



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Wednesday 2 August 2023

Members of the Legislative Council

60th Parliament

President

Shaun Leane

Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Georgie Crozier

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Matthew Bach

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

¹ Lib until 27 March 2023

² LDP until 26 July 2023

Party abbreviations

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

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Wednesday 2 August 2023

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:33 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Bills

Planning and Environment Amendment (Solar Energy Generation Facilities) Bill 2023

Introduction and first reading

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (09:35): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Planning and Environment Act 1987 to provide for factors that must be considered during the determination of applications for permits relating to solar energy generation facilities and for other purposes, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: I move:

That the second reading be made an order of the day for the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation Legislation Amendment Bill 2023

Introduction and first reading

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (09:35): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Act 2019 and the Forests Act 1958 to provide for an additional nine specified forms of cancer that are presumed to be caused by the nature of a firefighter's employment for the purposes of claiming compensation and for other purposes, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Samantha RATNAM: I move:

That the second reading be made an order of the day for the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Border Groundwaters Agreement Review Committee – Report, 2021–22.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

*Members statements***Bills Street, Hawthorn, redevelopment**

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (09:41): The Australian Labor Party is the only party that truly supports social housing, and today I want to highlight a particular project. As the Deputy Premier mentioned in question time yesterday, the Bills Street housing development in Hawthorn is being delivered as part of the \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build. That is a massive deal. Construction commenced in late 2021, and it would not have been possible had it not been for the former member for Hawthorn John Kennedy, who coincidentally is still spoken of very highly in the electorate. I know for a fact that my community of Hawthorn dearly misses their hardworking former member of Parliament John Kennedy, and I am excited to announce that the almost \$100 million development is on track to welcome hundreds of new residents by the end of the year. This project will replace the 52-year-old no longer fit for purpose dwellings. With 103 state-of-the-art social housing dwellings and 103 affordable homes, this project will boost social housing on the site by 98 per cent. I want to thank Minister Brooks for the invitation to visit the site yesterday and say thank you to Michele Morrison, chief development officer for Homes Victoria, and Sam Reinboth, project director of Hansen Yuncken, but most importantly the hardworking construction workers working around the clock to deliver this project for my community.

Homelessness

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (09:43): As we approach national Homelessness Week, not for the first time I call on this government to end homelessness. Local homelessness support services have told me that they have experienced a surge in demand over the past 12 months, including from many working poor unable to afford food or housing. We have heard from many constituents who are at risk of losing the roof over their heads due to out-of-control rent rises and the rising cost of living. They are forgoing essentials like food, heating and health care just to pay their next rent.

The recent Council to Homeless Persons report confirmed our worst fears – that homelessness is skyrocketing in western Victoria. Between 2016 and 2021 homelessness figures doubled in Geelong, while in South Barwon it more than quadrupled, and South Barwon now has the highest rates of homelessness in any regional area. Meanwhile, almost 7000 households across the Barwon region wait in line on priority access while the options for emergency accommodation rapidly decrease. The Labor state government needs to take urgent action to start addressing the root causes of the housing crisis, and everything should be on the table.

Victorian Tourism Awards

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (09:44): I rise today to congratulate four towns in western Victoria who are among 17 finalists in the Victorian Tourism Industry Council awards: Ballarat, Warrnambool, Koroit and Aireys Inlet. Last week Ballarat in the top tourist town category and Aireys Inlet in the top tiny town category, in the face of very strong competition, both won gold – a fantastic achievement. The awards celebrate the best that our state has to offer in the visitor experience. Ballarat and Aireys are top towns for absolutely different reasons, but they showcase Victoria's attractions right here in our own backyard. The great thing is that consumers and tourists have had their say on who wins. We have always known that Ballarat does it so well: family entertainment, food, heritage, beautiful environment, arts and architecture.

Aireys is a different world. To win gold in the tiny towns category for places with fewer than 1500 people is such a great local achievement. It is a village by global standards, but it has a tight-knit community and a very active traders and tourism association that I know worked very hard for this award. Aireys really is a hidden secret in plain view, a classic ocean-meets-bush setting, iconic features in Australia. I count myself lucky to have caught up with some of the Aireys folk who helped to achieve this award just as they were returning from the awards ceremony and then meet them again at

Aireys. Congratulations to everyone who made the gold award possible. The next step is the national awards in September, and I wish Ballarat and Aireys Inlet the very best in their respective categories.

Energy policy

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (09:46): Recently during my travels in Europe I witnessed firsthand the vast fields of wind turbines in Germany, many of which were standing idle. This observation raises questions about the effectiveness and cost efficiency of wind energy. As we aim to move towards 95 per cent renewables by 2025 we must critically examine the implications of this ambitious goal. The potential costs of this transition cannot be overlooked. Our state is already grappling with substantial debt, and adding billions more for an unreliable energy source could have serious consequences for our financial stability. We must act responsibly to ensure that every dollar spent on our energy infrastructure delivers real value and reliability for our citizens.

In light of these concerns I propose that we learn from the experience of European countries such as Germany as they now move away from costly and unreliable renewables. It is prudent for us to explore the potential of nuclear power. By maintaining our existing coal-fired power stations during the transition to nuclear, we can secure a stable and continuous energy supply while also saving substantial sums of money. Let us strike a balance between our environmental aspirations and the economic realities we face. Embracing a diverse energy mix that includes reliable options like nuclear power will not only ensure energy security for our citizens but also lead us towards a sustainable future.

Mornington Peninsula economy

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (09:47): Mornington Peninsula is well known for its top-tier food, wine and tourism experiences, but I want to take this chance to remind people of the strong and diverse economy in the region that might not be so well known. From the huge agricultural production in the green wedge to steel and energy and to the soon-to-be Victorian renewable energy terminal in Hastings, the peninsula has so many businesses of all sizes that contribute essential products and services to the Victorian community, create lots of jobs and drive the local economy. As we address climate change not only will it be renewable energy and the associated jobs boom that lower emissions while supporting the economy, small businesses will be a big part of this story too, and family business Peninsula Growers is a perfect example.

Founded in 1999, the family-run wholesale nursery in Boneo were successful applicants in the state government's low-carbon manufacturing grant scheme. Gary and Jane along with son Liam and the team will manufacture a reusable cell tray as an alternative to single-use polystyrene P6 plastic trays currently used in the commercial horticulture industry that quickly go on to end up in landfill. Rather than being made in and shipped from Europe, the new locally made trays will save tonnes of CO₂ in production and transportation, whilst supporting local manufacturing and design jobs on top of the 25 existing nursery jobs. Let this be a reminder that there is more to the Mornington Peninsula, small business and emission reduction than meets the eye. There is so much happening on the peninsula. You can see more this week in Queen's Hall, where the shire are putting on a great showcase for the region, and I look forward to seeing you all there.

Cannabis law reform

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:49): During the winter break I had the opportunity to visit Thailand, where I spent some time in Bangkok and Ko Samui, and it would be no surprise to my colleagues here that I was also there to review what cannabis and the state of play of cannabis look like in Thailand, considering it has just gone 12 months since cannabis was delisted in Thailand. While I was in Bangkok I caught up with a small business owner and formidable advocate for cannabis reform Kitty Chopaka. During my visit with Kitty I got to experience what a dispensary looks like. I got to see what products look like on display – there was a licence clearly displayed – and we had numerous conversations around what regulation has looked like there for Thailand.

Kitty herself has been a staunch advocate to say that regulation has not gone far enough. I guess the impression internationally of law reform in Thailand is that it is a bit of a wild west, and this is simply not true. Business owners there are licensed. They hold a licence in their store. They review your identification when you are coming in. They support a lot of local business growers and work together to be a cooperative rather than a commercial entity. It was amazing to see, and I thank Kitty for her time and energy. I also got to spend some time in a resort, and I look forward to sharing my experiences with my colleagues.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region schools

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:50): I rise to advise the house that the Andrews Labor government has again invested in infrastructure for our schools to benefit the rapidly growing community of Clyde North. This week the government acquired the land to build a new school to cater for more Clyde North families. The interim name of this school is Thompsons West primary. Construction will begin in October, and it will be ready to welcome new students in 2025. Importantly, we are delivering vital, state-of-the-art educational facilities at the time that families need them. This acquisition is part of a \$1 billion investment in land for our schools since 2018. In the past nine years the government has invested more than \$14.9 billion to build new schools and to deliver more than 1900 school upgrades.

On another matter, I am delighted to report on the naming of two new local schools currently being constructed in the outer south-east that will serve families in the Casey–Cardinia growth corridor. One such school in Clyde North with the interim name Alexander Boulevard primary school, which I have had the delight of discussing many times previously in this chamber, will now be known as Topirum Primary School, and the new interim-named Officer Brunt Road Primary School will now be known as Kurmile Primary. In the Bunurong language ‘topirum’ means ‘star’ and ‘kurmile’ means ‘white cockatoo’. All 14 new government schools that will open next year will proudly boast Indigenous language in their names.

Greyhound racing

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (09:52): Last week my office and I were pleased to rescue yet another greyhound from the racing industry, who had suffered an injury because of a fall in May this year. We had to do this all the way from a break in Bali because we knew that if we waited for our return, he would likely be dead. Despite receiving only a 21-day standdown period, he still walks with a limp, has open wounds and shows signs of severe trauma, for which he received no veterinary treatment before coming to us. After being interstate he is now home in Victoria in a loving forever home, receiving rehabilitation and professional veterinary care. But not only that, remarkably, he is also in a home with his biological mother. He is the last of her surviving puppies. Her name is Wendy, and she is 10 years old. With his human mother by his side too, he has everyone in his corner, and his future will be filled with nothing but love and kindness.

This story of hope from the community comes as news breaks showing trainers in South Australia brutally abusing greyhounds – the same greyhounds who are racing here in Victoria. On the back of this, the South Australian Labor government announced an independent inquiry into the greyhound racing industry, and I hope that Victoria will do the same sooner rather than later.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region level crossing removals

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:53): The Andrews Labor government is getting Victorians home more quickly and safely by removing 110 level crossings as part of Victoria’s Big Build, with 72 now gone for good. Across my electorate of South-Eastern Metropolitan Region the Frankston, Cranbourne and Pakenham lines will soon be completely level crossing free, with 27 level crossings currently removed and 15 more to go. The Frankston line in particular has a large volume of vehicles travelling through the crossings, with about 51,000 vehicles travelling each day and boom gates down for up to 48 minutes of the morning peak.

Level crossing removal projects that are currently underway or in the planning stages on these lines include Webb Street, Narre Warren; Webster Street, Dandenong; Progress Street, Dandenong South; Camms Road, Cranbourne; Station Street, Beaconsfield; Brunt Road, Beaconsfield; Latrobe Street, Mentone; Warrigal Road, Mentone; Parkers Road, Parkdale; McDonald Street, Mordialloc; Bear Street, Mordialloc; Station Street, Aspendale; Groves Street, Aspendale; Armstrongs Road, Seaford; and Station Street, Seaford.

We all know that level crossings can be dangerous, unsafe and congested. By removing them, the danger of trains sharing a crossing with a vehicle is removed and frustrating delays to motorists caused by boom gates are also eliminated. In the process we work collaboratively with the local community to completely redesign these areas, including creating public spaces that are accessible and inclusive and that enhance the local community identity. Thousands of jobs are also being created as a result of this government's massive investment in Victoria's infrastructure. We are proud that the Big Build agenda across all areas, including rail, roads, hospitals and schools, has created more than 610,000 jobs since the government was elected in November 2014, and we are looking forward to continuing to roll out these important projects and delivering for all Victorians.

Voice to Parliament

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (09:55): Women retire with 24 per cent less super than men, meaning we are more likely to spend our final years living in unequal and unacceptable levels of economic insecurity, and for Indigenous women the contrast is even more stark. We retire with on average 15 per cent less than our non-Indigenous counterparts. This year, however, we have a chance to draw a line in the sand on the super gender gap in the form of the Voice to Parliament. When I spoke at the Women in Super national roadshow recently, I reminded them that the Voice to Parliament is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to break the cycles of disadvantage that have perpetrated discrimination against First Nations people for generations, and that includes the issues that enable our exclusion from paid employment and from dignity in retirement. A yes is a vote for a better and fairer future. It is a vote to finally reduce the specific barriers that Aboriginal people face in our day-to-day lives, including with super, and we just must get this done.

Horsham development

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (09:56): On 29 June I was honoured to open the Wimmera riverfront activation project and the Horsham nature and water play park alongside our Prime Minister Anthony Albanese – peak plaque, I must say. A few weeks prior to the event I had the opportunity to meet mayor Robyn Gulline and also CEO Sunil Bhalla from Horsham Rural City Council. They updated me on their council's strategic plans for the future of their city, which are ambitious and well thought through.

Prior to the opening the PM did a walk down the main street of Horsham, much to the delight of local shoppers and retailers. Unsurprisingly, he was met by great fanfare and excitement at the opening. It was a real pleasure meeting schoolchildren with the Prime Minister. They played an active part in the project, helping create some of the impressive work. The Prime Minister emphasised the importance of governing for the whole of Australia and that visiting regional centres was his honour. He also expressed an appreciation for the work the Andrews Labor government is doing in getting things done in this state. We had the chance to thank builders who constructed the innovative space and members of the community reference group, including Johnny Gorton, who chaired the council's community reference group. It was a great pleasure to be there, and I congratulate the Horsham Rural City Council for their leadership and their support for the project.

*Bills***Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Ending Political Corruption) Bill 2023***Statement of compatibility*

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) tabled a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

The primary objective of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) is to identify, investigate and expose corrupt conduct.

Clause 4 of the Bill removes the requirement in section 4 of the *Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011* (the IBAC Act), for ‘corrupt conduct’ to be “conduct that would constitute a relevant offence”, where a relevant offence is effectively a criminal offence (i.e. an indictable offence or various common law offences).

The effect of clause 4 of the Bill is that IBAC may identify, investigate and expose non-criminal corrupt conduct.

The right to privacy and reputation is provided by section 13 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the Charter), which states a person has the right not to have their privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with, and not to have their reputation unlawfully attacked.

Widening the jurisdiction of IBAC to expose non-criminal conduct as corrupt conduct will likely lead to greater exposure of corrupt conduct, that in turn may adversely impact on the reputations of individuals identified.

However, all similar anti-corruption agencies across other Australian jurisdictions, bar South Australia, may investigate non-criminal corrupt conduct using powers similar to those provided to Victoria’s IBAC. Notably, the jurisdiction of the new National Anti-Corruption Commission opened by the Australian government earlier this year was purposefully legislated to ensure that the Commission could investigate non-criminal corruption.

These other jurisdictions’ anti-corruption agencies reflect contemporary understandings that not all corrupt conduct is necessarily criminal, and so an effective anti-corruption agency must have sufficient powers to investigate and expose this conduct to drive higher standards by public officers and office holders.

Therefore, the effective prohibition on IBAC investigating non-criminal corrupt conduct under the IBAC Act, does not align with public expectations and falls below the minimum integrity standards in other jurisdictions. The Bill seeks to correct this.

Furthermore, there are, in my opinion, sufficient protections in the IBAC Act to guard against arbitrary and unfair attacks on an individual’s reputation. Section 8aa provides for IBAC to prioritise the investigation and exposure of serious or systemic corrupt conduct, and section 117 provides a general presumption against public examinations, that can only occur where they will not cause unreasonable damage to a person’s reputation, safety or wellbeing.

Therefore, in my opinion the proposed powers afforded under clause 4 impose reasonable limitations on Charter rights with respect to privacy, and there are no less restrictive means of achieving a sufficiently empowered and effective anti-corruption commission in Victoria.

Second reading

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (09:58): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

For too long Victorians have been asked to accept poorer standards of behaviour from the people elected to serve them than those in other states.

This corruption, misconduct and general dodginess by public office holders costs Victoria, both financially as taxpayers and indirectly in terms of poor public policy outcomes.

Indeed, the true cost of corruption – its insidiousness – is not just the corrupt act itself but the poor policy that invariably results from it.

Whether it is houses getting built where they shouldn't and not getting built where they should.

Whether it's marginal electorates being allocated infrastructure and services they do not need while the ones that sorely do miss out.

Whether it is the projects that are mismanaged because those who received contracts can't deliver them or boards of management that don't properly manage risks because members are not appointed on merit.

It does not matter whether the corruption involved is so-called 'soft' corruption or hard corruption, whether the corruption is coloured black and white or grey or whether it involved the committing of a criminal offence, such as a direct bribe, or something else.

The policy costs of all forms of corruption are the same. It negatively impacts on the lives and livelihoods of Victorians, and it diminishes the trust in our leaders and institutions equally, whether it technically involves a criminal offence or not.

