember doing that when I was in primary school. I just think it is so fantastic what they do these days, building that real confidence and that ability to organise and run a really slick –

**Paul Edbrooke** interjected.

**Nina TAYLOR:** Yes, that's right – budding leaders of tomorrow. They did a fantastic job yesterday when I popped into the school and were really, really happy that we are backing them in and we are helping them to be able to achieve stage 1 of their master plan.

Last year, I should say, our free kinder program – I am switching now, because they get to primary school, but prior to primary school is free kinder, and we know those first years of life are so very important, so we have really got to make sure that parents are backed in to be able to get their kids into kinder – saved around 140,000 families up to \$2500 in fees. I mean, that is real dollars when you look at that. That is helping with the cost of living per se but also making sure that there are not unnecessary barriers holding kids back from getting those vital skills that are going to help them with that transition when they actually go to primary school.

I am going to come back again to the matter of housing. Of course it is absolutely vital. Our Big Housing Build is giving more Victorians the security and stability of a home. More than 9000 social and affordable homes are already under construction or complete. We know there is more work to do, and there is more work to do, and it is ongoing. This budget also includes almost \$197 million for frontline homelessness services to continue reaching and supporting Victorians who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This includes funding for the wonderful Sacred Heart Mission in Albert Park to supply meals and other essential items to people sleeping rough in our community. I have visited Sacred Heart Mission a number of times, and it is just wonderful to see how they produce these really healthy, nutritious and actually tasty meals. It is wonderful for people to have that dignity – not only do they need the nutrition, but they need the dignity of a meal that actually tastes good. Also it provides a mechanism of engagement as well, an important non-confrontational mechanism, for people to get the kind of support services that they may need, because of course Sacred Heart Mission is looking after some of the people who are most at risk and certainly extremely vulnerable in our community.

The Metro Tunnel – oh, my goodness, that is really coming along. We had a visit there, I should say, the other day to see the progress on the tunnel. There is going to be that unique interchange between the trams along St Kilda Road, and it is so very efficient and effective. Also whenever we have events at the shrine or the botanical gardens or otherwise, it is just going to create a much more efficient network. But I think predominantly for the day-to-day interchange – not only, I should say, for residents of Albert Park and surrounding electorates but of course for the residents from further out and the outer suburbs that are having to come into the city – it is going to be so much more efficient

in terms of the turnaround times. They are just going to have less time transiting and hopefully more time with their families and with their friends doing the things that they need to do to help nurture themselves on a day-to-day basis. That is coming along, and pardon the pun, it is on track. It is doing really well. It is looking fantastic, but of course it is the functionality that really matters in that space. I am really happy that it is going along well and that we have been able, along with a number of colleagues, to see for ourselves that kind of high efficiency in terms of transiting around our community.

We know that public transport as well is obviously critical, because aside from people doing the most active transport, which is of course cycling and walking, public transport is a key method in terms of reducing congestion on our roads and also making sure we reduce emissions as well – noting that we also, as part of our cleaner energy future, are making sure that we can transition to renewable energy when it comes to offsetting government buildings, public transport, schools and so forth. It is all part of the renewable revolution in Victoria. Anyway, I got excited about that.

Now I am going to hop along to the matter of health, because obviously if you do not have your health, what have you got? It is absolutely vital. We are truly investing in our health system. In this year's budget we are upgrading the Alfred, ensuring local families can get the care that they need when they need it. I say the Alfred because that is geographically the closest to the seat of Albert Park. This includes \$118 million for critical capital works to make sure the hospital can keep providing world-class health care for Victorians. Of course we know how important frontline services are for patients and their families. Since we came to government Victoria's public hospitals have now employed over 5000 more doctors and over 13,000 more nurses. This is obviously fundamental when we are looking at the structural elements of supporting the best health outcomes for our state.

There was one other matter. I am nearly there, but I do want to talk about some investments in terms of energy. I did allude to energy before, but I want to get a little more specific. In the budget there is \$38 million to continue the success of Solar Victoria with an extra 35,000 energy-efficient hot water rebates. I get really excited about energy efficiency because it is not only about generating the energy, which is obviously vital, but also about saving energy where we can. By switching to a heat pump or solar hot water system the average household will save up to \$400 on their electricity bills each year. When you think about school costs, health costs, heating costs, energy costs – a big one – your house, your rent, your mortgage et cetera, it all adds up. This has all been factored in fundamentally, so there is a real target, a real focus on these key cost-of-living levers and measures to help households in Victoria to be able to get the best possible outcome for themselves or, obviously if they have children, for their children, or if they are single or whatever the situation is. So I say 'households' to be able to cover the spectrum of Victorians and particularly the seat of Albert Park. On that note I think I will commend the bill to the house.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (18:08): Labor cannot manage money, and it is Victorians who are going to pay the price. We are already paying the price, and we are seeing it on every single page of the budget papers that were delivered last week. We are seeing it constantly in the reports that are coming through as the budget is digested by people. I must say I am a little bit disappointed to be getting up and giving my budget speech now and not in a couple of weeks time, when we will have had the opportunity through the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee process to actually get into the weeds of this budget, because the little bits and pieces that I have seen in my own portfolio and in my own electorate just highlight that Labor cannot manage money and it is Victorians who are paying the price.

The purpose of a state government is to provide services and infrastructure to the people of this state, and we have an ongoing debate in this place between those opposite and the Liberals and Nationals with respect to financial management. Sometimes it does get a little puerile. There is no doubt that debt can be a good thing. Debt put towards productive infrastructure is a good thing, and it is quite appropriate that future generations pay for some of the infrastructure in particular that they will utilise. But it is all about balance, and it is about making sure that you have got that debt under control and

that spending under control. The failure in this budget, after 10 years of this Labor government, is that this Labor government has completely failed to get that balance right.

It has lost complete control of its spending, it has lost complete control of its debt, because Labor cannot manage money, and we are seeing that right throughout these budget papers. We are heading, by 2028, for \$188 billion of debt for the state of Victoria.

**Tim McCurdy:** How much?

**Danny O'BRIEN:** \$188 billion. Debt will become 25.2 per cent of the gross state product of this state – that is, Victorians will owe a quarter of what they produce every year. To put that in context, I think the Cain and Kirner government disaster in the early 1990s got to about 16 per cent, so it is not insignificant in a historical context and it just reinforces that Labor cannot manage money.

We all have debt. We all borrow to build a home, we all borrow for a business – whatever it might be. Where that issue comes in for debt is in what it ultimately costs you and what it stops you as a government from being able to do. By 2028 that \$188 billion of debt will be costing Victorians \$9.3 billion a year in interest, which is \$26 million per day. To put this in context – and I am pretty sure those opposite probably have not looked at this – \$9.3 billion a year in interest payments is more than the entire budgets this year for the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, the Department of Government Services, the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Treasury and Finance. All those departments have a budget this year of less – in most cases far less – than the \$9 billion we are headed for terms of interest repayments.