But Victoria is almost unique in Australia in that it limits its anti-corruption agency, IBAC, to only investigate and expose one form of corruption, that which involves corrupt conduct that is a criminal offence.

Across the rest of Australia, anti-corruption agencies reflect the contemporary understanding that not all corrupt conduct is necessarily criminal, and so an effective anti-corruption agency must have sufficient powers to investigate and expose non-criminal corruption if it is to drive higher standards by public officers and office holders.

The bill itself is straightforward.

It seeks to expand the jurisdiction of IBAC by abolishing the requirement that corrupt conduct must involve conduct that would constitute a relevant offence, where 'relevant offence' is defined as an indictable criminal offence as well as certain common-law offences.

This would mean IBAC can identify, investigate and expose corrupt conduct of public officers that does not constitute a criminal offence – things such as serious breaches of codes of conduct of MPs and ministers, egregious pork-barrelling and the awarding of non-competitive tenders and appointments to public positions.

The transitional arrangements in the bill provide that this broadened jurisdiction can be applied retrospectively to conduct that occurred before commencement, as well as allowing IBAC to re-examine matters that it has previously dismissed or referred to another agency.

The bill will align the jurisdiction of IBAC with that of most other anti-corruption agencies across the nation, including the new National Anti-Corruption Commission that opened one month ago, that very deliberately broadened its jurisdiction to capture non-criminal conduct as a key feature.

To conclude, there have been a number of integrity bills that have been introduced into this place in this term, reflecting the inadequacy of the current Victorian integrity regime and the paucity of government action on the issue.

Without wishing to denigrate those bills it is no exaggeration to say that the small legislative amendment proposed in today's bill is by far and away the most critical single reform to combat corruption in Victoria.

This bill is what giving IBAC the powers it needs looks like.

This is certainly the opinion of the esteemed former Court of Appeal judge and Commissioner of IBAC the Honourable Robert Redlich AO KC.

Former Commissioner Redlich said just two days ago that the reform proposed in this bill is the ‘most important’ anti-corruption reform needed in Victoria.

Commissioner Redlich pointed to the recent report on Operation Daintree, which made countless serious findings of misconduct and a lack of integrity in government decisions – but because these findings could not be called corrupt conduct under the IBAC act, they were able to be spun, misrepresented and downplayed cynically by the Premier, using excuses that everything was okay because no crime was committed.

The Premier went further to say that ordinary Victorians weren’t concerned about this lack of integrity because he gets things done.

So when corruption gets easily ignored and brushed aside, when politicians effectively say, ‘Who cares if I’m corrupt, look at my big infrastructure,’ we have a serious problem.

But as former Commissioner Redlich, who is probably the least partisan person in Victoria, also said, while Daintree is a good example of why reform is needed, this isn’t about Premier Daniel Andrews or any one government or individual.

Soft corruption is rife across the country and we could point to any number of politicians, political parties and jurisdictions over the last 40 years illustrating this point.

But Victoria is, with the exception of South Australia, unique in that it has integrity laws that do not empower the anti-corruption agency to properly investigate and expose all forms of political corruption.

Victoria must not have lower standards than the rest of the country when it comes to political integrity.

And this is why I commend this important bill to the house.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:04): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

Committees

Select committee

Establishment

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:04): I move:

That:

- (1) a select committee of nine members be appointed to inquire into, consider and report on the 2026 Commonwealth Games and the progress of the regional infrastructure build, including but not limited to:
 - (a) the potential failures in governance, probity and procurement processes in the Victorian government’s bid, contract and termination of the 2026 Commonwealth Games;
 - (b) the impacts of the contract termination of the Commonwealth Games on Victoria’s reputation, business community, tourism and major events;
 - (c) the Victorian government advice received from government departments, councils, agencies, consultants and contractors;
 - (d) the potential of undue influence by the executive on the independence of the public service;
 - (e) the time line, progress and budget of the Victorian government’s regional infrastructure and housing build;
 - (f) the impact on community, social, amateur and professional sport in Victoria;
 - (g) any other relevant matter;

COMMITTEES

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- (2) the committee provide an interim report by 30 April 2024 and a final report by April 2025;
- (3) the committee will consist of three members from the government nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council, three members from the Liberal–National coalition nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council and three members from among the remaining members in the Council;
- (4) the members will be appointed by lodgement of the names with the President within seven calendar days of the Council agreeing to this resolution;
- (5) the first meeting of the committee will be held within one week of members names being lodged with the President; and
- (6) the committee may proceed to the despatch of business notwithstanding that all members have not been appointed and notwithstanding any vacancy.

I rise to speak to my motion this morning, and I do so because I believe that Victorians need to have the confidence that what the Parliament is doing and what the government is providing to Victorians they can have trust in. The motion that I am moving this morning is to have a select committee look into the 2026 Commonwealth Games and indeed the commitments made by government around the progress of the regional infrastructure build and elements around what has happened with the Commonwealth Games.

The Commonwealth Games, as we know and as the government has said on many occasions, was going to showcase Victoria to the world. This committee now needs to look into the decisions made by government for scrapping the games. The terms of reference will include the potential failures in governance, probity and procurement processes in the Victorian government's bid, contract and termination of the Commonwealth Games; the impacts of the contract termination of the Commonwealth Games on Victoria's reputation, business community, tourism, and major events – a very important element, and I will come back to that reputational component that has been so damaging; the Victorian government advice received from government departments, councils, agencies, consultants and contractors – again, another very important element, because so many of the regions and the councils and those that were involved in the lead-up to the games that were going to be held now also need to be questioned in relation to what actually happened; the potential of undue influence by the executive on the independence of the public service; and the time line, progress and budget of the Victorian government's regional infrastructure and housing build – again, another very important aspect of the inquiry's work, because the government has promised so much. They are now, in looking at it through a different lens, committing more money to ensure that some of these infrastructure projects get up. But we know what they do: they promise things that they do not deliver, and they drag it out – and we have seen it so many times. With 2026 there was a time line – there was a dead time line for these things to be delivered – but now no longer. This committee really needs to understand exactly what the government's plans are to be able to deliver the commitments that the government made since its scrapping of the games.

The committee would obviously need to do a substantial amount of work, as it should, so the terms of reference propose having an interim report by April 2024 and then to have a final report a year later, 12 months later, by April 2025. That is a reasonable time frame to undertake this very important work.

This is a government that in public was saying that the Commonwealth Games were on track, with a \$2.6 billion commitment, before the election just a few months ago and after the election, and it was saying that all the way up to two weeks ago – but they were not on track. We all know that now because of the Premier's decision to scrap the games. What was being talked about publicly up until two weeks ago was very, very different from what was happening behind closed doors. That alone should worry all Victorians, and that is the reason why we need this parliamentary inquiry. That is why it is so important – because up until two weeks ago, everything was rosy. We were on track to deliver a Commonwealth Games with \$2.6 billion, and now that has all been scrapped. That is why this inquiry is so important. It will allow Victorians to understand what went wrong.

We are a proud state. We are proud of our major events that we host. Melbourne is recognised as a sporting and cultural precinct not only in this country but around the world. We had that reputation, and that reputation now has been trashed. I think Victorians are extremely embarrassed and humiliated by that reputational trashing and the risk that brings to what is next. We do not want those major events and that reputation to slide any further. We need to regain the trust not just amongst Victorians but amongst the people who run these events and bring events to Melbourne and Victoria and to understand and tell those people that decisions like what happened two weeks ago are not the norm and will not happen in the future.

That is why we need this inquiry. We need to regain that trust. We need to regain that reputation. We need to regain confidence in this state and the proud reputation that we had. When that announcement was made, just over two weeks ago, it blindsided everyone. It blindsided certainly the communities in the regions where the games were going to be hosted. It blindsided all Victorians and Australians. It blindsided the Commonwealth Games Australia board and their members, the Commonwealth Games Federation. And it blindsided the athletes – athletes who were pinning their dreams on competing on the world stage in our home state. It blindsided all of those people.

Evan Mulholland: The backbench too.

Georgie CROZIER: And the backbench, Mr Mulholland. It blindsided the entire Labor government. They did not know the decision was coming.

When I talk about ricocheting around the world, I want to just highlight where it went in terms of the media. In the United Kingdom the BBC coverage was just extensive. There were just so many articles and discussions around what was happening. Scotland and other parts of the world – it went right around the world in terms of some of the countries that have been looking at Australia and these major events. In the United States the *New York Times* reported extensively on the cancellation of the games. It was covered in Canada, New Zealand, India, Pakistan and Singapore; the selection countries; the African countries – South Africa, Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Ghana; Caribbean countries – Jamaica; Guyana; European countries – Malta, Cyprus, France.

This is the extent of what this decision has meant in terms of world news coverage. That is the reputational risk that I am talking about. That is the extent of what so many people have spoken about. I have spoken to people who have said, ‘We were in Europe at the time, and you know what, they were talking about it. They knew about this decision made in Victoria.’ They said to me, ‘Do you know what they knew? They knew we had the longest lockdowns, and they knew that we had cancelled the Commonwealth Games.’ That is an extraordinary reputation, and one that we do not want to have – we do not want that. That is why it is really very, very important that we bring back Australia’s and Victoria’s reputation and say to everyone around the world that this will not happen again. That is why we need to understand what actually went wrong, and that is why this inquiry is so important.

As I have said many times, we in this Parliament have an obligation to those who have elected us. We represent all Victorians in this chamber. We are in a unique position because we are a house of review. It is not just legislation that we review, it is also decisions of the executive government. This was a decision of the executive government. This is the work that we have been put into these positions to undertake. A very important part of our work is to undertake inquiries. This Parliament can be very proud of the many, many inquiries that they have undertaken to get to the bottom of issues that have been difficult and to understand what went wrong. We know the work of this Parliament.

Melina Bath: Betrayal of Trust.

Georgie CROZIER: I was thinking of that inquiry, which I was obviously so involved in. The Betrayal of Trust inquiry, as Ms Bath has just mentioned, was a very important inquiry that this Parliament undertook. So many other important inquiries are being undertaken now, looking into the issues that matter to Victoria – and this issue matters to Victoria. So we have that responsibility, and I

am reminded of what is on our floor in the vestibule, those wonderful words from the King James Bible, Proverbs 11:14, and it says:

Where no counsel is the people fall but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.

We should all remember that. It is a pity the government do not remember that, because they are governing on behalf of all Victorians, and when they make decisions such as what they have done, then we really do need to understand that. That is the role that we in the opposition and certainly other parties need to undertake. The executive government made a commitment of more than \$2 billion in legacy outcomes; we have the former Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy and still the Minister for Regional Development in the chamber today. This committee will provide the Parliament and the Victorian community with the confidence that the \$2 billion of commitments they have subsequently made will be fulfilled. We need to understand and keep track of this government, because as we have seen today in terms of the promise made to the western suburbs – and Mr Luu knows this only too well – something promised prior to the election has now been scrapped. You cannot go to the people and make these promises that are so significant and then just come out and scrap them all; there is taxpayers money involved in all of this.

We know that these are really important decisions for the community, but the decision to scrap the Commonwealth Games is one, as I said, that has multiple implications. So the second part of my motion talks about that legacy issue and the ability for that to be fulfilled – another important element of the checks that this Parliament can provide on the executive government. We need to understand the time lines. We need to understand the decisions made. We need to understand the financial commitments that have been promised, and we need for this inquiry to be undertaken so that we can do our work and keep the executive government in check.

The government of course will argue that the inquiry will interfere with negotiations. Well, frankly that is a lame excuse, because it has now been longer than the 12 days of the games that were going to occur since Daniel Andrews claimed \$6 billion to \$7 billion for a 12-day sporting event – we are not doing that.

Evan Mulholland: Where did that figure come from?

Georgie CROZIER: A very good question, Mr Mulholland. Where did that figure come from? Surely Victorians should understand how the games cost of \$2.6 billion, as outlined in the budget papers, as outlined to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee just a few weeks ago, is now at that cost, because we have got one person saying it is \$6 billion, somebody else saying it is \$7 billion. But the real issue is that nothing has been released on the costings and how the government got to that figure. So to go to your point, Mr Mulholland: where did that figure come from? That is what we need to scrutinise as well. The government has not released the costs to the Victorian community. They have not even released it to the board of the 2026 Commonwealth Games. Craig Phillips sits on that board, and he, as the chief executive of Commonwealth Games Australia, said:

The stated costs overrun, in our opinion, are a gross exaggeration and not reflective of the operational costs presented to the Victoria 2026 Organising Committee board as recently as June.

That is just a few weeks ago. Surely Victorians need to understand exactly those impacts, but the costs are the justification for the government to cancel the games. They could have released those costings at the press conference when Daniel Andrews, Jacinta Allan and Harriet Shing stood there two weeks ago and told the world the games were off, but they did not. They have not provided any clarity whatsoever – except excuses.

These impacts have no impact on the negotiations, and that is why Victorians are becoming increasingly concerned that this is a figure that has just been made up. Now we have a government that is gagging Commonwealth Games officials and we have a government that wants to shut down any scrutiny at all over this decision, and that is why it is imperative that this parliamentary inquiry is established with members of the government, with members of the opposition and with members of

the crossbench, so that we can get to the bottom of what went wrong and so that it never occurs again. This was a very costly and humiliating decision made by the Andrews government. There are question marks that remain on so many aspects. This inquiry is in the interests of all Victorians – indeed all Australians. It needs to be undertaken so that we can get to the bottom of what went wrong.

So I end where I started, and that is that up until two weeks ago the government was saying it was on track to deliver a \$2.6 billion commitment for the Commonwealth Games. Now there remain so many questions. So many people have spoken out; so many people are expressing their concerns. We need to regain the trust of Victorians to understand that when government decisions are made, even if they are wrong or they have failed, the government admit they got it wrong – but not this government. They refuse to acknowledge any wrongdoing or any failures. Indeed Jacinta Allan was spruiking just weeks before last year's election, as the former Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery:

Victoria 2026 will deliver a world-class Commonwealth Games for all Victorians and showcase all our state has to offer.

That now will not occur, but what needs to occur is an inquiry to understand exactly what happened, to regain our reputation and to ensure that a decision like this by this government or any other government when made on such a very important matter that is impacting so many Victorians does not occur again. We need to get to the bottom of what happened, and I would urge all members of the house to support this inquiry so that the Parliament can do its work – so that we as members that represent Victorians can do our work.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Equality) (10:23): I rise today to speak on Ms Crozier's motion, and in doing so I wish to flag that the government will be moving amendments to this motion. I move:

1. In paragraph (1) the words 'a select committee of nine members be appointed to' be replaced by 'this house requests that the Auditor-General'.
2. In paragraphs (2) through (6) inclusive all words and expressions are omitted and in their place the following are inserted:

'(2) this house requires the Clerk to write to the Auditor-General to convey the terms of this resolution.'

I would ask that the amendments be circulated, please. I listened very carefully to what Ms Crozier had to say when speaking on the motion which she has placed on the notice paper today. One of the things that I heard very clearly from Ms Crozier's contribution was, to paraphrase Ms Crozier, what needs to occur is an inquiry to understand exactly what happened. I do not propose to go into the detail of the context and the content of the motion, which as a consequence of the government's proposed amendment would remain unchanged. What I do, however, want to do is to indicate that the government, on the point that Ms Crozier has made about the importance of an inquiry to understand exactly what happened, agrees with Ms Crozier. To that end the amendment that we have proposed seeks to enable, by way of a request to the Auditor-General, an independent officer of the Victorian Parliament, the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) to look into terms identical to those proposed by Ms Crozier.

As an independent officer of the Parliament, the Auditor-General is not subject to control or direction by the government. Independence is something which Ms Crozier and the opposition, the crossbench and others, including government, speak often and at length about – that the importance of independence can never be overstated and indeed that it must form part of discussions on the way in which government conducts its business in transactions large and small. VAGO provides assurance to the Parliament and indeed to the Victorian community about how effectively public sector agencies are providing services and using public money. This is entirely consistent with at least one of the terms of Ms Crozier's motion.

The Audit Act 1994 governs the Auditor-General's wideranging suite of powers and functions, including their power to access information, including cabinet-in-confidence information, during the

course of an audit or an assurance review, and the standards that must be met. The Auditor-General's office is well resourced – it is supported by around 185 staff – and all VAGO reports are tabled in the Parliament. VAGO audits examine a range of things: how effective, efficient and economical government agencies, programs and services are; how government agencies manage resources; the opportunities for government agencies to improve their management practices and systems; whether government agencies are fairly presenting annual financial statements and performance statements; if government agencies are complying with legislation and other requirements; and if there is wastage or a lack of probity in the way that public resources are being managed. These are all matters within the Auditor-General's scope and functions that fall squarely within the contemplation of Ms Crozier's motion. The work being proposed, by reference to this amendment, to be subject to a request to the Auditor-General, is important work. To quote Ms Crozier, 'what needs to occur is an inquiry to understand exactly what happened'. The Auditor-General is in a position to undertake that work.