What does that mean? That means the services and the infrastructure that the people of Victoria need are going to be removed, because we will be spending so much on interest payments – \$9.3 billion a year, \$26 million a day. There are consequences for that spending. There are consequences for the fact that Labor cannot manage money. You have seen it in this budget. You have seen it in cuts to airport rail – the airport rail that we have been promised for decades that this government said it was finally going to get on and do. The former Premier said it was going to be his thing; now it is put off for another four years. We are seeing community hospitals that were promised two elections ago – three of them, at Eltham, Torquay and Emerald – totally on hold, probably never to happen, because the money has gone. We see through the budget papers community crime prevention down 46 per cent, a 46 per cent reduction; early childhood supports down 11 per cent, an 11 per cent cut to the budget there; environment protection, a 37 per cent cut; and waste and recycling, a 44 per cent cut. That is notwithstanding that at the same time the government is actually upping the waste charge, so the tax increase is there but the waste and recycling budget will actually go down. How could that possibly be? I can only assume it is because the waste and recycling charge is going to prop up the bottom line. We are seeing child protection – child protection – down \$140 million on last year, home and community care support for young people down 19.8 per cent and the public health budget down 33.8 per cent.

I heard the member for Bentleigh and many others talk about how well the jobs market is going. The jobs budget in this budget is cut by 70 per cent. Then we have seen things like the government's signature policies, like the sick pay for casual workers. Remember, everyone sat over on this side and got lectured by the government about how important this was and how this was a Labor Party delivering for casual workers. It is gone – just cut. Absolutely gone.

We have got hospital waiting lists. We saw in the *Sunday Age* this week that the government's commitment, announced to great fanfare and with a huge amount of money just a couple of years ago, that they were heading for 240,000 surgeries per year – that target has been cut before they even reached it. They did not even get close to it.

The minister at the time said she would not accept anything less than 240,000 surgeries a year. They are now expected to perform 207,000, and the target has gone back to 200,000. That is not numbers; that is not budget figures.

**Bridget Vallence** interjected.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** It is people, member for Evelyn – people with hip surgery that they are waiting for, with knees, with all of those things that our constituents come to us with all the time. The government, with great fanfare and billions of dollars, announced they were going to do these 240,000 surgeries and get well beyond what the surgery target was before COVID, and in this budget it is just cut, because Labor cannot manage money.

We see it affecting everything else. We have got the public housing lists. We have seen the so-called Big Housing Build of \$5 billion, and yet we have still got something like 60,000 Victorians on public housing waiting lists. In my electorate in Latrobe city, Wellington shire and South Gippsland shire there are less public and social homes now than when this government came to office. Notwithstanding a \$5 billion increase in spending, there are less in those shires across the Gippsland South electorate.

We have seen the failure to deliver in mental health. We have seen the failure to establish the lived and living experience agency as recommended by this government's own royal commission, which was meant to be delivered this year and in this budget – not going to happen. Two thousand supported dwellings for Victorians living with mental illness and 500 medium-term supported housing places for young people – neither of them are delivered in this budget as expected. And finally there is the delay of the rollout of the next tranche of the local mental health and wellbeing services, again put on the backburner because Labor cannot manage money. That includes a mental health and wellbeing local in my electorate of Gippsland South in Leongatha, because the Labor government cannot manage money.

We are seeing in education more money over the last 20 years – more money and less outcomes for our students. We hear the government talk about all the schools that they are getting – well, I have still got Sale College unfunded. Despite the fact that it was given \$3 million three years ago for a master plan, it is still unfunded. Foster Primary School – still waiting for it to be finished. Leongatha Secondary College actually did not have an ask for money and did not have a master plan but was given a commitment by the government before the election of \$11.7 million, which of course we would welcome – except, because Labor cannot manage money, that too, along with several dozen other schools, has also been put on the backburner.

We are seeing cancer funding cut by 70 per cent, dental services cut in this budget – dental services; we have already got a two-year waitlist in Latrobe Regional Health for public dental services.

The member for Nepean has gone on about the tourism promotions that have been cut, and we come to the crux. I think the member for Bulleen put it pretty well: we all remember the debate about the Suburban Rail Loop and the health system at the last election, and the former Premier put up the Old El Paso TV ad, remember: 'Why don't we have both?' Well, now we are not getting either, because the Arden hospital, the so-called biggest hospital promise in the nation – gone. We are not doing that anymore, apparently for some electromagnetic thing: 'Oh, actually, we knew about that three years ago.' But it is a very handy excuse for us to just shelve the whole thing because we cannot afford it anymore.

We are not doing airport rail. We are not doing the Melton and Wyndham rail. We are not doing Geelong fast rail anymore. But we are going ahead with the \$125 billion, \$200 billion, \$250 billion – whatever it is – Suburban Rail Loop that no-one ever asked for. I heard one of the members on the other side before say people voted for it. People voted for the Arden hospital too. I am not hearing anyone mention that one. They also voted for the airport rail. They also voted, Acting Speaker Farnham, for the West Gippsland hospital. Did you get any money for that? I cannot put you in that position when you are in the chair, Acting Speaker, but those are things that people also voted for.

People also voted for the sick pay guarantee for casual workers. That has been dropped. So do not stand there and tell us people voted for the Suburban Rail Loop when you have dumped all the other things that people voted for because Labor cannot manage money.

We are seeing this in my portfolio of roads. We now have a roads maintenance budget that is 16 per cent less than it was four years ago. Not only that, we have got a whole range of performance measures that the government has introduced, and they are failing to meet some of the old ones. They are introducing a new performance measure of 'road area major patched'. That does not make literal sense. Is it patched majorly, as opposed to the minor patches they are doing? I do not know. They are bringing this in, 'road area major patched', and of course the targets are there this year but they are irrelevant. If you are patching potholes, that is not a measure of success in fixing roads, it is a measure of failure. Why have we got that? Because also on that same page, page 128 of the performance measures, we have got the 'road area resurfaced or rehabilitated' performance measure. In regional Victoria the target two budgets ago was 12 million square metres. What was achieved this year was 340,000 square metres – a 90 per cent failure on what the target was two years ago. The target for this year is 3 million square metres, so the government is absolutely abandoning any concept of actually looking after our roads, and our roads are in the worst shape they have ever been.

The government's own statistics have shown that 91 per cent of our regional roads – our roads across the state indeed – are in poor or very poor condition. They are like that because the money is not being spent on them because Labor cannot manage money. We are seeing that everywhere in the services that we are missing out on, in the roads that are not getting fixed and in the preventative maintenance. That performance measure includes resurfacing. We do resurfacing to make sure that a road is sealed and that water does not get in and we do not create potholes. The government has cut that to such an extent that there has been virtually no resurfacing program undertaken this year alone, and that is just a disgrace.

The government's \$26 million in spending on interest rates per day is leaving us without the ability to deliver the services that Victorians want. In my electorate that \$26 million a day is three Mirboo North fire stations or Foster fire stations or Korumburra fire stations. It is four Foster Primary Schools. It is half of Sale College in a day. This government has lost control of the finances, and it is Victorians who are suffering the consequences. Labor cannot manage money. It has got \$180 billion worth of debt, heading for \$26 million a day, and that means services and the things that Victorians need will not be delivered.