It is really important that we do not cut across negotiations that are occurring at the moment between the state, the Commonwealth Games Federation and Commonwealth Games Australia. The Auditor-General's powers, the Auditor-General's reach and the Auditor-General's statutory remit are a way to ensure that an inquiry can be undertaken to understand, again to quote Ms Crozier, 'exactly what happened'. This is an important process as much as anything to give people confidence around the \$2 billion fund, which has been part of conversations for many months now on legacy – that work that is continuing – around the probity and the value of work being undertaken across government and around the way in which the priorities, goals and objectives of rural and regional communities can be met and fulfilled.

Over the past couple of weeks there have been dozens of conversations about the decision not to proceed with a 12-day event that would cost, on current reckoning, more than \$6 billion. These conversations also build upon many months of discussion around legacy and around, to paraphrase the shadow spokesperson for Commonwealth Games, legacy being the most important part of the Commonwealth Games preparation. The work goes on, and I am indebted to communities for continuing to discuss what they want to see: legacy in every form, from permanent sports infrastructure and that \$550 million fund, through to tiny towns – an additional \$10 million; an all-abilities sports fund; sporting infrastructure for communities; a \$150 million regional and tourism fund; a \$150 million Regional Worker Accommodation Fund; and of course more than 1300 permanent social and affordable homes across regional Victoria as part of a regional housing fund, which brings the total investment to more than \$2.5 billion.

This is work that is important. Scrutiny is important, and the Auditor-General is the office appropriate to conduct this mechanism of scrutiny. The Auditor-General's report, as tabled in Parliament upon completion of such an inquiry, will provide the level of rigour and of transparency that those opposite are seeking. It is unfortunate that this amendment has not come about until the last minute – but having said that, nor did the opposition's motion. I am grateful to the members of the crossbench who have impressed upon government the importance of an inquiry and the importance of scrutiny. Members of the crossbench have talked about the need to make sure that government is making decisions that are in and for the public interest, and that is why this amendment is being proposed: to deliver those measures of integrity, of scrutiny, of accountability and of oversight to the work that we do.

Those opposite have previously suggested that VAGO look at this matter. This is a matter of public record: the coalition has previously suggested that the Victorian Auditor-General look at this matter. On that basis it stands to reason that the opposition should support this amendment. This goes to a position that they are already on the public record as supporting. To oppose this amendment would be worse than churlish; it would show that in fact this motion itself does not go beyond a stunt. On that basis, I commend the amendment to the house.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (10:33): I rise to support the motion. The cancellation of the regional Commonwealth Games is one of the biggest scandals of the Andrews Labor government, and that is really actually saying something, because this is a government that has had many, many

scandals. There has been the red shirts scandal. There has been the roting of entitlements to buy Labor memberships. There have been budget blowouts, budget delays and the cancellation of the east–west link project, which cost our state more than \$1.1 billion when Daniel Andrews said it would cost nothing, and the list just goes on and on. There have been so many, many reports on the mismanagement of projects and borderline corruption in this government – in fact those reports now number in the teens.

This latest scandal will not only damage the government’s standing in the eyes of all Victorians and all Australians but also damage our reputation internationally. Ms Crozier talked of the reporting of this internationally. Even the *New York Times* reported it, because people could not believe that a government could possibly mismanage a project quite so badly. This has damaged our reputation in the eyes of major events and sporting event organisations worldwide.

We now have a track record of breaking contracts in this state because of this government, the Andrews Labor government – as I said, the cancellation of the east–west link project that cost the state \$1.1 billion and now a cancellation of the Commonwealth Games contract that will also likely cost our state compensation to the Commonwealth Games authority in the vicinity of billions of dollars. Who would ever enter into a contract with the Andrews Labor government again? Who would take that risk? Who would spend the money on the negotiations and the developing of contracts only to have those contracts cancelled 12 months later?

The Commonwealth Games needs to be delivered by 2026. The games authority now have to find somebody else to pick that up and deliver it within three years. Four years was ambitious enough; three years is going to be almost impossible. And the Andrews Labor government may be the reason for the end of the Commonwealth Games. What a reputation that would be for you. What a legacy that would leave not only to Victorians and to athletes in Victoria but to athletes all around our country and all around the Commonwealth. Fifty-six countries and 2.5 billion people are affected by this decision about which the Andrews Labor government say, ‘Oh, it was an easy decision. We just decided to cancel it.’

The other contract that the Andrews government have broken, in breaking the contract with the Commonwealth Games, is a contract of faith with the Victorian people. The government used this contract to make promises to regional communities to buy votes at the 2022 election, and now many of those promises will not be fulfilled. I am talking not about the infrastructure but about the promise of the exposure and the tourism opportunities that will now be lost, the promise of additional private sector investment that will now be lost, and this is all because of the incompetence of this Labor government.

The government say they will still spend their \$2 billion in regional Victoria on infrastructure and housing, but what we are already hearing is that many of those projects are not the highest priority of communities. These are projects or upgrades that were necessary to deliver the Commonwealth Games, but now the money might be better spent on alternate sporting infrastructure in those communities – infrastructure that would better serve those communities. An example of that is in Armstrong Creek, where the permanent piece of infrastructure that was to be delivered was a 25-metre-square diving pool. Diving pools are deep. They are not suitable as community pools, especially for children. But the government, I believe, have told the City of Geelong, ‘Well, bad luck, that’s what you’re getting. You can’t change it to have a decent swimming pool for your community. You’re getting a diving pool.’

In Shepparton we already have a world-class BMX track. We have hosted the world championships. The upgrades that were to be delivered there were upgrades to the club facilities and for media et cetera to deliver the Commonwealth Games. The City of Greater Shepparton have told this government that money could be better spent on our basketball stadium. Our basketball stadium is a 1970s facility. The roof leaks, and it cannot be used half the time. When the roof is leaking, you cannot play basketball on those courts. It is used every night of the week for sporting competitions for our children, whereas

the BMX track is not something that people are going to every day and using. We have hundreds – thousands – of kids competing in basketball tournaments, and those are local basketball competitions. But we want to also be able to attract major events and major tournaments to our city. We cannot do that with the facility that we currently have, because we cannot guarantee the courts. What if it rains and the roof leaks? In the floods we wanted to use that facility as the relief centre for people who were displaced from their homes, because it already had toilets and showers and everything for them to use. They could not use it because the roof was leaking. We need money spent on our basketball stadium. That would far better serve the people of Shepparton.

The money for housing is a must. This government must deliver homes, and they must deliver them within the 2026 time line. We cannot afford to wait for these homes. The Premier told us in the media conference that the time lines were now deferred because the 2026 hard deadline for the games no longer exists, so while the government says it will still deliver infrastructure and housing, we have no idea when it will deliver them. So all these projects are now on the never-never, and the time lines could blow out by decades, because this government cannot even tell us that. This must not be allowed to happen for any project, but particularly for housing. Housing is at a crisis point in many areas, and the villages that were promised must be delivered. But we need housing in other areas as well, and I would say particularly they need to look at providing housing in areas that were badly affected by the floods.

When we look at the City of Greater Bendigo, on the social housing waiting list alone, in March 2023, there were 3491 families. Of those 3491 families, 2146 have priority status – that is, people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, people who are escaping domestic violence or people who are living with a disability or have special housing needs. 2146 families have that priority status, but this government has not delivered enough housing for them. So it is vital that housing is delivered in Bendigo. In Greater Shepparton, where we have had so many people displaced by the floods, there were 2665 families in March this year that were on the social housing waiting list, and 1477 of those families have priority status.

I do not have the figures with me for the Campaspe shire, but we all know the plight of Rochester and just how difficult it is for families there. You only have to drive around Rochester. It is interesting to drive around Rochester in the early evening, when everyone has got their lights on, when it is dark, because most of the houses are still dark because there is nobody living in them; they cannot live in them. Ninety per cent of the homes in that town were inundated in the floods. You only have to see the number of caravans you see in front yards – and you do not even see the caravans in the backyards – to see how many people are not living in homes. Very few people have actually been able to return to their homes. We need housing delivered desperately in some of the – *(Time expired)*

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (10:44): I am very pleased to put my name and the Nationals' name to Ms Crozier's motion 139, which moves for there to be a select committee of elected parliamentarians in this place to do our work. That differs very much from the amendment by the former Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy and current Minister for Water and Minister for Regional Development, who would like to see a bypass of scrutiny from this house, from elected members, to send it to the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO). I only on Monday had a very informative meeting with the Auditor-General's Office to do with the disability inclusion and the important work that the Victorian Auditor-General does. I support their work in its various forms wholeheartedly, but this house needs to do the work that the house of review is supposed to do. What Ms Shing is offering can already be done. We do not have to ask the Clerk to write to the Victorian Auditor-General. It can be done simultaneously with an investigative inquiry by this chamber.

We have heard very eloquently from my colleague Ms Crozier about the importance of scrutiny. I often find that when the Premier gets backed into a corner and gets uncomfortable and he is pulling at his shirt collar with his finger, he often talks about members of Parliament being irrelevant – that is his word. I know he is getting a bit itchy and titchy when he starts to talk about 'You people out there' – it is often the Liberals and Nationals – and 'You people, you're irrelevant'. Well, that says to me, first

of all, that he is under pressure. Secondly, it says to me that he would like to see such autonomy as he desires to fulfill his focus. Many millions of people went to the election and decided that they wanted to put their money on Mr David Limbrick, they wanted to put their money on One Nation, they wanted to put their money on Mr McCracken or they wanted to put their money on me, and they put that number in the election box. The Premier wants to say, as we have heard today, 'No, you don't need to do it. We'll send it off to VAGO.' Well, I support VAGO in its entirety and the work that it does, but this house needs to do that work. And there are multiple questions on that work.

It is very important work that we do in committees. And let us be honest, there is work, particularly by the crossbench and the opposition, that we do that is what I will call pet projects on issues that are very important. I have raised issues that are very important that have gone through committees. We saw the government hold only recently a select committee inquiry into a particular area. So this work is vital for scrutiny, for integrity and for the unpacking of decisions that are made behind closed doors, which the general public cannot see. Some of those questions relate to this. Some of those questions relate specifically to the Commonwealth Games. It was on the table in 2022, in an election year; it was taken off the table only two weeks ago post that. It was on the table with a \$2 billion cost estimate; now that has blown out somehow to \$6 billion – billion with a B. And even Ms Shing just spoke about it then.

How much will Victorian taxpayers have to pay to break this Commonwealth Games host contract? How was the Andrews government's \$2.6 billion cost estimate so far off apparently the actual cost – nearly triple the initial estimate? What external parties conducted these cost estimates? How much has been spent on the Commonwealth Games to date? What will happen to the public servants employed to organise these Commonwealth Games? Will there be redundancies? Why was the 2026 Commonwealth Games organising committee advised just recently that there were sufficient funds available? And why did the government not discuss the funding situation with the committee jointly to find a positive solution? There are multiple questions. People will say, 'But this is what you do.' The reason we are doing it is for fiscal responsibility in this government and fiscal responsibility as a Parliament. The issue of rising costs of living and the issues of homelessness and housing stress are crucially felt in my Eastern Victoria electorate, particularly after conversations – I regularly have conversations – with people at the very front line that supply and meet with those vulnerable people all the time.

I have spoken recently about Sarah Copland, who is a pastor in a church. She is a dynamic woman with a dynamic team. They issue Foodbank support on a regular basis. The impact on their community is increasing at an alarming rate. We see it from one census to the next – we see homelessness and it is given by electorate. We see in the Morwell electorate in Latrobe Valley an 85 per cent increase in homelessness. Pakenham has had a 113 per cent increase in homelessness, and we have got a rally, I think today, on the steps to talk about that.

We want to see, and the Victorian public want to see, time lines of capacity, of bricks and mortar going into the ground for social and affordable homes. We have heard it and we hear it: we are getting \$1 billion and 1300 homes apparently. Spread across, that equates to somewhere over \$700,000 per home apparently. But we want to be able to ask people and to interrogate government members, bodies and departments and to listen to the community. One of the key things about our work in our committees – select or joint or standing – is letting people have their voice. There are many people, again, in that Eastern Victoria Region – many sporting clubs – that want to be able to have their voice.

I believe that there is a lot of 'You need to be quiet' going on behind closed doors, that people and councils are being told, 'You need to be quiet or you won't get your fair share.' We need to see and to enable people who are prepared to come to the fore and have those discussions – but they need to be positive discussions. We cannot wind back the clock. This has been a debacle and a disastrous decision – and a political one at that – but the Victorian community needs to see the positives that can still be salvaged from this. I endorse the comments in relation to Ms Crozier on the international

reputation damage. I will leave her comments to stand with the time I have left, and I say ditto from the Nationals.

The other thing in speaking to people locally is that it is what they have not got: there was a promise of \$3 billion in economic activity, in small business, in tenders and in international tourism. How can this house, this committee, support our local people to re-establish and reinvigorate that loss? How can we hear from them? Because what we will hear is that the government has got it covered. But what we need to hear is those solutions and recommendations from grassroots organisations, businesses, industry, community groups and sporting groups.

The other group that I do feel sad for is our professional and amateur sporting groups and the athletes that would have competed. I know I have some fantastic athletes in the Eastern Victoria Region, and I have not spoken with them, but they are from high jump – as we know, very talented people – women's skeet shooting, basketball, a tremendous chap in universal trench shooting and swimming in a variety of forms. It is a crying shame that they do not get, in 2026, to host, celebrate and endorse. This inquiry needs to go through, and I thank the crossbench for having discussions with this side – with Georgie and our people.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:54): I rise to speak on this motion to set up a select committee investigation into the Commonwealth Games not going ahead and also the amendments put forward by the government referring this to the Victorian Auditor-General's Office instead of a select committee. I was planning on supporting this select committee, and I also support VAGO, the Auditor-General, looking at this. So the amendment put forward by the government puts me in an uncomfortable position, because I support both of these things going ahead. I think that the Auditor-General and a parliamentary committee serve two different functions with different skill sets. I do have faith in the Auditor-General to be able to carry out this sort of investigation. They are very well equipped to look at processes, contracts, accounting, this sort of thing. They have all the powers and skills necessary to do that.

What I am concerned about with not having a parliamentary oversight committee or a parliamentary inquiry is there are many members of the public in regional Victoria – businesses that may have invested, thinking that they were going to get lots of tourists, and individuals that might have made personal decisions about where they are going to live and what they are going to do – and I think that these people should have the opportunity to put in submissions to an inquiry and be heard in public about what has gone on and how it has affected their lives. They may be able to put in submissions to VAGO, but I do not think that that would have the same sort of effect as having a parliamentary inquiry. I also think that an inquiry would give an opportunity for a committee to question people involved with the process and get some sort of public scrutiny on that.

That leads us to the place where I am – the position that I support both of these things. Let us wait and see how it turns out at the end, but yes, I do support the Auditor-General looking at it and I also support at some stage, if it does not get up today, potentially further down the track some sort of parliamentary political oversight of what is happening. I do think that it is the job of members of Parliament to take part in committees like this to provide oversight and scrutiny of government actions. Clearly this is a really big decision that the government has made and it should look in detail at what actually went on, and I hope that the opportunity for that to happen does happen. So that is my position on this.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (10:57): I rise to support this motion, but let us face it: this was a pre-election promise, nothing more, nothing less. As many would know, I did not support the proposal of the games in multiple regional areas because, as anybody who is in regional Victoria would know, there just simply was not going to be the infrastructure available to cater for all the facilities, whether it be rail, roads, housing or security. I mean, in Ballarat alone all the available beds were going to be taken up just with the bus drivers and the police that were necessary to involve themselves in the games, so there was going to be no accommodation available for visitors, for families who wanted to watch their athletes or for spectators. In Ballarat, outside the Mars Stadium, where we were going to

have many of these events, the government point-blank said they were not even going to build a platform so people could get off a train and get to the stadium, and that would be infrastructure going forward that we could all admire and use – no, that was not going to happen. The road needed to be duplicated going from Mars Stadium – no, that was never likely to happen either.

As for the housing in Ballarat, well, that is another story altogether. The proposal was going to be on a contaminated site, no less, that for over a hundred years had been used for saleyards. You can imagine the toxic waste that was prevalent there. I mean, I fought the toxic waste going into the Bacchus Marsh quarry from the West Gate Tunnel, but here was going to be another example of toxic waste needing to be removed. There was also a King's caveat over the area; they had to negotiate their way out of that. There was an easement because opposite – it is an industrial site – was a cement manufacturer that had an easement on it. So there were multiple problems.