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (18:23): I am so pleased to rise and speak about how this government's budget will be helping families in my electorate of Yan Yean. That is what I see when I see this budget. I see all the help there will be for the many, many young families that I represent in Yan Yean. Raising kids is fantastic. It is rewarding and it is wonderful, but it can be very expensive.

I would like to start just by reflecting on something that the member for Albert Park also reflected on, and that is the Glasses for Kids program that is run in our schools. This is one that is really close to my heart, with my daughter being in glasses since she was 15 months old and us sort of not realising before then that she did not have good vision and she could not see us properly. We have always been really glad that we were able to catch it early, to pick it up early, so that it was not a barrier for her. So to think of the children that will be in our schools receiving assessments by optometrists and all the extra kids that will be in glasses as a result just makes me so happy that they will have that barrier removed. We know that with this \$6.8 million tripling of the glasses program we are going to reach another 74,000 kids. Another 74,000 kids are going to have their eyes tested, and the reason that is great for families is not just that it is good for their kids' health and learning but it saves parents money at the optometrist. We know how hard it is, the weekly hustle, the Monday to Friday that goes past in a blur and before you know it, it is the weekend. Families do not want to be at the optometrist on the weekend, so I am so glad that we are delivering this additional Glasses for Kids program.

It is great to have the Minister for Community Sport here in the chamber because the Get Active Kids voucher program is just so important for my community, and it means so many kids can participate. Last week I was at Auskick in Wandong – 65 kids. There were 65 kids there at the Wandong Auskick, and I have never seen a harder thing to manage. So a very big thankyou to the president, Stuart, and all the volunteers that were there helping get these kids into line. Talking to families that were there, we talked about the cost of the registration, but parents were also saying that there are other costs that come with sport that people have to work into their budget. We were talking about where to get cheap footy boots and the like. Having this help with registration and costs like that is really important for getting kids into sport, and I know that is especially true for my area.

In the same way, Brodie and Kathy, the team at Laurimar Netball Club, have got the NetSetGO running at the moment, and it is going really well as well. It is a very popular sport for young people. As we heard, it is not just about physical wellbeing but it is also about social wellbeing, the social development of children and opportunities for parents to mingle. In the new estates, in the new areas, for things that bring the community together, sport is chief amongst them, so removing barriers from families participating in sport is absolutely brilliant.

The school saving bonus of \$400 is, again, helping families – removing barriers from participation in excursions and camps and the like. We want all children to have amazing experiences. I know one of my local schools this Friday has a special science incursion with an external private provider coming in to run something that is promised to amaze and excite the children in terms of STEM. I imagine there will be a volcano – there usually is a pretend volcano. It is important for kids to have exposure to all the other things that go along with school, not just the three Rs.

Kids just grow and grow and grow, and their feet never stop growing. It seems like new shoes are required all the time. The difficulty with school shoes is they are not really something you can get second hand. A lot of families support each other by passing around school uniforms, but you cannot really do that for shoes.

**A member** interjected.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** The shoes fall apart; that is right. So it is good that we also have that additional support for families that require it, with the State Schools' Relief program, so that kids can turn up proudly to school, ready to learn. With the expansion of the breakfast program for kids, they will be absolutely ready to learn. This is absolutely removing barriers for families in my electorate to have their children reaching their absolute best potential. We do not want mum and dad stressed out and worried. I do not know about you, Acting Speaker Farnham, but certainly I have noticed an increase in people reaching out in rental stress: 'I need to leave my property. I've only got X amount of weeks. Has anyone seen anything available? I've applied everywhere. I can't find anywhere. I can't afford the properties that are available.' This just seems to be becoming more and more common, and it seems to be very common, or more common – I hear it a lot – with single mothers who only have one income and are caring for their children. The rental stress is something that really worries me. So I am really glad that this budget has the rental stress support package, which will provide funding to organisations to support renters in the private market, giving advice, advocacy and legal assistance. I guess it is another step forward in our housing statement commitment, where we said that we would develop a package around rental stress.

Families are really at the centre of this budget, and so are learners – little and big learners. Learning is a theme throughout the budget in many different portfolios. We all know about the Building Blocks program and funding streams, and in this budget we have the improvement and inclusion grants for refurbishment of kinders. We have got some fantastic kinders that have been around for a long time. I am thinking about the Whittlesea kindergarten, which has clocked up decades and decades and decades of service. I am thinking about the kinders that are still running that my husband went to when he was little, so these ones do need a bit of a facelift, especially with the additional children that will be attending. This funding builds on Building Blocks funding we have had previously. In my area that

has funded the construction of Murnong Kindergarten; we paid towards the Marymede kindergarten – that is with the Catholic system; the Eucalyptus Parade Kindergarten we constructed; and the Orchard Road kindergarten. So we have been very busy building kinders in the electorate of Yan Yean and people have been very busy creating babies, so it just works out really well – we just get on perfectly. It is fantastic to see those facilities full of happy children. I was speaking with a kindergarten teacher at a community event on Sunday night – I am sadly moving from a kindergarten in my area to Kalkallo, so my loss is Minister Spence's gain – but she just loves being a kindergarten teacher. She loves those kids, and they are really lucky to have her. The way that we are backing in families for kinder is really important.

Last year with our free kinder program 140,000 families were saved up to \$2500 in kinder fees. That is huge. That is a huge amount of money for a family, up to \$2500. That is a lot. It is good that, again, especially with three-year-old kinder, we are removing that barrier for people to send their children to kindergarten for that social and play-based learning, giving mum the chance to go back to work if she wants to.

The next stage up then, primary school, we were really excited to announce recently our new school in Wallan East, so that is opening in 2026. The funding is there in this budget for the construction of that school. It will have 525 students. There will be a kindy onsite. The local community centre is being constructed next door, with another kindergarten. Like I said, we make a lot of babies in Yan Yean. That is going to be a fabulous school. I cannot wait for the builder to be appointed, which will be mid-2024. I cannot wait to see that school open, and I know it is going to be a really important part of our community there.

Then on to the high schools, Whittlesea Secondary College will be upgraded with the funding in the budget there. I know principal Kathy Mourkakos was really happy to see that. It is a fantastic school with fantastic captains there – Caitlin, Will, Amy and Matthew – who do their school very proud. It is a school I am very proud of for its excellent musical productions. Last year was *Chicago*, and I hope I am not talking out of school when I say that this year's production is *Flashdance*. I cannot wait to see *Flashdance* in the flesh at Whittlesea Secondary College. They are absolutely top-notch.

If people want to go on to TAFE, then we have got great support for TAFE in the budget as part of our \$555 million to build the workforce. But teachers are really at the core of all of this – kindergarten teachers, schoolteachers, high school teachers. So they are not left behind in this budget: there is \$139 million there. If you speak to teachers – and I am from a family of teachers, so I do a lot – around my electorate of Yan Yean and all the different schools, teachers' workloads we all acknowledge are just really high. Teachers work so hard. They give so much for their students and so much to their schools. If I think of all the work that they do outside, I am glad that this \$139 million is going towards improving workloads as well as professional development and wellness for our teachers. They absolutely deserve it, and I know everyone on this side would agree with me on that.