The councils all got very excited and energised about supporting all the ribbon-cutting exercises they were going to be involved in at these multiple sites. They were happily thinking the government was going to come forward with a bucket of money to fix all the problems that they were not able to fix themselves. The housing site at the saleyards in Ballarat was a case in point. Well, all of a sudden they then realised they were not going to get the funding. Geelong, for example, has got a huge debt, so I do not think any of the ratepayers in these areas thought it was a grand idea to have that landed on their rates notice – a whole lot of infrastructure. In Geelong we had the bizarre situation where we were going to have blow-up pools, no less. Blow-up pools – who ever heard of that? They were going to be just pulled down and moved somewhere else. The Premier, I remember, in his press conference, when he announced the collapse of the whole shenanigans, said, 'Well, everything was going to be dismountable – I mean, houses, pools, the whole box and dice.' What an extraordinary scenario. There was going to be no legacy left for anybody in these areas, and those councillors who were happily there with their ribbons and scissors were going to be left languishing as well, trying to justify to their ratepayers why on earth they had agreed to it all in the first place.

So we had a bizarre situation where there was no way to have the infrastructure that was going to be needed, because you had to duplicate every facility. Whether it was housing or all the medical infrastructure required or the security infrastructure required, you had to duplicate it across all these multiple venues. I am not sure all those international athletes who thought they were coming to Australia for an international games event were happily thinking they were going to be transported almost into tents in various places, you know – throwaway homes that did not have a kitchen.

Joe McCracken: Ray's Tent City.

Bev McARTHUR: Ray's Tent City – is he still going, Ray's Tent City? Anyway, there will be an alternative. We could have had swags and tents.

Joe McCracken: Kathmandu.

Bev McARTHUR: A Kathmandu operation, yes. Even a North Face jacket for everybody, perhaps, the Premier might have dished out.

So this was a stupid idea from the beginning. It was never going to fly, and the questions I asked on multiple occasions in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) of course elicited ridiculous answers. There is no way that these games were going to fly. And then, when everybody was excited about it before the election, after the election of course: 'Well, who cares? We won. It doesn't matter now. We can do what we like.' That seems to be par for the course these days: 'We'll just cancel that.'

I am also curious about the whole notion of the republicans –

Nicholas McGowan: We're for the republic, aren't we?

Bev McARTHUR: who should be, I would have thought, dead against the Commonwealth in a way. Never mind you, Mr McGowan. You would love a republic. We are not interested in your view.

Nicholas McGowan: I just want to see mascots. Where are the mascots?

Bev McARTHUR: The mascots – now, that is another issue altogether, isn't it, the mascots? I think it was going to be a donkey. Perhaps the former Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy could tell us – was the mascot a donkey mascot? It would be nice, a donkey mascot. We could all wear that, I think. But I do not know. Maybe Scotland is going to take it over, I have heard. They might like a donkey mascot, Minister. You could just hand it all over. It would be a shame to waste it, wouldn't it, really? We do need to know how much those mascots cost, though. Give us a little inkling as to how much the mascot operation cost.

Nicholas McGowan: Kelly Koala.

Bev McARTHUR: Kelly Koala – now there is a chance, yes.

Nicholas McGowan: Whizzy Lizard.

Bev McARTHUR: Whizzy Lizard – well, look, there are so many options, aren't there?

Really, we also need to know exactly how much it has cost and how much it is going to cost to get out of this debacle. And the detailed motion that the coalition have put forward – we need to have answers to all those questions. It would be great if the Auditor-General actually addressed all those particular issues, but at the moment I am not sure what he is actually looking at. I am sure he is looking at something. That would be great, because the Auditor-General, as Mr Limbrick says, is a very honest, reliable broker, and we need these honest, reliable brokers to oversee what we do in this place – exactly. But he does need a detailed script to work from; that would be a good idea.

In any case, the government, through an inquiry and with the help of the Auditor-General, need to tell the public exactly what we are up for and what we have lost out on, and we do need to know exactly who is going to get what as a result. We have heard a lot about the legacy that we are still going to get, but we have not got a lot of confidence in all these promises of bits and pieces floating around, because they seem to have been cancelled left, right and centre.

We would hope that the government in good faith are going to supply the housing they have promised and supply all the sporting facilities they have promised, but we do need to know how much they will cost as an extra bonus to the people who love the Commonwealth after all. I think it is a very good idea that we investigate this matter very thoroughly. I know Mr Galea over there would like a thorough investigation too. He was at PAEC hearings when we asked all those questions. The answers were not really forthcoming, though, were they, Mr Galea? Anyway, we can try again on another occasion if the worst comes to the worst and we do not get all these answers through these various mechanisms that are being proposed today. But anyway, I happily support the motion, and I hope everybody else will too.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (11:06): I rise to make a brief contribution on Ms Crozier's motion and the proposed amendments from the government. Can I say just in hindsight I have really enjoyed previous Commonwealth Games. I worked at the Commonwealth Games in 1982 in Brisbane as a driver for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. I had a hoot. It was fantastic. It was really good. The Queen attended. The entertainment was led off by an entertainer maybe not so famous now by the name of Rolf Harris, and I have to say the afterparty that was held for the people who worked in the media and for all of the games administrators and managers was fantastic if you were poor, like I was. One aspect of it was the hostesses who were dressed up like they were in a 1920s speak-easy, with trays of cigarettes, because the function was sponsored by Rothmans tobacco. I guess I raise Rolf and Rothmans because times change and priorities change as our society changes.

If we fast-forward to the 2006 games, they certainly had their moments, with all of those fantastic metal fish floating down the Yarra River. It was sort of like, in hindsight, a bit of an anaemic version of the 2000 Sydney Olympics. But again, it did not have anything like the sort of excitement, engagement and sense of the Commonwealth that there was in 1982. In 2018 on the Gold Coast, I think half of Melbourne did not necessarily notice it, and God knows we love our sport here in Melbourne. But I guess the point I am trying to get to here is that in looking at this \$6 billion cancellation – if it was a \$6 billion cancellation – was it more of a mercy killing than a strategic change? And more importantly, how do we ensure that the people of Victoria get to understand what happened. The one thing we all share is that sense of ‘What the! How did we get to this situation, and how do we get an explanation of it?’

Before I proceed I do want to take a moment to acknowledge the disappointment of the athletes, who will be denied a significant opportunity to compete and to compete for a home crowd. I think Richard Burton said that life is not a rehearsal, and for athletes with a very finite life in their chosen sport, with a few prominent exceptions – thank goodness for the lawn bowls – for most of them this is a rare opportunity that they have lost. So our sympathies go out to them for losing that opportunity. And likewise to regional Victorians – those in small businesses across the state were obviously looking forward to the opportunity for some growth and some business. Likewise, I can understand their disappointment.

So we now have this claim from the government that the cost of these games has blown out to \$6 billion or thereabouts. If that is correct, then I think that most Victorians would support the cancellation. It is not worth \$6 billion. We just cannot afford it. It would be insane to proceed. And I think most Victorians would like to understand. If we think about this in that old context of bread and circuses, I guess the saying might go, ‘If you’re short of bread, you need to think about how much you spend on circuses.’ So again, was this a good decision and was this an understandable decision? That is what the people of Victoria want to know: how did this happen?

Today we are presented with two options: a potentially politically motivated inquiry by people in this place, which could easily become self-serving but may not, or an independent inquiry by our highly respected Auditor-General with the greater powers of inquiry that come with that statutory office. Now, it has been put to me – and I do not know whether it is correct or not – that the Auditor-General does not have those powers. Ms Crozier just said that to me a minute to go, and look, if that is the case I am concerned. But again, I have received advice to the contrary and I do not know which is correct.

I guess I am interested in the proposition that was put forward by Mr Limbrick, which is that the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The terms of reference are the same and the subject matter is the same, but the inquiry participants, in terms of who is at the top table, would obviously be different. So this is a question of whether we risk a political sideshow on one hand – to put it bluntly – or we allow a dive into the numbers by an independent organisation that has demonstrated skills in audit and investigation and that exists for just such a purpose. If we want real answers rather than political pointscoreing, I feel that the Auditor-General path should be preferred in the first instance. As Mr Limbrick suggested, once we have received the Auditor-General’s report we as a chamber would be in a position to decide whether or not we wish to pursue this investigation further. Accordingly, the votes of Legalise Cannabis Victoria in this chamber will reflect in the first instance the amendment from the government to refer this to the Auditor-General.

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (11:13): We think Victorians deserve to know what went wrong with the decision around the Commonwealth Games and most importantly to make sure that the promised housing and other infrastructure projects for regional Victoria especially do not suffer the same fate. That is why the Greens will be supporting the motion for a select committee to inquire into the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games. The Greens would have preferred that an existing parliamentary committee such as the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) would be in a position to conduct a proper inquiry – as it is meant to do. However, the current system in the Victorian Parliament to scrutinise the government has been gutted by this Labor government,

and it needs to be rebuilt. The committees to scrutinise the decisions of government are filled with government MPs and the majority of them have government chairs, so they are not working. All governments of all colours should be held to account for the decisions they make and for their use of taxpayers money.

Whether or not you agree with the outcome around the Commonwealth Games and its cancellation, in some ways it does not pertain to the substance of the motion before us today. The Greens believe the Parliament has an incredibly important job to do to apply proper scrutiny and hold the government of the day to account, and one of our few levers to be able to do so is through the parliamentary committee investigatory process. But the Greens have long held deep concerns, which we have put on the record countless times, including with bills before this Parliament to fix the system. We have long-held concerns that our parliamentary scrutiny system through our committee structure is failing the Victorian Parliament and thereby failing Victorians. If we had a committee structure that was working to do what it is meant to do, I do not believe this chamber would be in the place that we are in here today. It is unfortunate that we have to think about bandaid solutions to a broken system and consider a select committee proposal when ordinarily a committee like PAEC should be operating how Senate estimates operates to apply proper scrutiny to major decisions like this – and this was a major decision. This is a decision of such significance that it does require the scrutiny of Parliament. It is incumbent on all of us members of Parliament to do our jobs, and one of our jobs is to hold the government to account, whoever the government is – and I hope that we will be saying this no matter who is in the chairs of government for the years to come.

If you have the system in order, you will have confidence in those processes to create greater transparency and oversight of significant government decision-making. You just have to look at a number of projects that are happening in Victoria right now with great intentions. Take, for example, the Big Housing Build: there were great intentions with that program to increase the amount of social housing in Victoria, yet we have got nearly half the \$5.3 billion apparently spent already in the last couple of years and we have had a net increase of 74 homes added to the social housing stock. The question is: what is going wrong there? Where do we have the opportunity to ask government meaningfully, and get authentic, actual responses from government, about what is going on? When will the government come clean about what might be going wrong, for example? Where can we learn together about how we work together to fix those problems together? We might be from different political parties, but we have a job as a Parliament to do across these chambers, and we should be using every opportunity to strengthen the system to get those outcomes right. We are concerned about projects like the big build if they are not delivering the housing that we need in the midst of a housing crisis. That is why we believe proposals like this have merit – because we hope that they will apply adequate pressure and oversight on government decision-making and put a spotlight on what has happened so we can learn about how we can improve things in future.

We urge the government to seriously consider reform of our parliamentary committee structure. Victoria's lower house in particular has the unfortunate reputation of being the least democratic house of Parliament anywhere in this country because the systems for having non-government debate and general business have been completely gutted. How can Victorians expect to have trust and confidence in this Victorian Parliament when we do not have proper systems of oversight?

At the heart of this motion for the Greens are our lack of confidence and our deep concern about the eroded scrutiny and accountability mechanisms this Parliament currently has. We want to see the systems improved. If those systems improve, hopefully we will see less bandaid solutions and hopefully we will see less extra committees added on to the existing committee workload, because our ordinary committees should be doing the work that this motion is intending to get done.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (11:18): I would like to stand in support of the opposition's motion to refer the Commonwealth Games debacle to a select committee. Furthermore, I would also like to see this matter investigated by the Auditor-General, as implied by the government's own amendment. After having made the commitment to host the games despite

reasonable public concern, the decision to then cancel the games without prior external consultation is something of an unwanted ‘we told you so’ moment for the Victorian people.

The government has implied that this was the last possible opportunity to do so without incurring additional expense from contractual commitments, as if to be seen to be making a fiscally responsible decision after all other possible alternatives were exhausted. This simply is not true. Prior commitments have incurred significant expense for the Victorian taxpayer. How else are we to explain the \$1 billion withdrawal fee? This whole debacle rehighlights the lack of accountability by the government in managing the state’s finances. During the challenging projected economic future we as a state faced when the tender was first submitted, it is very difficult to believe that the government could have seen this tender submission as anything other than an unnecessary expense.

Conveniently, after some decidedly bad PR for the Premier, it is also a stretch to believe that this commitment was not made in an ad hoc effort to raise public favour. After having witnessed the blatant disregard towards the responsibility of spending someone else’s money by seemingly doing so to raise their own profile, then the all too cavalier backflip in a short amount of economic time, the Victorian people deserve to see where and why these expensive mistakes were made.

Credit where credit is due – the concept of a regional games I personally thought was brilliant. To showcase regional Victoria internationally would have been fantastic in the current economic climate, though with the known additional expense in civil construction, labour and materials since COVID it was always a stretch. I need not point out the elephant in the room; however, I will: if the games were condensed to a more traditional metropolitan-style event, we have pre-existing fit-for-purpose infrastructure and facilities to support the games. I am sure if the regional communities that were to benefit from the games were given some preference to purchase tickets first, based on area code, or free public transport and discounted accommodation – again, in pre-existing accommodation – they would understand why the decision was made. The people of Victoria deserve to be treated with due respect. They deserve to see the actual information that the government used to make this decision. They alone should be allowed to decide whether this decision, which is costing them \$1 billion, was the right course of action. I do not wish to engage in the political jousting this issue is likely to encourage. I would like to see the best possible outcome for Victoria – the people, I would like to remind you all, that we represent.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (11:21): While cancelling the games may have been the right thing to do, it is clear that there are questions that need to be answered about where all this went wrong, and as my colleague Dr Ratnam has so articulately outlined, it is the role of this Parliament to apply that scrutiny. The communities in regional Victoria who were relying on the Commonwealth Games for desperately needed infrastructure improvements, jobs and a chance to finally have investment in housing deserve answers and transparency. They deserve reassurances and clarity about how the \$2 billion promised by the government will be allocated. People also want to know why their concerns were not listened to and why there was such a lack of consultation with the regions, councils, sporting bodies and other relevant stakeholders.

I actually have some direct experience of this, because I was one of the councillors on one of the host city councils and we had a range of concerns about the tight time frames and how the games would be delivered. We were no strangers to hosting major events and major sporting events, yet there was a clear lack of interest and commitment to working collaboratively with the council to address those challenges early on. Unfortunately in June last year, in an unprecedented move, five Labor MPs signed an open letter to the Geelong council, backed by the Premier, stating publicly that the government would oust Geelong council from being part of the games, citing concerns about the council’s ability to deliver state-funded projects. The unjustified and unedifying criticism sparked a political pile-on that was difficult for the council and the community to shoulder, and reflecting on the way that things have turned out it does raise questions about the willingness of government to engage with and genuinely collaborate with stakeholders like councils, and important questions about this need to be answered.

The Commonwealth Games were something that regions and councils cared deeply about, and whether you were for them or against them, there were potential benefits for desperately needed infrastructure that we all did agree on. Regional cities have been chronically neglected in health care, housing and transport infrastructure, and these games offered a lifeline of investment that gave people some hope. Right now people across the regions are struggling to find a secure rental, with some being forced to sleep in tents and caravans, and public transport is sorely lacking in so many areas. While the government has since committed to still spend \$2 billion on infrastructure in the regions, there are a lot of questions about how that will be rolled out. We have real concerns about how and when this will be delivered, and we hope that this inquiry will help us get to the bottom of a few key areas. Will it be new spend? Will it force the regions into competitive grants processes for infrastructure? Will areas struggling the worst, those areas most in need who are experiencing the highest rates of homelessness in the state, be prioritised? These are questions an inquiry and parliamentary scrutiny can answer in order to ensure that there is a legacy from the Commonwealth Games for our regions which is more than just wasted hours and taxpayers money.

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (11:25): I know I have got limited time, but I am rising to support this motion today, mainly because it is a way of getting answers that we have asked for in this chamber quite substantially. I know I have asked for quite a few, and to be quite honest I am sick of the response, 'We are still working through the detail.' I want actual answers.

I know Mr Ettershank made the comment before that this committee could be a political sideshow. I think we have already seen the political sideshow. This is about getting answers to it. The fact of the matter is that this was an election commitment brought to the people of Victoria in 2022. My hometown of Ballarat was one of the four hub sites that was key to that, and not even years but months later that commitment was relinquished. There was obviously something wrong. The due diligence really was not done in the first place, and whether that commitment was made knowing that or not is in itself worthy of investigation.

From \$2.6 billion to over \$6 billion to \$7 billion – it is a bit of a rubbery figure there – how could it be so wrong? How could it be so wrong when key projects in my hometown of Ballarat like an events platform opposite Mars Stadium were not even considered for funding? It was not funded at all, and that is a platform that actually would have delivered a very significant legacy to my community – not considered.

The oversight that this committee will provide if it is successful is important. I understand that the government have put forward their alternative, which is through the Victorian Auditor-General's Office, but the people have elected us and the people voted on a commitment. It is incumbent upon us when a commitment has clearly been backtracked upon to investigate that commitment, when it was such a public commitment made in the middle of an election, or before that, and it was something that people used to vote on. I hope this committee also looks into things like the housing allocation – the 1300 homes that are going to be allocated. We do not know exactly where they are going to be – just across regional Victoria, and I hope that is a fair and equitable distribution.

I guess the reputation of Victoria as a state of events, a state that can manage events, a state that can be relied upon, has been tarnished. My hometown of Ballarat has suffered from that because people have made significant preparations to be ready for the Commonwealth Games that are now nowhere, and I am interested to hear from those people, to hear what the actual real impact has been for them and their businesses and their families and more broadly for our communities, including our athletes.

The most important part of this motion is about integrity, the integrity of this Parliament, the integrity of our society and the integrity of the government to make a promise and then break it months later. That is what integrity is about, and that is what we are going to be looking into.

The government's amendment is a step in the right direction, but this place is where accountability happens. We are directly elected by the people of Victoria, and when we have the opportunity to have

a hearing about an issue that has been so significant, it is incumbent upon us to take that opportunity to shine a light on the places that have been very difficult to get answers for. I note that there is already a \$2 billion spend in regional Victoria, and originally the Commonwealth Games were slated to be \$2.6 billion. Where has the \$600 million gone already? Consultants, probably.

I know my time is running short, but I do commend this to the house. I know not one political party will dominate this committee, and that is how it should be so we can get a fair and equitable view on this and so that we can work with others on the crossbench and indeed in the government to shine a light on what went so wrong, give Victorians the answers that they deserve and need and give true accountability and integrity to this place. I agree with the crossbench over there, with the Greens: the integrity system does need more work. I agree with you. This might be one step in restoring that.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (11:30): I would like to thank those members who have spoken on my motion. As I said, I think it is an important motion that the Parliament undertakes this work so that we can understand what went wrong. I also note that the government wants to move an amendment to have this issue referred to the Victorian Auditor-General. Can I say that we had indicated that we would write to the Auditor-General, which we did, and this morning we received a letter from the Auditor-General, or the Leader of the Opposition received a letter, confirming:

I write to advise that I have initiated a performance engagement *Withdrawal from the Commonwealth Games 2026*. We will consider the matters raised in your correspondence as we progress this engagement and I look forward to sharing the results of the engagement when I table the report in Parliament in due course.

The government's amendment is redundant; that work is actually being undertaken. And can I say that the Legislative Council has no direct legislative reference capacity to refer a matter for investigation or audit to the Auditor-General, nor does the Victorian Auditor-General's Office have any legislative compliance requirements to investigate upon parliamentary referral under the Audit Act 1994. The Legislative Council can draft a letter for consideration around financial aspects, but of course this is now being undertaken, as has been confirmed by the Auditor-General in his letter to the opposition.

What the parliamentary inquiry will do is have the opportunity, as those who have spoken on this motion have requested, to hear from the community, to have them come before the committee and let the committee hear from those people that have been directly impacted by this decision. That is something that we believe is very important to instil trust back into the process, to enable Victorians to have their say and to understand some of the decisions that have been made by government.

Again I would say that the work of the Auditor-General is incredibly important. It is why we wrote to the Auditor-General for them to undertake the very specific work that they will do around the financial aspects of these decisions that have been made. But we know that an inquiry also needs to be undertaken. That is what we believe. We think that is in the best interests of all Victorians. That is why we want both to occur: it is important to have the Auditor-General do their work, and it is important for the Parliament to be able to do their work. I urge members of the house to support the motion.

Council divided on amendments:

Ayes (19): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Noes (21): Matthew Bach, Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Katherine Copsey, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nicholas McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Aiv Puglielli, Samantha Ratnam, Adem Somyurek, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

Amendments negated.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (25): Matthew Bach, Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Katherine Copsey, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, David Ettershank, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nicholas McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Samantha Ratnam, Adem Somyurek, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

Noes (15): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Tom McIntosh, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion agreed to.*Motions***Taxation**

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:44): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

- (a) Victorians are paying \$5638 per person in tax annually under the Andrews Labor government, higher than any other state in Australia;
- (b) the Andrews Labor government has raised taxes on Victorians 49 times since its election in 2014;
- (c) the Andrews Labor government has failed to act despite soaring cost-of-living pressures on Victorian families; and

(2) congratulates the opposition on the release of its discussion paper *Making Victoria's Tax System Work: Reducing Cost Pressures for Families, Community Groups and Business*.

It is good to rise to speak on this notice that this house notes that, firstly, Victorians are paying a huge amount per person in tax annually under this government – \$5638 per person; that is higher than any other Australian state – and secondly, that the government has raised taxes on Victorians almost 50 times. It might be 50 times now; I will check with Ms Wilson in the other place. But at a minimum it is 49 times; we will go with 49.

David Davis: Fifty.

Matthew BACH: Oh, it is 50, Mr Davis.

David Davis: It's actually 50 new and increased taxes.

Matthew BACH: New and increased taxes – we are actually at 50, as I suspected. Thank you, Mr Davis. Thirdly, the Andrews government has failed to act despite soaring cost-of-living pressures on Victorian families – and that is the nub of the issue. Finally, together we congratulate the opposition on the release of its discussion paper *Making Victoria's Tax System Work: Reducing Cost Pressures for Families, Community Groups and Business*.

It is our proposition that the tax system here in Victoria is broken. It is so regressive. To the best of my knowledge no government in the long history of the world has ever taxed its way to prosperity. Yet it seems to be that this is the view of the Andrews Labor government. Our view is that to ensure that we become more prosperous as a society and to ensure that hardworking families have cost-of-living relief, what we need to do is to encourage investment and to encourage growth. There are so many things we can do to modernise and reform our tax system in order to ultimately achieve that aim, and it is such a pressing aim right now. In our region we know so many people are hurting. We have had I think it is now 13 interest rate rises in the period of just over a year. Power bills are going through the roof, and the government's plans on gas are tangential to this motion but nonetheless relevant. School fees are going through the roof, and I will talk a little bit anon about the government's schools

tax on which it has had three different positions in the last two days. All of these additional taxes, many of them regressive and bad taxes, are hurting Victorians.

Taxation is so important. I heard Mr Limbrick talk about tax yesterday and the fact that his party will always oppose tax increases. Well, our position is that it is incredibly important that we have a strong and stable revenue base and a strong and stable taxation base to fund the things that Victorians expect the Parliament to fund each year – our hospitals, our schools, our emergency services and important infrastructure like roads and rail. There are ways and ways of doing this of course, and there are ways and ways of minimising taxation as you do this.

Firstly, I would like to point to some of the comments that others have made interstate about the state of play here in Victoria. Given that our tax system is demonstrably the least competitive in the country and given that Victorians are experiencing a cost-of-living crisis, I was particularly interested to hear some commentary recently from the Treasurer in South Australia. I find myself constantly impressed by the South Australian government and the South Australian Premier. Nonetheless here is a comment from the South Australian Treasurer just a month and a half ago. He said:

If you are a large corporate employer, especially in these days when even people in senior positions perform remotely, the choice should be obvious. Why would you choose a high-tax, high-cost location like Victoria ...

That commentary is from South Australia's Labor Treasurer. And they are right of course, because instead of a regressive tax system, a broken tax system and the highest taxes in the country, what we should have is a tax system that reduces costs for families and community groups and also for businesses.

I want to talk about families, because in embarking on this endeavour announced a week and a half ago by Mr Rowsell and Ms Wilson, both from the other place, first and foremost what we are seeking to do is to start a discussion with Victorian businesses and Victorian families about the ways in which we can reduce the cost of living. That is first and foremost what we are seeking to do. I remember distinctly – I am sure all members do – that before the 2014 election the opposition leader at that time was doing the media rounds and he said that if the people of Victoria voted for a Labor government then there would be no new or increased taxes. I know of course that from a Labor opposition that was a very appealing proposition to the Victorian people, and the Victorian people voted for Mr Andrews and the Labor Party in 2014 – no new or increased taxes. It is a claim that has been repeated at every election actually. Mr Pallas, the Treasurer, repeated the claim just before the last election – just like we were told we would have a Commonwealth Games before the last election – 'No new or increased taxes.' But in actual fact we have had 50 new or increased taxes since that time. The problem of course with simply piling on more and more and more taxes is that that hits families.

In the booklet that was launched by my colleagues in our economic team, there is a helpful list of every one of those 50 – at that time 49 but there have been even more increases since then – new or increased taxes. This is a publicly available document, and so all members of the house, should they wish, could go to bettertaxsystem.com.au to get access to that list. It is a good URL, President, don't you think? There in the hardcopy booklets that have also been distributed we list the new or increased taxes. Just by way of example: a new stamp duty on property transfers between spouses, which was introduced some time ago; increased stamp duty on new cars; a new stamp duty on off-the-plan purchases; more recently, huge increases to the WorkCover average premium rate; increased payroll tax on businesses; the jobs tax; increased land tax on landholdings above \$300,000; land tax on landholdings between \$50,000 and \$300,000; and the rent tax, pushing rents up at a time when, as we have discussed in this house, there is a housing crisis. So many Victorians are crying out – quite literally crying out in this place actually when we last discussed rent – and are in immense distress. Why would you put additional taxation upon landholdings between \$50,000 and \$300,000, pushing up rent in those circumstances? There are increased absentee landowner surcharges, increased wagering and betting taxes and a payroll tax upon independent schools. These are just some of the new and increased taxes that are hurting families so much right now.

To get down into the weeds somewhat and to look at the figures, if I may, over the next four years what this has meant – all these new and increased taxes – is that tax revenue is forecast to increase by 16 per cent. We have already had 50 new or increased taxes. Tax revenue is set to increase by a further 16 per cent over the next four years. By contrast, our gross state product is set to grow by only 1.5 per cent in this financial year and an average of 2.7 per cent annually over the next three years – these are figures from the government's own budget papers. Given that very significant expansion, it is worthwhile noting where the government says we will see that increased revenue – that increased revenue from further hits to businesses and further hits to families.

Payroll tax revenue, for example, according to the budget papers is forecast to be \$8 billion in this financial year but then increase by an average of 4.6 per cent every financial year after that over this budget period. Land tax revenue is set to go up too, to be \$6.1 billion in this financial year and then again increase by an average of 3.7 per cent every further year over the period of this budget. Stamp duty, which is such a regressive tax – a tax on mobility – is forecast to be \$7.4 billion in this financial year and then increase by an average of 8.4 per cent every year over the out years in this budget cycle. Revenue from the mental health and wellbeing levy is set to be \$912 million in this financial year, and then that will increase too by an average of 5.5 per cent annually over the next few years. And finally, although I could go on, revenue from the new so-called COVID debt levy is set to be \$2 billion in 2023–24, this tax year, and then increase by an average of 4.9 per cent annually over the next few years. So at a time, as I say, when we have a cost-of-living crisis, when our gross state product is growing by a small amount, tax revenue is set to outstrip that, and the impacts that we are seeing on families are significant.

Let me talk, if I may, about just one of these tax increases, just one of these new taxes.

Georgie Crozier: The schools tax.

Matthew BACH: Colleagues may talk about others, and there are many to choose from – there are 50 to choose from, in fact – but I would like to talk, as you say, Ms Crozier, about the schools tax. The government shocked the school sector on budget day when it announced with no prior consultation that for the first time the longstanding payroll tax exemption that independent and denominational schools have enjoyed would be removed. The budget papers said that this would raise \$422 million – a very specific figure – over the period of the budget, and yet, as is the way with this government, that commitment started to unravel on day one. Initially the government said that the threshold, if you like – the level of school fees at which schools would have to pay payroll tax – would be \$7500, and the Premier said that these were high-fee schools that needed to pay their fair share. The Premier said that these schools had had a sweetheart deal for so long. Well, Labor members who spoke anonymously to the media reported that so many members of their communities reached out to them to say, 'What are you doing?' They might send their kids, for example, to Oakleigh Grammar, with fees of \$8000. The principal of Oakleigh Grammar spoke out about the nature of his school community. It is so multicultural, so aspirational. Of course this is a tax on aspiration, on choice, on people who want to save as hard as they can – ordinary Victorians – to then send their children to the school of their choice.

At the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee on a Friday the Treasurer defended the government's position: 'Schools with fees of \$7500 are high-fee schools; they've had a sweetheart deal when it comes to taxation. They must pay their fair share.' However, by the afternoon so many Labor members had trodden a path to the Premier's office that when the Premier appeared before the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee it was a very different story. He said no, the threshold would not be \$7500, it would be slightly different. Ultimately, the government set an arbitrary threshold of \$15,000, but as reported by the new education editor at the *Age* yesterday, Robyn Grace, nobody knows how the government comes to this figure of \$15,000. Yesterday the government said that no further schools would be added to the hit list until 2029. That was first thing in the morning, but during question time, when Ms Tierney was talking about pet censuses, the Minister for Education released a statement to say that was wrong, that in actual fact every single year – every single year –

Gayle Tierney interjected.

Matthew BACH: Well, Ms Tierney says, ‘What has that got to do with it?’ I am not sure. Maybe you were running interference for her. But nonetheless Minister Hutchins came out to say that every single year more schools would be added to the hit list.

I was speaking to my colleague the member for Kew about a school in her electorate for less than 30 children with special needs. That is going to be hit with this tax slug. The government has maintained –

Sonja Terpstra interjected.

Matthew BACH: They should do the heavy lifting, Ms Terpstra? Is that what you say? What did you say?

Sonja Terpstra: I’m not engaging with you.

Matthew BACH: You are engaging with me. The government has said that this school in the electorate of Kew, catering for fewer than 30 children with special needs, should pay its fair share. However, today the beleaguered Minister for Education, potentially the worst minister in this government – although that is saying something – came out to say that in actual fact there may be a way of taking away this new obligation to pay payroll tax from this tiny school for special needs.

The government has had now six different positions on the schools tax, and that may be one huge problem with the way in which the government has sought to communicate this tax change. But at the end of the day what it means for Victorian families, 42 per cent of whom choose to send their children to independent schools, will be quite straightforward. The way the government has communicated this tax change has been chaotic and complicated, but the outcome is straightforward: school fees going up in the order of over \$1000 –

The PRESIDENT: Apologies, Dr Bach, I have to interrupt your contribution for question time. Before I call the first question, I remind members, or alert members if they do not know, that the new parliamentary integrity adviser Professor Charles Sampford has commenced his four-year term this week. Professor Sampford will be available to meet with people in the north library this afternoon between 2 and 3:45 pm, so I would encourage members to drop in and meet with him and learn about his role of providing advice to members in the next four years.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

LGBTIQ+ events

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:01): (209) My question is to the Minister for Police. As you know, many rainbow family events such as drag story time have been cancelled due to security concerns at the recommendation of Victoria Police. Meanwhile, as we heard yesterday, on Saturday Nazis held a white powerlifting event, openly recruiting at a gym in Sunshine, protected by a cordon of police. So I would like to ask the minister: what can the government do to ensure that events that we want to see go ahead, like drag story time, can go ahead and that our policing system is not causing them to be cancelled?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:01): I thank Mr Puglielli for his interest and his question in relation to this matter. I know he is very passionate about these issues and he has raised them in this forum and many other forums. In relation to that question, in line with the practices of this place I will take that question on notice and seek a response from the relevant minister in the other place.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:02): I thank the minister. I should also note, based on past responses I have had from the minister that this has been directed to, I appreciate that

the minister does not have operational oversight or give directives towards police and their decisions, but I ask: can you meet with the police commissioner to discuss how to prevent queer events from being cancelled?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:02): I thank Mr Puglielli for his supplementary question. In line with the practices of this place I will also forward that to the Minister for Police in the other place and get a written response.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:02): (210) My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, the fixed term of the former IBAC Commissioner Robert Redlich concluded in December last year. Victoria is now entering its eighth month with an acting Commissioner as the Andrews government has yet to make a permanent appointment to what is one of the most important integrity roles in the state. The government's delay has been criticised by former Court of Appeal judge the Honourable Stephen Charles, who said:

It suggests to me that they're not really interested in how well IBAC is working or the question of this government's integrity.