Learning is so important, family togetherness is so important, but it is all built on a foundation of health, so families and children need to be healthy to be able to enjoy the benefits of learning and community sport that we are talking about.

I was really humbled recently to host, last week actually, a women's pain forum in Doreen where women from across the community gathered to talk about their experience of pain. One of the women as she was entering said to me, 'I've never been to a women's pain forum before.' And I said, 'Neither have I. I don't know what we're doing either. This is new. Let's just try it and see what happens.' In that room women were so courageous and so generous in sharing their stories of pain and how they had felt ignored and dismissed for so long. I am so proud to be part of a government that is working to address what has been just treated as less important. Something that is really tangible and helpful for the women that were there and for many women in my electorate is the opening of the comprehensive women's health clinic at the Northern. Something we heard at the pain forum was how

important it is to have specialists of all different stripes together to help women address complex issues, and that is exactly what this women's health clinic at the Northern will do.

But people might not recognise the Northern when they go in future years because we are having a massive redevelopment. We are going to have a new emergency department at the Northern with a new paediatric section, just for kids. We are going to have a new mental health space there, a new alcohol and other drugs hub and additional inpatient beds. The Northern deserves it. It is a fantastic hospital. I met last week with the director of the emergency department Daniel Crompton, and he is so excited about the funding that is coming. I know that everybody in the northern suburbs is absolutely thrilled to be having a new emergency department. My father-in-law happened to be there on the weekend, unfortunately, through the emergency department and overnight in the Northern. Like many people, he absolutely raved about the staff – the fantastic nurses and doctors that we have got there at the Northern. They absolutely deserve and our patients deserve the very best in facilities as well, so I am so proud and so excited that we are delivering a new emergency department for the Northern. I cannot wait to see it get off the ground there.

We are going to have nurses that are working there who have studied free under a scholarship from this government. We will have GPs referring people there and those GPs will have benefited from a \$30,000 top-up first-year payment to stay as a GP. GPs are so important to our system, and we will continue to find ways to support them through reducing their workload and supporting them with their studies and their exams. This budget is for families, and I am for families, and I am very happy to commend the bill to the house.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) (18:38): Before I start – it is really important – I need to get something off my chest when it comes to this budget. First and foremost, I have to declare my conflict of interest. I am a mad, crazy Geelong supporter. I love my football club. They are a brilliant club. But I cannot understand any government that would put \$4.5 million towards a scoreboard for an AFL club at the same time as cutting funding to cancer research in our state. That, to me, makes no sense. And I would guarantee I could go to nearly every Geelong supporter and say, 'Would you give back the \$4.5 million for a scoreboard that we didn't need so we could put that money into cancer research here in Victoria?' and overwhelmingly we would have a yes answer. The only people that would tend to answer no to that would be the Victorian Labor government, and that is a problem we have got in our state.

I have heard many on the other side talk about rental stress and some of the concerns that they have with people coming into their office and explaining to them they have got concerns when it comes to paying rent, particularly out in the growth corridors at the moment. Or if you drive through the inner east or inner west, you will see queues and queues of people trying to get a home, or a place they can rent and call their home. Yet at the same time, we are increasing taxes, regulations and putting pressure on people who are investors here in our state and driving them and their money away from Victoria. I met with our real estate agents locally to have this discussion because I know how important it is and what we need to do to ensure that we can make sure that every person that wants to have a home has the ability and the access at an affordable price. And it is not an answer for the government, it is an answer to ensure that we can involve the private sector who have done this for many years.

With rents increasing, this government want to demonise them. The reality is it is not about demonising them; they continue to tax them. Of every three investment properties out in Casey and Cardinia that go on the market for sale, only one of them on average is coming back as an investment property. So each time three houses go on the market that were investor properties and one returns, what do you think it is going to do? It increases pressure in the market, and therefore prices go up. At the same time, interest rates have gone up. At the same time, this government has put land tax on these properties. The landlords, who are there to ensure it is an investment, will pass most of those costs on to those people who are renting those houses.

Many landlords – most landlords – do not want to pass on these cost increases, and they wear them for as long as they can. But they are all written off as this rich, wonderful group rather than the mum-

and-dad investors that they mostly are. There are actually statistics that say some of the most common investors here in Victoria are our emergency services workers; they are some of the most often to own one investment property here in our state. So those that are being punished by those opposite are actually those that they keep talking about being there to protect. We all know that is simply not true, and we need to make sure that our investment market is safe. We need to make sure that there is confidence, otherwise we will continue to see people go and invest in other states, and that is a negative outcome for this state.

At the same time, when the government say they are going to increase public housing but we know the results in Casey and Cardinia have effectively seen net growth of near zero public housing since this government has been in, you have got a real problem, because you have driven out the private sector. The government is not taking up any of that slack, and that is why rental properties through those areas have skyrocketed in price and people are living in cars. It is not just people who have traditionally been in that position; working families are living in cars because they cannot get a property, and we need to see that change.

We have seen out in the Casey–Cardinia area that one of the other issues has been – because of this government – that over a long period of time we have had a massive increase in crime. Some of these crimes that are increasing through our area are particularly around violent crime. I note the member laughing, but if you go and speak to the victims who have been involved in armed robberies, people coming through their houses with machetes, I am sure you would not be laughing. We have seen too many home invasions in Berwick – 96 in the last 12 months. Ninety-six families have had someone or some people come into their house with weapons to steal their cars and effectively take away their rights in their own home. We need to make sure that we have police services and resources available to respond to that as quickly as possible.

How would you do that? The first thing you would do is deliver on your own promise that if you were in government you would build a police station in Clyde North that is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to respond to those crimes. That was promised before the 2018 election with the absolute, rolled-gold guarantee they would have it up and operating in the first 12 months to two years of being in government. They put a sign up. To give them credit, the sign said they would have it all going. The only thing that has changed since that date is it has vanished from the budget. There is no longer a line item at all, and the sign was updated to say 2025. So they have updated the sign in Clyde North to say they will not be delivering it on time, and I am actually not even confident they will deliver it by 2025.

I note the member for Cranbourne said the money is still there. It is probably sitting next to the funding for the FRV station in Clyde North, also promised by the Victorian Labor Party. That is not there either, and the money has gone from there. If you want an example of why that station was important, you might want to ask the family who lived just 100 metres away whose house caught on fire. They had a CFA station respond from Clyde and an FRV station respond from Cranbourne. These people should have had a truck there effectively 2 minutes after that fire started, which most likely would have kept it to the room of containment, being one garage, not damaging other garages and other houses and putting people at risk in that community.

On top of that, this government with the Thompsons Road and Berwick-Cranbourne Road upgrade came out and were more than happy to be on the front page of our local papers, all with their big smiles to say, ‘How good are we, getting on with the job,’ yet it is about five years away in the budget. We are seeing how many seats are growing in this area – how many new people – and the population is growing.