Attorney, how much longer will Victorians have to wait until a permanent IBAC Commissioner is appointed?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:03): I thank Mr Davis for his question. Of course the IBAC Commissioner does play a critical role in the integrity system by leading IBAC to prevent and expose public sector corruption and respond to police misconduct. It is a really important role. I am pleased to advise that we have an acting Commissioner, who is the former Deputy Commissioner, in that role at the moment. It is an important role. It is a significant appointment. The recruitment process is underway. It is a process that is at arm's length from me. Recommendations will be made to me, and then there is an additional process which involves the IOC. So I am not in a position to provide a definitive time line, apart from providing assurances to the chamber – and in direct answer to your question, Mr Davis – that that process is underway.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:04): I thank the minister for her response. I further ask: it has been reported that IBAC is currently working on investigations that affect the Andrews Labor government, including Operation Richmond concerning the relationship between the government and the United Firefighters Union. Given acting IBAC Commissioner Stephen Farrow is required to make decisions about such matters that directly affect the government's political interests, how can the Attorney avoid any perception of a conflict of interest in the appointment of a permanent IBAC Commissioner should Mr Farrow be a candidate for that position?

Jaclyn Symes interjected.

David DAVIS: Would you like me to read it again?

The PRESIDENT: Yes, that would be good.

David DAVIS: I will read the substantive bit of it. Given acting IBAC Commissioner Stephen Farrow is required to make decisions about such matters as the above that directly affect the government's political interests, how can the Attorney avoid any perception of a conflict of interest in the appointment of a permanent IBAC Commissioner should Mr Farrow be a candidate for that position? It is a very simple question.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:05): Well, it is not simple to me. I cannot work out if you are reflecting on a public servant and their capacity to deliver the role.

David Davis: No, no. I am talking about the perception of a conflict.

Jaclyn SYMES: The perception of a conflict? There are well-established independent processes for appointments. That is at arm's length from me, which is appropriate at this point in time, and we have the additional overlay of the requirement of me to consult with the IOC chair on the appointment. This is a process that is very specific. It is quite cumbersome, which is appropriate for an appointment of this type, so it is designed to ensure that we deal with perceptions –

David Davis interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: I think that the appointment process stands for itself. Would you like additional steps to be put in place to delay this further?

David Davis: I am just asking how you will manage that.

Jaclyn SYMES: I think it is managed appropriately by the process that is underway.

Ministers statements: Andrew Crisp

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:06): I am going to use my minister's statement today to update the house on the distinguished career of Andrew Crisp AM APM, a 45-year respected career that is underpinned by an unwavering commitment to keep Victorians safe. This Friday is the end of Andrew's five-year term as emergency management commissioner. 'Andrew' sounds weird. I always call him Crispy, so I am going to call him Crispy in here as well. Sorry about the lack of formality, but he is not an Andrew. He does not look like an Andrew. It is Crispy.

He is a strong and loyal leader with exceptional judgement and an unwavering commitment to community safety and diversity as well as inclusion. Over the last five years and indeed the 40 years prior with Victoria Police, including as deputy commissioner, Crispy has demonstrated exemplary leadership and collaboration in the emergency management sector and across government and, importantly, with the community members that rely on him. He has been a calm and familiar face for Victorians during some of the most significant emergencies the state has faced, including the Black Summer bushfires, the pandemic response, the June 2021 storm event and the October 2022 flood event. He has championed inclusion and diversity in the sector and supported many women to reach their potential. Crispy listens and engages with all communities, particularly multicultural and multifaith communities.

My personal thanks to Linda, his wife, and his daughters Nicola and Chelsea for their support of him, which has allowed him to do what he does best, often taking him away from home for extended periods, and enabled him to support people in the most dire of times of need. I am personally grateful to work with such an amazing man. He has been a great support to me, particularly during the floods, but on a daily basis in my portfolio I could not have asked for a better mentor in relation to taking this role on. It has been my and many of my colleagues' pleasure to have worked with such a knowledgeable, genuine and kind person. On behalf of the government, on behalf of my office in particular and, I am sure, on behalf of many people in this chamber, I want to say thank you. I wish you and your family all the best for the future, and I hope you get to spend much more time with Lenny.

1080 poison

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:09): (211) My question is for the Minister for Agriculture. The cruel Felixer grooming trap that traps and sprays animals with a dose of toxic 1080 gel has been approved by federal authorities for wild cat management across the country. 1080 kills animals in the trap slowly and painfully when they lick it off. The traps are not suitable for large landscapes and are being used in tandem with aerial baiting. The government's first ever 10-year cat

management strategy to protect cats and wildlife is due to be released soon. Can the minister confirm that the Felixer 1080 grooming trap will not be deployed in Victoria?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:10): I thank the member for her question. This is a relatively new device. For those that are not familiar with it, it is essentially a metal box, and inside of it there are containers that hold 1080 in it. It sprays on the detection of particular animals, and it can identify different animals in terms of its spray, so it is a technological advancement in terms of pest control in the country. In respect to Victoria, we have got some very stringent controls in terms of 1080; in terms of feral cats, it is not allowed. But I can assure you that in terms of the cat management strategy, this is not a feature of those consultations whatsoever and it is certainly not part of the strategy overall. In terms of anything that is approved nationally, we obviously need to consider what the implications might be in terms of Victoria, making sure that we have got some sort of eye on technological advancement, as well as balancing that with animal welfare considerations.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:11): I thank the minister for her response. 1080 poison is banned in most countries, including the US, where it was outlawed in the early 1970s because of civilian deaths. 1080 is a poison used extensively to kill so-called pest species such as foxes, rabbits, wallabies, cats, wild pigs and wild dogs. It is colourless, odourless and tasteless and is therefore easily ingested by companion animals as well as native species. Its victims, intended or otherwise, experience a slow, agonising death. Will the minister consider humane, long-term population control techniques such as immunocontraception for target animals and end the use of 1080, as recommended in the final report of the inquiry into ecosystem decline in Victoria?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:12): Thank you for the question. This is a banner that was raised by your predecessor Andy Meddick as well. The government's position in terms of an answer has not changed in relation to this, but I think in terms of the actual answer that you are after, it is probably more within the province of another minister.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:13): (212) My question is again to the Attorney-General. The former IBAC Commissioner the Honourable Robert Redlich gave evidence this week to the Integrity and Oversight Committee in relation to the *Operation Daintree: Special Report*, saying:

... the Premier made much of the fact in his long media address that there was no crime committed. But regrettably, and quite incorrectly, he repeatedly said there were no findings made. The whole report is about findings of misconduct ...

That is what Mr Redlich said. Attorney, did IBAC's *Operation Daintree* make findings of misconduct against the Andrews Labor government, or is it government policy that there were no such findings made?

The PRESIDENT: Do you mind repeating that?

David DAVIS: Did IBAC's *Operation Daintree* make findings of misconduct against the Andrews Labor government, or is it government policy that no such findings were made?

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: I think one might have been asking for an opinion. I will put the question to the minister.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:14): I will give a response in relation to the question that you have asked. In relation to *Operation Daintree*, it reported on matters that needed government to look at ways to –

David Davis interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: I am answering your question. The report laid bare issues that government are taking on board. It made recommendations which we have committed to review and to provide advice back on. There are several reports that the IBAC Commissioner has made that have recommended different recommendations and made different findings, and government is giving due consideration to those. That is irrespective of whether it is determined to be corrupt conduct, misconduct or any other threshold. What is interesting is that we have been having a debate around whether the IBAC Commissioner can look at things that are not crimes. Well, we are having that exact conversation. We are having a conversation about a report that made recommendations and findings to government in relation to the way that officers can behave, and we are responding to that by considering those recommendations. Those recommendations were not directed to the Attorney-General, but as a government we are looking at those recommendations and will respond accordingly.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:16): Attorney, former IBAC Commissioner Mr Redlich also gave evidence to the IOC in relation to *Operation Daintree* that said:

Daintree is a particularly illuminating case for the simple reason that it shows that ... there was a failure of ministerial responsibility, that ministerial advisers grossly overstepped their role ...

Given these findings go to the poor behaviour of ministers and staff in the Andrews Labor government, why haven't the 17 recommendations made in *Operation Daintree: Special Report* even been responded to, let alone implemented?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:16): You are asking the Attorney-General; that is who I think your question was to. The report did not make recommendations to me, but I can give you –

Members interjecting.

Jaclyn SYMES: I am not responsible for IBAC. They are an independent body. You keep trying to say that I am. The administrative order says I am responsible for IBAC's legislation. I have meetings with them about how they are functioning. I do not have discussions with them about their investigations or their operations.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, it is very clear that the administrative orders give the IBAC act as a responsibility to the minister, including amendments to that act.

The PRESIDENT: It is not a point of order. I think the minister is trying to help. Despite the recommendations not falling inside her responsibilities, I think she is trying to help. Maybe if she does not get interjected on in the next 30 seconds, we might get there.

Jaclyn SYMES: I am in constant conversations with integrity agencies, including IBAC, about potential reforms and the way that they are operating. When it comes to individual reports and those findings, they are generally made to particular bodies or ministers. In *Daintree*, none of those recommendations were made to me. However, it is a matter of public record that it raised issues that the government is giving proper consideration to, which is appropriate.

Ministers statements: Andrew Crisp

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Equality) (12:18): I rise today to speak about a remarkable human being. Andrew Crisp has steered this state and its communities through some of the most difficult times imaginable. He has a breadth of expertise and wisdom that few of us will ever achieve. He has decades of stewardship and leadership, and the demonstrated experience that he has shown to people in bushfires, in floods and in major emergencies has been without peer. My colleague has referred to you as 'Crispy'. I am going to do the same thing.

You have earned and you deserve the respect and the recognition and the thanks of this state. The lives of so many people are so much better for all that you have done without expectation of recognition or

reward. You have demonstrated a measure of compassion and of care in all circumstances that you have encountered. I will never forget a road to Wairewa in 2020, when the landscape was black and white around us, and how you stopped to comfort a man in a state of high distress. You met him at his level, as you have done with everyone in your public service. I will not forget you sitting on the ground hugging a dog by the name of Ember at one of the control centres. I will not forget seeing you at flood relief and recovery centres. We will not forget the contribution that you have made.

Crispy, I am going to disagree with Maya Angelou as I finish with a quote:

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

Crispy, we will not forget what you said, we will not forget what you did, but we will never, ever forget how you have made everyone feel. Thank you and good luck.

Barwon River water sports

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:20): (213) My question is for the Minister for Regional Development. It is an understatement to say that the athletes, sports clubs and communities of Geelong, like the rest of regional Victoria, are deeply disappointed that their Commonwealth Games legacy will be one of disappointment, failure and broken promises. Does the minister have the opportunity to secure a lasting sporting legacy for the huge number of dedicated watersport competitors who use the Barwon River, and does the minister value these sporting clubs, such as rowing, canoeing and waterskiing, and the physical benefits participation brings?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Equality) (12:21): Thank you, Mrs McArthur, for that question. Again, in line with the discussions that we have had this week, I am really happy to continue to provide information and advice on the work that we do to deliver legacy benefits across regional Victoria, including as they translate through the delivery of \$550 million in permanent sports infrastructure, to make sure that communities have the outcomes that they need and that they have identified to us.

There are a range of water sports that have been identified, as you would be aware and as communities are really aware, that are the focus of what outcomes need to be delivered, deserve to be delivered, as part of legacy. I have been engaged over many, many months now and will continue to be engaged with communities on the sorts of outcomes that they wish to see for the purpose of legacy within community and sporting clubs and organisations, with peak bodies, with communities and councils and with our regional partnerships, and this is work that is really important to make sure that what we deliver through this \$2 billion is fit for purpose and meets the needs of communities now and into the future.

There has been, Mrs McArthur, as you would be aware, an announcement, as part of this fund of more than \$2 billion, of \$60 million toward community sport and development, and this is on top of the \$550 million permanent sport infrastructure commitment that we have made and that we are in the process of delivering. I would very much urge you and indeed anybody else around this chamber who has organisations, clubs, peak bodies or groups – everyone from our nippers right through to our masters – to get in touch to be part of the legacy round tables, which are continuing and which have always been locked in, to talk about the enduring benefits of the preparation for 2026 and where we head to from here. Last week I was in fact at the Committee for Ballarat. More than 200 people attended, and this is about an opportunity to continue that conversation.

As is the case with every other code, I am looking forward to hearing from a range of stakeholders, including watersport clubs and community participants. There is a lot of enthusiasm for a range of on-water activities, and I am looking forward to seeing what we can do. I suspect I know where your supplementary question might be going, Mrs McArthur, as it relates to waterskiing and as it relates to a range of things around multi-use capacity for the Barwon River, but I will not pre-empt that work and I will let you ask your supplementary.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:24): Thank you, Minister, for that fulsome response. I am sure they will all be pleased to hear that you have got their backs. These particular clubs are perhaps not interested in receiving money, although I am sure they would welcome it if you want to come forward with it, but these clubs have dedicated amateur, semiprofessional and professional participants. Geelong Waterski Club members – and you were right, that is where I was going – for example, win national and international honours. This is where you need to take some action, Minister, because the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority took more than 11 months to reply to the Geelong Canoe Club about proposed new boating rules, and even then they would not agree to meet with them. The sporting reputation of Victoria has been trashed by the Andrews government, so will you please, Minister, at least step in to save the Barwon River's national reputation for water sports and order the CCMA to respond to the river users' concern that their activities could soon be outlawed?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Equality) (12:25): Mrs McArthur, it appears that we have both pre-empted where we were going on this particular conversation. Corangamite CMA has been continuing to engage with the community, including the waterski club, to make sure that options and consultations as they are occurring around the span of hours balance the interests of various user groups in and around the Barwon. We do want to make sure that clubs are able to do their work and are able to participate in a range of training and competitive activities. We also want to make sure that other on-water vehicles are able to move throughout the Barwon River without presenting that safety risk that may be attendant where we do not have an adequate balancing of priorities. So there is a review being undertaken at the moment, and what we are intending to do is make sure that we do continue to talk with communities. And when we have a final decision on where we are landing with this, including a span of hours for use of the Barwon River, we will be able to work through that with clubs and community groups, including the waterski club.

Medicinal cannabis

David ETTERSHPANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:26): (214) My question is for the Attorney-General. Fitzroy Legal Service has published a report on the 420 cannabis event held in Flagstaff Gardens earlier this year that details multiple accounts of police searching medicinal cannabis prescription holders even after they had produced their prescriptions and identification. In at least one instance a medicinal cannabis patient so identified was handcuffed and arrested. The report states that upon production of the legal prescription, a police officer cannot reasonably suspect possession of an illicit substance and search. To do so is unlawful, discriminatory and a contravention of the prescription holder's human rights. This is yet another example of the discrimination experienced by medicinal cannabis patients. So my question to the Attorney-General is: what legislative changes are you contemplating to protect medicinal cannabis patients from discrimination in Victoria?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:27): I thank Mr Ettershank for his rundown of an issue from the experience of and reports from Fitzroy Legal Service. It is a little difficult for me to comment on the specifics of the matters that you raise without having further consultation with people in relation to suggestions that have been made. I am on the record many times saying that legal reform is a constant in my life. There is never a full stop on things that we can look at, so I am always open to having conversations with people about ways that we can make the justice system more responsive to the needs of Victorians, whether they be people that feel they are unfairly feeling the brunt of laws or those victims that feel the opposite. It is always a balancing act in relation to specific laws in relation to medicinal cannabis. It is not on the top of my agenda in my office, but we know that you have as a party suggested numerous things for governments to consider, and we are very happy to have ongoing conversations with you in relation to that. A lot of the matters that you have raised do tend to lean into a bit of operational matters for police and so would not be as simple as a potential law change from the facts as you have outlined, but I am more than happy to have further conversations with you.

David Ettershank: I thank the Attorney-General for her response, and I look forward to those conversations. I have no supplementary question.

The PRESIDENT: Before I call the next ministers statement, can I acknowledge former member Mr Andy Meddick up there in the gallery.

Ministers statements: community organisations

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:29): This government has invested almost \$7.6 million in the recent budget to deliver promised projects for local communities. Through the delivering for local communities fund, we are funding 59 community-based organisations including neighbourhood houses, men's sheds, food relief providers and philanthropic organisations.