**Pauline Richards** interjected.

**Brad BATTIN:** I note the member for Cranbourne commenting. We know how many people are moving into our area down here. How many people are using that road because they have not got public transport because the rail was not built down to Clyde? They have to rely on the fact they have

got one intersection, which is already packed daily and is going to have thousands of new people come onto it. Yet the solution from the Labor government is 'We will fix it in five years time.' Why does this happen? Why does this happen out in our area? It is quite simply because Labor cannot manage money, and when you cannot manage money the consequences are felt throughout the entire community.

I spoke about crime before. One of the other major concerns we have is community crime prevention. We know how important that is, and we now see that the budget for crime prevention here in Victoria has been slashed by 48 per cent, when crime in the community is at an all-time high. How can a government sit aside and literally say 'We're going to cut funding' when it comes to crime prevention? It is not only funding. They have reduced the staff in the crime prevention unit by around 80 per cent. That means we have got the minimal amount of numbers – such a minimal amount they did not even have an opportunity to put forward a submission for what they would like to do to prevent crime here in our state for this budget because they do not have the capacity that they used to have. The Victorian Liberal and National parties were very proud to introduce Australia's first crime prevention minister. It was Ed O'Donohue in the other house. We started the process; the reality is that whilst those opposite talk about it, we did it. We know that crime prevention is better than apprehending, arresting and putting in jail. It is cheaper, the outcomes are better for the community and people stay safer – all things that I think we should all back here in this house. But to cut the funding by 48 per cent because you cannot manage money is something that is going to impact every single person in the community, whether it is down here in metropolitan Melbourne or all the way up in Mildura, which actually had the most aggravated burglaries in the last 12 months.

The youth justice custodial budget has been slashed by 14 per cent. This is at a time when we know young people are coming out of the system worse than they were going in. We have got young people going down to Cherry Creek, and staff are not safe. The amount of violence we have had within the youth justice system is simply appalling and is putting staff continuously at risk. What we do see is that the increase in funding, any time that it has been for staff in youth custody services, is all towards management, so we are increasing the number of managers and we are increasing the number of supervisors. At the same time, we are not increasing the numbers of those that are working one on one with young people to give them the best opportunities – the tools that they need – to have improvements in their life. Acting Speaker Farnham, I know you have heard me say it: it is not about rehabilitation, it is about bringing kids out so they are ready to return to education or ready to return to work, or it is about ensuring that they go to the services they need. Unless one of those three outcomes is met, those kids will end up back in our detention centre or, worse, will effectively graduate to our jail system. The cost to hold a young person in the justice system here in Victoria is over \$5500 every day – \$5500 every day to hold a young person in detention here in Victoria. If we could keep one of those kids out for 12 months, we could re-fund the community crime prevention programs and ensure that we keep more kids out longer term – quite a simple solution. If you manage your money better, you can make sure that money is invested in the right spots, and it is so important.

Victoria Police, we all know, have had the roughest few years, particularly over COVID and then coming up to now, and some of the respect in the community for them has declined. That is because they were put into positions that no Victoria Police officer wanted to be in. The ring of steel – no police officer wanted to stop someone going from Pakenham to Longwarry. The border patrol – no Victoria Police officer wanted to stop a person coming back from New South Wales into Victoria. Going out to parks in Melbourne and arresting people – no copper wanted to go in and arrest people who were just out having a glass of wine or kids wanting to use a skate park.

That was not what coppers wanted to do, but the reality is the government forced them to do it. The result of that, and this is a huge risk to us, is we have seen satisfaction and confidence in Victoria Police decline to 58 per cent. It is the lowest of all time. And I will tell you now, a future government of Liberals and Nationals will do everything we can to build that respect again, because we know, understand and love the work that they do. We know that to have a community which is safe we need

to have a Victorian police force that people can trust, and that comes from management down, from policymakers down. For those that go out in the media and are quite happy to bag the Victoria Police or put them out to do dirty work that is unnecessary and not within their normal duties, we need to reverse that now and let the community know that I, and I am going to say most people in here, respect Victoria Police for the job they do. They have a tough job, and it is time that the government and the Parliament got behind them.

The other thing we have seen, and we know this is very big out in the growth corridors, is a \$207 million cut in the public health budget. This is a huge issue when Casey Hospital already has massive waiting lists. People are already being ramped when it comes to ambulances coming into the service. We heard just recently of a person dying while waiting at Maroondah Hospital. How the hell are we going to fix the system when the government is absolutely paramount on cutting these funds? And they have a choice, because they are putting funds into the Suburban Rail Loop. They could put the funds back into health and ensure that our health system is where it should be.

I know, and I have got the member for Nepean behind me, we have got \$286 million slashed from the tourism budget. While some out there will try and paint this as 'Getting rid of the tourism budget's not the biggest issue in the world', the reality is that tourism is one of the cornerstones of our budget. It is a cornerstone of our business, and we see it every time when we have things like the grand prix, proudly brought here by Jeff Kennett, making sure that our major sporting events are bringing people in. If you want to know when taxis are busiest, taxis are busiest during the two weeks of the Australian Open because the tourists are here for a long period of time. That is essential. How can a government cut the funding on their tourism strategy? What we are going to see now, and we are already starting to see it, is WA is going to increase its budget to come after our projects. They will be looking to try and get some of those major events across to Western Australia, and that is a huge problem.

But I will finish where I started. Governments have choices, and this government, whilst it might sound minor, chose to put \$4.5 million into a scoreboard that no-one needed, no-one asked for and no-one would care if it was not there instead of putting \$4.5 million into cancer research in Victoria. That is the sign of a bad government, when it cannot manage money.

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (18:53): I am delighted to rise and speak on these bills. But before I do go any further, I would just like to make some comments about the contributions from some on the other side. It has been a fairly extraordinary display of sort of flip-flopping through whether they think we should be spending or not spending money. The member for Brighton talked about the Premier having no plan. All I can say is the opposition seem to have absolutely no plan for how to talk this through. It is whether we want to spend or not spend – they really cannot work it out. But the most extraordinary contribution, the one that really takes the cake, came from the member for Bulleen, and someone really needs to tell him that a soufflé certainly does not rise three times.

What is really getting to them is that we have the fastest growing economy in Australia. Deloitte Access Economics is forecasting Victoria's economy will outpace those of all other states over the next five years. Business in 2023 alone increased by 13 per cent. Unemployment remains historically low, at around 4 per cent, near the lowest in 50 years, and it is even better in regional Victoria. We have got a plan. We are the only state that has a plan to work with the budget that came from the COVID pandemic. You know what, they love their four-line slogan, and I would say to them, 'Now that's managing money.' We know how to do it. We have got an economy that is the fastest growing in Australia, and that is how you manage money.

But I would like to talk about this budget and the really wonderful things in it.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance to the bill, I think the member may have missed a couple of other stats, which are the highest debt in the country and the highest taxes in the country.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham):** That is not a point of order.

**Michaela SETTLE:** How extraordinary, when they do not like statistics – this is why they keep flopping around. That is managing money, as we grow at the fastest rate of any state in this country. That is a great job by our Treasurer. What I love most about this budget is that this government knows that we need to work on that economic balance, and he has put the work in. It is a fine line between that and delivering the services that people need. I would like to thank our amazing Treasurer for the 10 budgets he has delivered, and all of his staff who have worked so hard to make sure that we are continuing to grow our economy but also that the services we need are there.

Of course we know that across Australia and indeed across the world we are all feeling the impacts of the cost of living. From rises in interest rates to inflation, many are doing it tough. A Labor government will always stand side-by-side with our communities. We will not cut their free fruit just to make our budget balance. We will make sure that we walk the line of looking after the economy, encouraging growth and supporting those who need it most.

This budget continues our work of helping families with cost-of-living pressures. The \$400 schoolkids bonus will help make sure our kids have all that they need for a good day at school. One close to my heart is rolling out breakfast club to every government school. I know it well from having been a volunteer, and I have seen the real difference it makes to kids' learning. We are not cutting their fruit; we are making sure they have got full bellies every day that they go to school, and of course we are tripling our free glasses program. We know that learning goes beyond the classroom, and the Get Active Kids vouchers are an incredibly valuable contribution to families, certainly across my electorate.

I think I would like to focus locally here. What I really love about it is that it is a sensible budget that continues to support the most vulnerable. Locally, for me that means funding for Youth Live4Life, which supports kids with their mental health. It means support for McAuley House for homeless women. It means funding for our mental health and wellbeing hubs in Ballarat. It means continued funding for legal services for women at maternal health clinics across my electorate. These are really important programs that are looking after the most vulnerable in our community. Those on the other side would have them cut so that they could gloat about some sort of budget surplus. We want to make sure we walk the line where we look after our communities and continue with economic growth.

A real game changer for me is the funding for the mental health, alcohol and other drug emergency hub at Grampians Health. This is going to provide a dedicated support service for people who are struggling with addiction, but it also means that it will free up the capacity in the existing emergency department. It makes EDs safer for us all.

Another one of the wonderful contributions I heard from the other side – from the member for Murray Plains – was the suggestion that regional development had somehow been gutted under our government. As the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development, I was really surprised to hear that. He suggested it was a shadow of its former self, and he wanted to glorify the days when under his government it was used as a pork-barrel bonanza. I want to get some facts straight. Regional Development Victoria will deliver close to \$3 million over the next 12 months, marking the portfolio's biggest investment in recent years. This increased investment is driven by the rollout of the expanded \$20 million Tiny Towns Fund. They can still have their community halls, but we are doing it with a view to economic development in the region. I would like to point out there have not been staffing cuts. RDV is actively recruiting to support its renewed focus on economic development and investment. That is what is so special about this budget – it is walking that line and making sure that we are growing the budget. Our roads have never seen such investment. We are investing nearly double what those on the other side did, on average, between 2010 and 2014. That is country roads for country people. This budget loves regional Victoria.

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

**Motions agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

*Third reading*

**Motions agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

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

**Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Bill 2024**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Anthony Carbines:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**And Michael O'Brien's amendment:**

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government commits to:

- (1) consulting properly with stakeholders, including the Law Institute of Victoria and the Victorian Bar, to consider and address their concerns; and
- (2) assuring Victorians that the bill contains sufficient safeguards to adequately protect the rights of innocent people with no involvement in criminal activity.'

**The SPEAKER:** The minister has moved that this bill be now read a second time. The member for Malvern has moved a reasoned amendment to this motion. He has proposed to omit all of the words after 'That' and replace them with the words which appear on the notice paper. The question is:

That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Those supporting the reasoned amendment by the member for Malvern should vote no.

**Assembly divided on question:**

*Ayes (53):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Sam Hibbins, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight

*Noes (25):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

**Question agreed to.**

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

*Third reading*

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

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

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

*Adjournment*

**The SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

**Hawthorn electorate schools**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (19:08): (651) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Education. The action I seek is for the minister to come out to both Glenferrie Primary School and Canterbury Primary School to speak with the school leadership about much-needed funds for school rectification works. These are important schools in my electorate of Hawthorn, two vital centres of learning that received no funding in this year's state budget.

As I have said in the past, education empowers and transforms people into their best selves. Glenferrie Primary was the school I sent my own daughters to. It is a wonderful and charming school, educating the young minds of Hawthorn since the 1870s. The same can be said for Canterbury Primary School on the eastern side of the Hawthorn electorate. It was first built in 1908 and has educated the students and families of Canterbury for generations. Both schools have a combined 200 years of history between them. However, for both schools to continue for another hundred years they need urgent funding for their facilities.

Both schools suffer from leaks in the ceiling, rotting wood, cracks in the walls and corrosion. In the Education State, how can this be? The Victorian School Building Authority reviewed the condition of Glenferrie Primary School in 2018. It identified 66 significant defects, including works that were required to address health and safety risks. They also raised concerns regarding the structural integrity of the original schoolhouse, flagging that an investigation by a structural engineer is required. Speaking at Canterbury Primary School, students are being exposed to damp classrooms; facilities are waterlogged. Again, the VSBA has known about these concerns since 2021. Their report identified 137 significant defects, including roof leaks in six buildings. How is it fair that six years on these school facilities are still in a decaying state?

All Victorian students deserve safe and fit-for-purpose learning environments. The Allan Labor government in this year's budget has once again failed Victorian families and students. In the Education State Glenferrie Primary and Canterbury Primary should not be forgotten by this state government. The students at these schools deserve better. Families, teachers and the Hawthorn community deserve better. They should not pay the price because the Allan Labor government cannot manage money.

**Bellarine electorate school breakfast clubs**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (19:10): (652) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is that the minister provide an update on the breakfast club program and when government schools in my electorate of the Bellarine currently not part of the program will be able to join in providing kids a nutritious start for the day. The breakfast club is an incredible program helping to reduce that financial strain for families in the current cost-of-living crisis as well as ensuring kids are getting the nourishing start to the day that they need. Four of our government primary schools in the Bellarine currently receive the breakfast club, and I am proud that this government is expanding the program to include all government schools so more kids can get the

opportunity to access breakfast. I look forward to hearing this update from the minister so I can share the good news and timeframes with my local government schools.

### **Mildura electorate mental health services**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (19:11): (653) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Mental Health in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to give Mildura residents a timeline on when the mental health local will be upgraded from the telehealth-only service it currently is to the full walk-in service. Mental Health Victoria, which is the peak body for mental health and wellbeing in Victoria, has said:

... substantial reforms recommended by the Royal Commission have been missed in this budget, raising concerns about the status of their progress ...

And that is certainly true in Mildura, where currently we have a mental health local service, but it is a telehealth service which goes alongside the other mental health services that we have that we can get on the phone – Lifeline, Beyond Blue and all the rest of them. They are all fantastic services, but what we need is a walk-in, wraparound service that can serve the needs of those suffering with mental illness when they need it. I know this because we had a similar model long before this in Robinvale, established by my husband, who did a fundraiser during COVID. He has been battling mental illness his entire life, spoke about it publicly and knew what was needed. He needed support then and there – could not wait eight to 12 weeks for a psychologist or a counsellor appointment – so he ran a marathon and raised \$50,000 to start a similar service to a mental health local at Robinvale District Health Service – walk-in, no Medicare, no referral, and there is someone there to see you when you need it. We need this.