Over the winter break I had the chance to visit some of these organisations and see firsthand the difference these investments will make. In Glen Waverley I visited Waverley Woodworkers with the member for Glen Waverley. The local member is a great advocate for this organisation. I know that he is very pleased that this men's shed are the recipients of a \$50,000 grant to invest in machinery and infrastructure to ensure that they can continue to provide the community with the best equipment. It was an absolute pleasure to talk with the shedders about how this investment will impact the important work that they do in their shed for the community.

I was particularly interested to hear that the Waverley Woodworkers have an active toy-making group who make toys and give them to those in need in the community. From childcare centres and kinders to the children of women in corrections, they are providing toys to those in need. Listening to the shedders describe the look on children's faces when they receive one of these toys was really inspiring. I am sure that this \$50,000 grant will help them continue to deliver for the community. I would also note that this men's shed also welcomes female members, and it was great to chat with members of the club about how they came to be involved with the shed and the reasons why.

I also had the chance to visit Bk 2 Basics with the member for Narre Warren North. This organisation is responsible for providing meals and healthy food for local families, among many other things, such as running a community pantry. It was incredible to see the scale of food and pantry items Bk 2 Basics are able to distribute to their community. Our \$100,000 investment in this organisation will allow them to continue delivering their services and help those most in need.

This government recognises the impact our investments into local community organisations will have on them so that they can continue to play an important role in supporting their communities, including older people, regional households, carers and people with disability and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Commonwealth Games

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (12:31): (215) My question is to the Minister for Regional Development. Simon Balderstone, a former Labor adviser and general manager of the Sydney Olympics organising committee, said that the government's \$4.4 billion blowout of the Commonwealth Games is enormous to him and that he cannot really work out where all the money would have been spent. Given that Victorians are asking the same question about the Commonwealth Games, will the minister release the full costings?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Equality) (12:31): Thank you, Mr McCracken. Again answering this question as the Minister for Regional Development as fulsomely as I possibly can, negotiations, as you would be aware, are currently on foot between the CGF, CGA and government. I do not intend to cut across or to interfere with those negotiations as they relate to progress of this matter. As has been indicated, Mr McCracken, full information will be provided around the work undertaken for the purpose of costings and of outcomes upon conclusion of those discussions.

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (12:32): Will the government guarantee Victorian residents and sporting clubs that the full amount of infrastructure spend allocated as part of the Commonwealth Games will be provided in full?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Equality) (12:32): Thank you, Mr McCracken. More than \$2 billion in that fund to deliver on so many legacy outcomes across the state has already been budgeted for within the 2022–23 budget. That is now allocated to deliver on a range of projects, including \$1 billion in social and affordable housing, worker accommodation, a range of sporting and community-based infrastructure and programs – everything from all-abilities participation options through to cultural and multicultural festivals and events. We also want to make sure that we are continuing the work that has already been undertaken in the preparation for legacy and that we continue to build on that from here. Mr McCracken, I would love to have you be part of legacy round tables and conversations. This is about partnership and about collaboration. You were not able to make it to the Committee for Ballarat’s dinner that I addressed last week, but I would really, really welcome an opportunity to work alongside you around those legacy priorities as identified by communities.

Commonwealth Games

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:34): (216) My question is to the Minister for Regional Development. When did the minister become aware that the initial Commonwealth Games Visit Victoria Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong proposal would be expanded to include the seats of Morwell and Shepparton?

Members interjecting.

Melina BATH: The Latrobe Valley and Shepparton regions.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Equality) (12:34): Again talking to this question as regional development minister, Visit Victoria is not part of the government in terms of the work that it has done. The agreement that was struck between the Commonwealth Games Federation, the CGA and the state related to delivery of the games across a number of locations. That included the Latrobe Valley. It included Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong. It also included Shepparton as part of delivering on those BMX events. We are continuing to work with those communities. Again, the subject of the agreement with the Commonwealth Games Federation was for delivery of the games across those four hubs and Shepparton.

Melina Bath: On a point of order, President, the minister is responding. She has got 2 minutes left. I am sure she will actually clarify as to when, and that was my question.

Harriet SHING: Thank you, Ms Bath. Again you are referring to a document with Visit Victoria that is not actually a Victorian government document as part of the bid process.

Members interjecting.

Harriet SHING: No, no. Again I take issue with your characterisation of the work of Visit Victoria. The distinction that I am wanting to be really clear on here is with the bid that was put in by and agreed between the Victorian government, the CGF and the CGA. Ms Bath, that is an agreement that was in place when I became the minister in December. When I was sworn into the portfolio I received a range of briefings on a range of matters, including matters that had been established and were extant for a significant period of time. Again, that is the subject of negotiations. It is really important that we are clear, though, about the nature of the agreement. The nature of the agreement to deliver on regional games related to Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, the Latrobe Valley and, again, additional sports to be undertaken in Creswick with the bike trails there and also Shepparton for the purpose of BMX.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:36): I thank the minister for her response. Victorians now see that the 2022 Commonwealth Games announcement was nothing more than a vast political con by the Andrews government to hold and win seats in an election year. The Commonwealth Games chief executive Craig Phillips only a few days ago, on 30 July, stated:

You have got to resist the temptation of using the Games for micro-political imperatives ... That is what happened here. We ran into trouble by playing to local politics in the run-up to an election.

Minister, can you guarantee that no taxpayer funds from any of your departments came to polling those seats of Morwell or Shepparton?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Equality) (12:37): Again, there has been commentary made by a number of people, including in the preambles to questions that have been asked in this place and elsewhere. I do not intend to respond to that commentary. I also want to reconfirm that negotiations are continuing. Please do, however, not be under any misapprehensions about the fact that I was made the minister in December last year. I was part of the work from December last year until the cessation of the commission and my resignation from that role on the 18th. Again, this is work which is part of discussions and negotiations between the state, the CGF and the CGA, and we are continuing to deliver a record amount into those areas that you have identified, as we have done since 2014.

Ministers statements: Cherry Creek Youth Justice Centre

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:39): Last week I had the pleasure of attending Cherry Creek with the Treasurer and member for Werribee in the other place to formally open our newest youth justice precinct. Opening Cherry Creek is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to continue to improve our youth justice system and drive better outcomes for the young people across our state. Cherry Creek is a new way of doing youth justice. It puts rehabilitation and safety at the heart of the custodial experience – safety for staff, safety for young people and safety for the whole Victorian community.

The Treasurer and I welcomed the latest graduating squad, who have just completed their professional training and are getting ready to be deployed ahead of the first intake of young people later this month. Squad 4 are known for their no-nonsense attitudes and cool heads under pressure. I really enjoyed getting to meet the graduating class and listening and talking to them about what they learned from their training and why they were there. They were an articulate and thoughtful bunch who came together from all walks of life and diverse backgrounds to work in a fulfilling career in our youth justice system. Our youth justice staff do amazing work in incredibly challenging circumstances, and I would like to again thank them for their dedication and service.

Our youth justice staff do an incredible job, as I stated, but Cherry Creek could not have come to fruition if it was not for the foresight of the Treasurer himself but also my predecessors, the many youth justice ministers such as Ms Tierney in this place but also Mr Carroll, Ms Kilkenny and Ms Hutchins. They all contributed to the vision of a youth justice system that has a different approach and puts the rehabilitation of these young people first. Providing a modern youth justice facility is an essential part of the Victorian government's commitment to improving community safety and modernising our youth justice system. Cherry Creek brings together best practice and is part of our continued investment in our youth justice system. This will provide the young people in our care with the best chance to turn their lives around and be the best versions of themselves.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:41): Thank you, Mr Erdogan. You are going to get written responses for Mr Puglielli for both his substantive and supplementary to the Minister for Police in line with the standing orders.

Constituency questions

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:41): (299) My question is for the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation and relates to the Andrews Labor government's recent gambling reforms. The South-Eastern Metropolitan Region includes some of the municipalities that experience some of the greatest financial losses from poker machines. Minister, how will communities throughout the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region benefit from the recent changes announced by the government to the gambling industry? Within my electorate there are three municipalities that rank in the top eight highest losses from poker machines in Victoria. In a ranking of the highest amount spent on pokies per municipality, the City of Casey came in second, with residents having spent \$159 million in the last financial year. Money lost to pokies in Greater Dandenong was similar, with around \$140 million, and the City of Monash rounded out the top eight. These councils have been calling for action on poker machines, and I am very glad to see these reforms and policies announced. My question is: how will these reforms benefit the South-Eastern Metropolitan area?

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (12:43): (300) My question is for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, and I ask her to please advise when the Wollert rail feasibility study will be completed. In November 2019 Jacinta Allan wrote to the City of Whittlesea to say the state government would start the feasibility study into the new rail line by 2022, but it appears nothing has been done. The federal government has already committed \$250,000 for the study, and the local council wants the state government to contribute funding and complete the study. In a rapidly growing suburb, Wollert rail is an essential piece of infrastructure to enable access to public transport. Rail would save time and remove 2000 cars every hour from already congested roads. It would improve livability, connect residents to Melbourne's CBD and make it easier for staff and patients to access the Northern Hospital. Local residents want to ensure the minister does not miss the train. It is time to get on board and complete the feasibility study.

Western Metropolitan Region

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (12:44): (301) My constituency question is for the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Danny Pearson. This year we learned that WorkCover is fundamentally broken because the value of payments outstrips the premiums collected by almost \$1 billion, and yet many have been warning this Labor government about this exact catastrophe for years. Indeed in this very Council chamber on 8 June last year former Liberal MP Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips moved motion 776 calling for accountability, oversight and intervention to ensure the financial sustainability of WorkSafe due to the countless annual reports which had revealed it was heading towards bankruptcy. Last week a small manufacturing business located in my electorate, which has been operating for 15 years and provides full-time work for 11 staff, received its annual WorkCover renewal notice, which rose from \$31,800 to \$57,400 per annum. This is just one of many businesses considering laying off staff or shutting down because they have to choose between paying their own employees or paying for this government's mistakes. What will be done about this?

Southern Metropolitan Region

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:45): (302) Today I rise to ask a question for the Minister for Health Infrastructure in the other place, Minister Thomas, and in doing so I pay tribute to the announcement by the Andrews Labor government to give women's health a serious focus and the funding it deserves. We will provide almost \$58 million as part of an overall budget package worth \$153.9 million to deliver on our commitment to create 20 comprehensive women's health clinics across Victoria, with one in my electorate in Prahran at the Alfred hospital. Women and girls make up more than half of our population. Eighty per cent of women will suffer from conditions including fibroids and menopausal symptoms, yet these conditions remain undiagnosed and untreated. So my

question to Minister Thomas is: what other conditions will the women's health clinic treat in my electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region?

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:45): (303) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it concerns the failure of the Andrews Labor government to expedite works to implement safety upgrades at the intersection of the Murray Valley Highway and Labuan Road in Yarroweyah. The intersection was the scene of a catastrophic motor vehicle accident in April 2023 that claimed the lives of five people. As a result of this horrific collision I called for immediate action by the minister to make the intersection safer. The minister responded to my contribution of 2 May on 5 June, stating that:

Planning work on potential further improvements, including options recommended by Police, is underway ...

And also:

DTP will progress any short and longer-term improvements as quickly as possible ...

Nearly four months has passed since this tragic collision, and no significant work has been done to improve safety at one of the most dangerous intersections in Victoria. Will the minister ensure the immediate start of work to upgrade safety at the Labuan Road–Murray Valley Highway intersection in Yarroweyah?

Northern Victoria Region

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:47): (304) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Since the withdrawal of the government's commitment to the Commonwealth Games, constituents from regional centres that were to benefit, like Shepparton, Wangaratta and Bendigo, are reaching out to see that the previously committed funding is diverted to where it is most needed. Noting the halving of road maintenance funding in the recent state budget, is the minister advocating for some of this funding that is no longer required to be rerouted to road maintenance, where it is desperately needed?

Western Victoria Region

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (12:47): (305) My question is for the Minister for Veterans in the other place, Minister Suleyman. What is the Andrews Labor government doing to support Vietnam veterans and Vietnam veterans' RSL sub-branches in the Western Victoria Region? Friday 18 August is an important time in our nation's history, commemorating Vietnam Veterans Day, and this year marks the 50th anniversary of the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War. Our service men and women have given so much to our state and our nation. At 11 am at the Warrnambool Cemetery a lone bugle will sound the last post, honouring privates William Carroll and Graham Warburton for their service. At Camperdown Private Ian Scott will be remembered, as will Private Ralph Niblett at Cobden. I thank our RSLs for commemorating this anniversary in such a pertinent and personal way.

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:48): (306) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and concerns the condition of Wallace Street in Meredith in my electorate. This is not some country back road or track; it is the Midland Highway, used by all drivers commuting between Geelong and Ballarat. The Advance Meredith Association conducted a survey to see what they could do for residents. Fixing the roads was the overwhelming response. They are now conducting a comprehensive pothole audit and running a petition to present to the Golden Plains shire, but the Midland Highway is a VicRoads road and between Meredith CFA station and the roadhouse there is a continuous stretch with severe ripples and multiple potholes, probably verging on craters. The road was patched last year but disintegrated just one week later. B-double fuel tankers have to

drive over the ripples, with no room to avoid them. They are a serious accident waiting to happen. Minister, when will you fix it properly?

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:50): (307) My question is for the Minister for Housing. Will the minister listen to the residents of Wonthaggi's Caledonian Crescent who are concerned about the sudden influx of mental health social housing on their street? Last week the *Sentinel-Times* reported that the state Labor government had decided to suddenly create 12 government housing flats for people with significant mental health issues. The opinions of residents were not a priority, because some of these residents found out when they read about it in the local paper. Residents have raised concerns about this project being near such a small, quiet street full of young families. According to a resident, they said they recognise the importance of placing people with mental illness in the community, but rather than creating a pocket with 12 people with significant mental illnesses, it needs to be more spread out. Parents are particularly worried about the safety of their children. Minister, in order to give these vulnerable people the best chance, please consider consulting local residents first.

Western Victoria Region

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (12:51): (308) My question is to the Minister for Regional Development, and it relates to the future of the site at La Trobe Street, Ballarat, which was the proposed site of the athletes village for the Commonwealth Games. The information that I seek is very simple. Minister, what is going to happen to the site given the government has cancelled the Commonwealth Games? On Wednesday 19 July the front cover of the Ballarat *Courier* read 'Games over' and a heading on page 4 was 'Saleyards housing plan back to start.' The article quotes Wendouree's Labor MP commenting on the site, and I quote directly:

This creates an opportunity for us to really have a deep think ... about what that fantastic location could be.

Wouldn't it have been a bright idea to have this deep think about the site beforehand? Wouldn't it have been a great idea to consider the remediation of the site, perhaps decontamination, how much it might cost, what sorts of chemicals are there or levelling of the site? So please, by all means have this deep think, but remember times are ticking, so let us get moving.

Motions

Taxation

Debate resumed.

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:52): Our tax system really should do a series of things. Firstly, it should encourage opportunity. It should promote a growth agenda. It should encourage investment into our state and competitive markets. It should also, as a corollary to that, encourage digital transformation. I understand that for some people talking about tax is a little dry. However, in putting forward our discussion proposal and in launching the website with that fabulous URL of bettertaxsystem.com.au, what I have sought to do is to make the case that first and foremost when we are talking about our tax system and we are talking about cost of living and the ability to deliver cost-of-living relief to Victorians you cannot tax your way to prosperity. To do that you must grow and you must encourage investment, and that is what this entire process is about. So I would encourage anybody listening to go to that website and to consider making a submission.

I know that my colleagues in the other place Mr Rowswell and Ms Wilson have been out and about, in particular in regional areas, over the period since this paper was launched, and as a result of discussions with local communities we already have a very significant number of submissions. Submissions close on 31 October in the afternoon. There is a period of time now when businesses and individuals – I know some schools are interested – can submit their ideas. We want to make sure that as we are formulating our plans we are really, really listening.

Of course we have already made a series of commitments. We have a firm position when it comes to tax. Victorians know, I think, that should they elect a Liberal–Nationals government in October 2026, of course we will have less tax than under this Labor government. At the last election we went forward with a clear plan to scrap a whole series of taxes. Already we have said that whilst we would love to be in a position to ditch this government's land tax increases, their rent tax and their jobs tax from the last budget, because of the absolutely parlous state of our budget, because of the fact that Victoria has more debt than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined, we are not in a position yet to make those commitments. We can commit to scrapping the schools tax of course, but as we make those decisions and as we formulate our plans we really, really want to hear from families who are being impacted by the huge and growing tax burden here in Victoria; from businesses – small, medium and large – that are being impacted by the growing tax burden here in Victoria; and also from community groups. If we do that, then we will be in the very best position to put forward a thoroughgoing tax reform agenda at the next election – a growth agenda, an agenda that will see cost-of-living relief delivered to families, which is something that has not happened hitherto. I commend the motion to the house.