We also need the other things that have been neglected in this budget: the 2000 supported dwellings for Victorians living with a mental illness and the 500 medium-term supported housing places. Young people are just left out in the abyss in Mildura. It is really frightening. I have had the family of a 15-year-old with debilitating symptoms who cannot get referred to another service. Headspace is not enough. The family are desperate for respite. They need a break as much as this young man needs treatment – desperately – and they have been told that he just does not fit anywhere. Can you imagine what that must do to the soul of your family, much less your own soul, when you are 15 and you are told you do not quite fit anywhere for treatment so your family cannot get respite. What then did they do? They came into my office and begged – literally begged – us to help them. This budget goes in the face of the royal commission for mental health reform in this state, and I ask the minister to address this urgently.

### **Werribee Mercy Hospital**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (19:14): (654) My adjournment is for the Minister for Health Infrastructure, and the action I seek is that the minister update me on the important works being done to expand the emergency department at Werribee Mercy Hospital. As the minister knows, Werribee Mercy is the main hospital for folks living in Wyndham, including in my electorate of Laverton. In the 2022 budget, just over two years ago now, works developing a business plan for a future expansion of the hospital culminated in a \$109.6 million investment into doubling the size of the existing ED at the hospital. This will increase the number of treatment spaces in the ED from 33 to 67, including four new resuscitation bays, 16 short-stay beds and 36 emergency care cubicles. As a result of this expansion it is expected that the hospital will be able to treat an additional 25,000 patients a year. At the end of last year designs were unveiled for the new look of the emergency department, incorporating local First Nations artwork, and the project will be delivered by architectural firm Lyons, project manager Aurecon and engineers LCI. Wyndham is a growing population, and this bigger and better emergency department is an absolute must for local health care in our local community. That is why I would greatly welcome an update from the minister on how this important project is proceeding as we head towards construction starting very soon.

**Rolling Hills Pre-school, Mooroolbark**

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (19:16): (655) Affordable and accessible child care remains a significant stress for families across the Yarra Ranges. There is a dire lack of childcare and kinder places close to where people live, and families are forced to wait for years on waiting lists, causing stress and anxiety for parents and particularly having a disproportionate impact on women. For families in Mooroolbark the matter I raise is for the Minister for Children in the other place, and the action I seek is for the government to take all necessary steps to provide more kinder and childcare places at Rolling Hills Pre-school in Mooroolbark, including allocating much-needed funding for infrastructure upgrades so that this can happen.

Communities like Mooroolbark, Lilydale and Montrose are growing, with many young families moving to these areas. The Mitchell Institute's mapping Australia's childcare black spots report outlines that these suburbs have twice as many children as available childcare places. Mooroolbark families are cruelly being denied a place for their children at Rolling Hills Pre-school due to insufficient places. Under the requirements of the guidelines of the Department of Education these families should have a priority of access given it is their local kindergarten, but families are contacting me distressed that they have been told there are no available places for them to enrol at Rolling Hills Pre-school, despite it being the closest to their home. Rolling Hills Pre-school in Mooroolbark is highly regarded, offering three- and four-year-old kinder programs and conveniently located close to Rolling Hills Primary School. But the physical constraints of Rolling Hills Pre-school mean that they can only offer 25 places and have been operating at capacity for several years.

I am aware that Yarra Ranges council in its advocacy and budget submissions to the state government has also highlighted the need to develop Rolling Hills Pre-school to ensure it can provide more places for local children, with council estimating that \$8.7 million in funding is required to redevelop the Rolling Hills facility to add three new playrooms and offer 33 additional places for local children.

Sadly, the Allan Labor government has failed to adequately invest in childcare facilities and services in my local community. Not only is Victoria the most expensive place in Australia for child care, as confirmed by the Productivity Commission in February this year, Labor has now broken its early childhood promises from the last election. As a result of Labor's financial mismanagement, their 2024–25 state budget confirms Labor's promised delivery of 50 new early learning centres will be delayed by five years and the expansion of free kinder for four-year-olds to 30 hours a week has been delayed by four years. Labor has also failed to address the chronic early childhood workforce shortages.

Families should be able to enter their children into their closest preschool, and Mooroolbark families deserve more support, not less, from this government to ensure the necessary steps are taken to upgrade Rolling Hills Pre-school to increase the number of places at Rolling Hills Pre-school in Mooroolbark as a matter of priority.

**Pascoe Vale electorate veterans**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (19:19): (656) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Veterans, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the investments the Victorian government has been making to commemorate the service and sacrifices of our veterans across my community. The sacrifices of generations of service men and women in our veterans community have played a fundamental role in helping us create and protect our largely peaceful and harmonious way of life, which we must never forget nor take for granted. At the heart of our veterans service and at the heart of our nation's soul is very much the Anzac spirit. I recently had the privilege of taking part in the Victorian parliamentary delegation to Türkiye to pay respects to our very first Anzacs, marking the 109th anniversary of the Gallipoli landings on the very shores where the Anzac legend was born. Amongst the 8700 Australians who lost their lives at Gallipoli over the eight-month campaign from April to December of 1915, there are at least 62 servicemen who made the ultimate sacrifice from my community who remain buried on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

I had the absolute honour of visiting the final resting places of 11 of these local veterans to pay my respects on behalf of our local community and to ensure their memories are never forgotten. For the record they included Sapper Harold Evelyn Baxter, 23 years old, of Coburg, killed 13 June, buried at Beach Cemetery; Private Garnet Albert-Roy Brooks, 18 years old, of Brunswick, killed 13 October, buried at Shrapnel Valley; Lance Corporal Gordon Peter Cameron, 24 years old, of Brunswick, killed 12 July; Private John William Eric Cox, 22 years old, of Brunswick, killed 3 November, buried at Shrapnel Valley; Private John Thomas Hancher, 23 years old, of Brunswick, killed 8 May, buried at Redoubt Cemetery; Lance Corporal Leslie Hart, 18 years old, of Brunswick, killed 4 May, buried at Beach Cemetery; Private Thomas Enoch Haylock, 31 years old, of Coburg, killed 12 October, buried at Shrapnel Valley; Trooper John Thomas Leonard, age unknown, of Brunswick, killed 30 May, buried at Ari Burnu Cemetery; Private Frank Anthony O'Loughlen, 19 years old, of Brunswick, killed 16 September, buried at Shrapnel Valley; Trooper Frederick Joseph Smith, age unknown, of Brunswick, killed 7 August, buried at Ari Burnu Cemetery; and Private Douglas William Thompson, age unknown, of Brunswick, killed 20 May, buried at Beach Cemetery. In their memory I echo the deep words of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who said:

Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives ... You are now lying in the soil of a friendly country. Therefore rest in peace. There is no difference between the Johnnies and the Mehmets to us where they lie side by side here in this country of ours ... You, the mothers who sent their sons from faraway countries, wipe away your tears; your sons are now lying in our bosom and are in peace. After having lost their lives on this land they have become our sons as well.

I look forward to receiving the minister's response so I can share it with the Coburg RSL, Pascoe Vale RSL and particularly the younger generations of my community so their memory can live on. I thank the Minister for Veterans for leading the delegation, all the parliamentary colleagues from both sides who took part, Michael Pianta from the Coburg RSL and Les Mananov from Veteran Scarves, who provided us with the scarves and the ties we wore proudly. I thank the Turkish ambassador to Australia Ufuk Gezer and the Turkish consul general to Melbourne Doğan Ferhat Işık for their efforts to facilitate the delegation.

### Community safety

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (19:22): (657) My adjournment today is for the Premier. The action I seek is for the government to ensure the safety and rights of protesters at university encampments for Palestine. Over the last few weeks thousands of students have set up tents at campuses around the world to show solidarity for the people of Palestine and call for an end to the atrocities being inflicted on them by the Israeli military. I recently visited the University of Melbourne encampment. Students from a wide range of backgrounds, including Muslim and Jewish students, welcomed us to a peaceful and uplifting environment. They had organised food stations, tea stations and first aid areas. I saw how students organised themselves so that they could still study and get their assignments in while others organised safe spaces for regular prayers and spaces for staff and students to engage in dialogue about what is happening in Palestine. When people from outside the university turned up to deliberately antagonise and intimidate the protesters, the students peacefully held their ground and refused to engage.

These students and staff, like so many of us, have been utterly horrified by watching what is unfolding in Gaza. They want their universities to divest from their partnerships with weapons manufacturers. Their message for the Victorian Labor government is also clear: end your complicity in Israel's brutal attacks on Palestine. This Labor government in Victoria has signed an MOU with the Israeli Ministry of Defense – actively signed that MOU. If that was not bad enough, Labor in Victoria has given taxpayer dollars to Elbit Systems, an Israeli weapons manufacturer whose drone killed an Australian aid worker in Gaza and whose equipment has murdered literally tens of thousands of innocent Palestinians, including tens of thousands of innocent children. Let us be clear here: with these decisions Labor is choosing a side, and it is not the side of the tens of thousands of innocent Palestinians who are being killed.

Like millions of students before them, these brave students are standing up and using the tools available to them – their voices and their bodies – to say, ‘No. No, not in our name.’ And make no mistake, protests like this change the course of history. It was student protests that changed the course of the Vietnam War and helped lend international pressure to end apartheid in South Africa. Today students on campus are changing history before our eyes, yet disappointingly we have seen agitators turn up at these peaceful protests at all hours of day and night to cause violence, including people armed with bats and bottles and fire extinguishers. The government must work with universities and the police to ensure that peaceful protest and free speech on campus is allowed to exist. Labor might want to sweep these students’ message under the carpet, but students’ voices will continue to be heard.

#### **Mount Atkinson bus services**

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (19:25): (658) My adjournment is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. The action I seek is for the minister to join me at a Mount Atkinson community residents meeting to hear from residents about the need for a public bus to be implemented in their community. Residents currently living in the Mount Atkinson and Grandview estates have to walk 50 minutes to the nearest public transport option. Whether that be Rockbank station or Neale Road to catch a bus, a 50-minute walk in Australia’s fastest growing LGA is simply not acceptable. These two estates are currently home to over 7000 residents and this figure is growing, with 72 families moving into the Melton LGA each week. I regularly hear from residents that they are putting their children in rideshare services just so they can attend their zoned primary school or high school. While it is welcome news for my community that walking paths are being funded in Kororoit so that those residents who walk for 50 minutes along Hopkins Road can now do so safely, it is not the news that they really want or need to hear. These residents need a public bus that will connect them to their community and get them to and from work and school, so I hope that the minister can join me at a residents meeting with community members and hear these stories firsthand from the residents of these estates.

#### **State forest access**

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (19:26): (659) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is: please do not shut down our state forests. Ninety-six per cent of Victoria’s state forests are already locked up. Only 4 per cent remains, and the locking up of the state forests in my area affects my whole electorate. It affects it from Nar Nar Goon right through to Walhalla. The only thing they have left now is tourism, and it is very important to these rural communities. I mentioned this last week in Parliament. If we shut down these state forests, business will suffer. I will read out a post on my Facebook page, if you will bear with me:

My name is Mark and my wife and I own the Toolshed Bar in noojee. We are a big employer in the area and if they lock our forests up, we are worried our bar will not be viable and we will have to shut our doors and put all our staff off ...

All the business in the area are battling already with the logging industry and Vic forests gone and a massive part of our towns business is those who enjoy the forests for different purposes

I hope common sense prevails before serious damage is done

That is the point – these smaller communities now rely on tourism. They do not have the forests anymore. That has been taken away from them and tourism is extremely important, so I am asking the minister. The consultation process was absolutely disgraceful. There were no questions or answers. They got told to put a sticky note on a map and ‘Tell me what you do.’ People have not had an opportunity. The consultation process has been very poor, and as a result of this the community is worried they are going to lose their state forest and they are going to lose the tourism that they really do need for those economies to survive. So I ask the minister: do not lock up the state forests.

**Meli**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (19:28): (660) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence. The action that I seek from the minister is to visit Meli, a Geelong-based organisation that supports people in the Lara electorate and the surrounding Geelong community. Meli was formed in 2023 when Bethany and Barwon Child, Youth and Family merged their collective 150 years of experience. Meli offers services to support members of the community from early childhood through to adolescence and adulthood, including being one of Geelong's major providers of kindergarten and early childhood education services.

Their men's family violence intervention centre is a great example of the work that they are doing to support people and families experiencing family violence to be safe but also to help people who are using violence to make better choices. I am very proud that this incredible service operates to support the Lara electorate, and I look forward to hosting the minister for a visit to see this work firsthand.

**Responses**

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (19:29): The member for Hawthorn raised a matter for the Minister for Education, that he visit Glenferrie Primary School and Canterbury Primary School to discuss upgrade needs at those schools. The member for Bellarine raised another matter for the Minister for Education, to provide an update on school breakfast clubs programs, with a particular focus on schools in her electorate.

The member for Mildura raised a matter for the Minister for Mental Health, to give Mildura a mental health local, to be upgraded to a walk-in service from the telehealth service that currently services that region. The member for Laverton raised a matter for the Minister for Health Infrastructure, seeking an update on the new emergency department at the Mercy Werribee Hospital. The member for Evelyn raised a matter for the Minister for Children, to take all necessary steps to increase childcare and preschool places at Rolling Hills Pre-school in Mooroolbark. The member for Pascoe Vale raised a matter for the Minister for Veterans, to update him on investment to commemorate and remember the service of veterans in the electorate of Pascoe Vale. I will make sure that matter is passed on.

The member for Melbourne raised a matter for the Premier in relation to safety and rights of protesters at university campuses. The member for Kororoit raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, to join with her in a meeting with Mount Atkinson residents to discuss bus services. I will make sure that matter is passed on. The member for Narracan raised a matter for the Minister for Environment, seeking that government prevent the shutdown of state forests. The member for Lara raised a matter for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, to visit Meli family services in her electorate. They run family, child and violence prevention services in the region. I will make sure those matters are passed on.

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

**House adjourned 7:32 pm.**