Sitting suspended 12:55 pm until 2:06 pm.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:06): I rise today to set the record straight. The Andrews Labor government is working hard to address the cost-of-living crisis, and the Andrews Labor government has a track record of cutting your taxes. But first, we all know how hard it has been for the last couple of months – in fact the last year. The Andrews Labor government will always look out for Victorians no matter how tough it gets.

It only takes a brief look at the policies that we have delivered to understand that at times of financial insecurity the Andrews Labor government has your back. Take, for example, one of the biggest contributors to stress on the household bills: your energy bill. It is no secret that since the Ukraine war energy prices across the world have been a real concern for everybody. The Andrews Labor government would never stand to let a single Victorian go through the winter not knowing whether they would be able to pay their electricity or gas bills, which is exactly why last year and this year we launched the \$250 power saving bonus. The power saving bonus is a one-time \$250 payment from the government for Victorians to have extra cash to put towards their power bill. This was received well both in the 2022 round and the 2023 round.

This is not the only Labor government energy reform that is improving the lives of Victorians as we face unprecedented costs of living. Minister D'Ambrosio has done fantastic work in reforming the space around Victorian energy not just for the benefit of Victorians but also to enact real action on climate change. Cost of living is not the only crisis we are facing now. With the ever-present threat of climate change, real action needs to be done, and only the Andrews Labor government can do this whilst also helping ordinary Victorians with their budget. Victoria has the most ambitious emissions reduction targets, and this is in large part thanks to the return of the SEC.

Families are particularly affected when it comes to the household costs, so the Andrews Labor government knew that something needed to be done to address this, which is how we arrived at the free kinder program. Free kinder is an important piece of our approach to the cost-of-living crisis and does not just help with the family budget.

Despite what the motion says, we are acting. Here is a quick list of the initiatives: electricity discounts and winter gas discounts for eligible concession card holders; extending the solar homes and batteries programs into 2022–23 with 64,000 solar rebates and 1700 battery rebates available; the Victorian default offer, which in 2023–24 will still be cheaper than the price of the standing offers prior to the VDO's introduction in 2019; free L-plate and P-plate licences and online testing; discounted driver licence renewal for safe drivers; car registration discounts for eligible concession card holders; short-term vehicle registration; free TAFE to give Victorians more training and new careers; making nursing and midwifery free, covering students' HECS; a cap of one residential rate rise per 12 months; capped

council rates; free zoo visits and Melbourne Museum entry for kids under 16; a wide range of discounts, concessions, entry and travel vouchers for seniors; discounted student travel and a conveyance allowance for all rural students; free travel and accommodation subsidies for rural Victorians travelling long distances to see health specialists; and discounted and free treatment through Dental Health Services Victoria. And of course do not forget the various tax breaks and supports provided to first home buyers that we have discussed earlier.

This side of the chamber talks a lot about schools because we support them. We support our children's education. For families with slightly older children there is the school breakfast program. Without the school breakfast program many schoolchildren could well face the prospect of having to start the day on an empty stomach. This has serious negative health implications, and the Andrews Labor government understands that it must be avoided. This year a further \$69.5 million was delivered to keep the program running with Foodbank Victoria. The delivery has even expanded by 2.4 million meals. With the Andrews Labor government in charge, you can always rest assured that we will support education wherever and however we can. \$32.9 million has been put towards the affordable school uniforms program, which means disadvantaged families can save on essential school items – not just uniforms but also textbooks and stationery.

Finally, the Andrews Labor government has cut or abolished taxes and fees 63 times since coming into government in 2014. This includes increasing the payroll tax free threshold four times since coming into government so fewer small to medium-sized businesses pay any payroll tax, and with our most recent budget we have committed to increasing it twice more, lifting it to \$1 million so that 6000 businesses – about 15 per cent of payroll tax paying businesses – will no longer pay a cent of payroll tax. Despite what some may say, we cut the regional payroll tax rate to 1.2125 per cent, just one-quarter of the metropolitan rate – the lowest in the nation. Regional unemployment is at historical lows, and it is thanks to policies like this that have got us there. That is why election after election, regional Victorians are increasingly turning to Labor as their vote of choice. From Bendigo to Ballarat and Geelong to eastern Victoria, only Victorian Labor is delivering for them. I know, as I grew up in regional Victoria.

I will not shy away from it, and I have said it before: we need to pay taxes to build things, to do things, to do what matters. We on this side of the chamber believe in a government that plays a role in supporting the community and creates jobs – and for the past few years we have shown that more than ever – and a government that uses those tax dollars wisely to build projects for the future. Just yesterday I spoke about Hawthorn West Primary School and the transformational infrastructure projects we are delivering for the community. Camberwell Primary School is getting the support that it deserves and needs. Think about the \$15.5 million for free period products in all Victorian government schools, the \$2.9 million Glasses for Kids program, the \$32 million for the State Schools' Relief program to continue to deliver the affordable school uniforms program, the \$3.815 million for books and prep bags and the \$168.724 million over four years and \$44.85 million ongoing for the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund. These are real cost-of-living relief measures that only this side of the chamber is delivering.

This morning I spoke about the Bills Street project, also in the community of Hawthorn. This will deliver affordable housing for my community and real cost-of-living relief for those that need it, because only Labor believes in properly supporting social and affordable housing. The new Union station is another success of the Level Crossing Removal Authority, which is delivering real results for Victoria. I want to highlight these last two projects, which need workers to deliver them, with construction workers working around the clock. We need to train them up, and that is why we delivered free TAFE – to break down barriers. Government schools are being funded to provide materials to students so that they can properly access the VET programs needed to learn the jobs of the future. Think about timber, screws, plasterboard and PVC pipes for certificates in building, construction and plumbing; workbooks, cabling, plugs, switches, solder, wire and fuses for certificates in digital media and technologies; disposable PPE, such as gloves, masks, gowns and booties, for

certificates in health; food and beverage ingredients, disposable gloves, aprons, hairnets and disposable food containers for certificates in hospitality; products such as brow and lash tints, skincare products, hair products, nail products, make-up pads, cotton buds and bedsheet rolls for certificates in hair and beauty; and fabric, threads, patterns, calico, beads and specialist drawing paper, inks and art supplies for certificates in creative industries. The funding boost removes barriers for young Victorians wanting to undertake VET studies by reducing out-of-pocket expenses for families.

It delivers real cost-of-living relief for families while also having the benefit of training up the workforce of the future. The runs are on the board, and I know that my community of Hawthorn and all my community in Southern Metro get that it is only due to Labor that they are seeing these results and that it is only due to Labor that we have created almost 490,000 jobs since September 2020, surpassing an already ambitious jobs target of 400,000 jobs. From power to education, from transport to making it easier, we are delivering policy after policy to ensure that as we move through this difficult era Victorians do not have to choose between essentials. That is my contribution.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (14:15): I am very pleased to rise to put my name in association with Dr Bach's motion 140 on the notice paper today, and indeed the motion goes to two very real, live and salient issues: the soaring cost of living and the pressures on Victorian families and businesses, and then some of the pain that our people are feeling with the burden of being the highest taxed state in the nation and Victorians being now the recipients of 50 new or increased taxes under the Andrews government's last 8½ years of punishment.

I thought I would take the cost-of-living pressures first and deal with those, because certainly they are some of the key issues that my office staff are dealing with on a daily basis. I do feel for our electorate office staff and all of those people who are on the front line of services or discussions or receipt of information when people come in in a very distressed state. I know there are many people doing wonderful work on that front line. People who come into an electorate office do not actually care whether you are council, whether you are state or whether you are federal when they come in with a problem. Only recently my staff dealt with a very real issue of a gentleman who was on serious medication and could not afford to go and get his medication from the pharmacy. He could not afford to buy food, and thankfully a local neighbourhood house gave him a gift voucher, and also their larder was open.

These are the very real pressures – essential items. Obtaining food for the table and prescription medicine to help them sustain themselves – these are the very real pressures that people are under. Indeed the Australian Bureau of Statistics consumer price index only recently put out some information that whilst we have got the official inflation rate of 6 per cent, many of those normal cost items have climbed by two to three times as much. Let us look at some of those cost items that people are having to wear the burden of. Rents in Victoria have soared by 30 per cent in the last 2½ years. These are the implications and the downflow effects of some of the Labor Party's taxes that we see, some of that rent tax, the squeezing of availability of housing stock. This has an impact. If you are going to put up taxes on people, and we know from the information we receive about home owners and landlords that the overwhelming majority, over 70 per cent, of properties for rental are mum-and-dad owners or are one-person property owners. So it is not unreasonable to expect that they are going to be suffering at the moment. They are going to be suffering, and they will have to put up those rental prices – 30 per cent since 2020 we have seen.

That is coupled with these increased price rises in everyday items, such as general basic foods, cheese and milk. Now, I am a dairy farmer's daughter and I will always support people to buy cheese and milk, and our hardworking farmers produce that. These are essential items that have increased in price at the checkout. Bread has gone up. Ice cream is another one that has gone up, by 14 per cent; maybe that is not essential, but it is in many people's normal daily lives. Some of these basic costs are hurting people.

We see that with inflation, as I have said, the spending on average has gone up by over \$1500 on groceries from one year to the next. That, over the average weekly spend, is certainly a burden. Power prices: my goodness, this government has been the overseer of the most, we will say, radical change – but we will also say cost impost – back onto the family. They have risen 25 per cent in the new default offer prices from the Australian Energy Regulator that come into effect very soon. The average cost increase on a home – this is not average cost, but average cost increase – is around that \$400 mark per year. For small businesses it is up and over \$800. Our small businesses, we know, are vast employers in our rural and regional towns and our city centres. They wear the burden of these input costs.

We do need, certainly, sensible policy. We see that the government has put a ridiculous policy out only recently about gas, and the impact is that no new homes in Victoria will have gas connections. You are removing people's right to choice. You are also removing competition in terms of that supply. We know that gas is very important. It is very important in the Otways; it is very important in my Gippsland region. We have been the powerhouse of gas production over many years. Natural gas supply is important for heating our homes and cooking our food, and it is an absolute indictment that this government has decided to shut that down, taking away rights and a sensible form of heating and cooking. We also see that car registrations have gone up. Day by day we see the government's failed policies nibbling way at family purses and the thread of normal life in our families.

If we turn to taxes, I heard my colleague Dr Bach, very importantly I think, identify the new initiative from the Liberals and the Nationals, this discussion paper on taxes. We have a Premier who, before he came to be the Premier at the end of 2014, stared down the barrel of the camera and said, 'No new taxes'. Well, we have got 50 new or increased taxes on the way. The South Australian Treasurer has said:

If you are a large corporate employer, especially in these days when even people in senior positions perform remotely, the choice should be obvious. Why would you choose a high-tax, high-cost location like Victoria ...

No-one likes talking our state down, but this is the reality that is perceived not only interstate but certainly over the world. It is round the world, and I note Ms Crozier spoke about the debacle today in terms of the Commonwealth Games. I spoke on that very important select inquiry, but she read into *Hansard* the different countries across the world that thought that that was a debacle and the reporting. Our reputation has been trashed.

This better tax system – bettertaxsystem.com.au – is certainly a position, a discussion paper, to get feedback from all of the very valuable tax providers in our fair state. We see that people in regional Victoria again produce food and fibre for our tables and for domestic, interstate and international markets. How are these increased taxes burdening them, and how is that impacting on their ability to employ people locally?

We have certainly seen one of the most disastrous decisions from this state government, and I heard a former member talk about the cost of, I think it was, timber and various building supplies. The government shutting down the native timber industry is only going to absolutely make it critically challenging to builders – for new homes, for construction and for renovations – to be able to fund that hardwood timber, and it is going to come in from overseas. They talk about free TAFE, and they talk about industry and timber, I heard. Well, you have just shut down a viable, sustainable native hardwood timber industry. That is going to have an impost, again, on these amazing people in our amazing country towns and cities that value-add. It is going to have an impost on bottom lines. I really welcome this discussion about our tax system and our discussion paper, and I suggest everybody can be involved.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (14:26): This government has a proud record of leveraging taxes to support the most vulnerable Victorians at the same time as promoting key elements of the Victorian economy in this state. This government's taxation regime is carefully calibrated to support equity for vulnerable Victorians, stimulate the Victorian economy and fund the aspirations of Victorian communities.

I firstly want to comment on the opposition's tax discussion paper. This motion reads more like an exercise in fishing for praise than a comprehensive review of tax. In fact the discussion paper reminds me a little bit of an exam question – I did read it. True to form, the opposition present what they call engagement with the community on ways to reform 'the tax system', then proceed to tell Victorians what changes they believe need to be made to the tax system. Despite what the opposition allege in their discussion paper, Victoria's economy is strong. The *Deloitte Access Economics Business Outlook* of 20 July 2023 forecast that Victoria's economic growth will surpass the other states over the next two years.

Since the Andrews Labor government formed government there have been 63 occasions when we have cut or abolished taxes altogether while continuing to foster new jobs and bring Victoria out of the financial hit that was the COVID-19 pandemic. To reinforce this point, ABS labour force data shows almost 490,000 Victorians have secured work since September 2020, more than any other state in both absolute and per capita terms. Victoria's unemployment rate remains at a historically low 3.7 per cent, a full 3 percentage points below the 6.7 per cent rate left behind by the former do-nothing coalition government.

I want to reinforce some of the tax reforms that the Andrews Labor government have introduced in recent times, the first being payroll tax from the COVID debt levy. This levy is temporary, targeted and responsible. The payroll component of the levy will focus on large businesses with national payrolls above \$10 million – only about 5 per cent of businesses in total. The Parliamentary Budget Office has reported that using the latest ABS data on overall tax Victoria remains the second-lowest revenue state in the nation. The PBO report is clear that Victoria is expected to have only the third-highest payroll tax revenue per person of any state, behind Western Australia and New South Wales, which is expected to remain unchanged in 2025–26. In this year's budget the government committed to increasing the payroll tax free threshold to \$900,000 and then \$1 million, which will mean 6000 businesses will no longer pay any payroll tax and around 60 per cent of businesses will pay less payroll tax. Even more, the government has cut the rate of payroll tax payable by regional businesses to one-quarter of that paid in metropolitan Melbourne, which is benefiting 5500 businesses every week.

Despite opposition attacks on property taxes, this government's land tax levy is temporary. The average increase in land tax from the temporary levy will be \$1300 on a land valuation of \$650,000, which equates to a holiday or an investment home worth \$1.3 million. It equates to about \$3.50 a day on average and only applies to Victorians who own a second property. It is a reasonable contribution to come from an area where many landlords have seen the value of their properties rise by more than 80 per cent in the last 10 years.

Again, the PBO reports that from this financial year onwards forecasts for total property tax revenue are broadly similar in Victoria and New South Wales. They also report that these figures are narrowed down to one tax type and do not show the whole picture, as Australian states have structurally different economies and different levels of reliance on revenue sources. Based on this, using the ABS data and overall tax, Victoria remains the second-lowest revenue state in the nation. All existing exemptions to land tax apply and, most importantly, the family home is not subject to tax.

On cost of living, this government has committed to providing cost-of-living support to every Victorian struggling to get by. The Andrews Labor government has a range of initiatives currently underway, as well as more in the works – initiatives that are making a real difference to Victorian people. In my electorate free kinder for three- and four-year-olds is receiving consistently positive feedback, saving up to \$2500 per child each year. This is helping families with children to support their education and achieve the best outcomes. The uptake of the \$250 power saving bonus has been significant, and my team have enjoyed getting around the electorate and helping people access their bonus. Free TAFE is making a tangible difference to so many people's career options, and in the south-west, Warrnambool and the South West TAFE experienced an increase of 800 students in the first year that free TAFE was introduced. That is a real thing; that is not talking about free TAFE, that is

free TAFE actually changing people's lives and careers. And it is impossible to take the train from Warrnambool to Melbourne without hearing comments about how the capped V/Line fares have opened access to opportunities for outer regional Victorians.

Matthew Bach interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Dr Bach! Ms Ermacora, without assistance.

Jacinta ERMACORA: This government is making available electricity discounts and winter gas discounts for eligible concession card holders and extending the solar homes and batteries program into 2022–23, with 64,000 solar rebates and 1700 battery rebates available.

This government is helping with school costs and fees: free school breakfasts and free pads and tampons in government schools help many families. Initiatives such as the Get Active Kids vouchers for up to \$200 help all kids get involved in sport and recreation. The cost of sporting registration or a pair of new sports shoes can make such a difference to a kid getting involved. Discounted student travel and conveyance allowance for rural students and travel accommodation subsidies for rural Victorians travelling a long distance to see health specialists can also be life-changing. Other budget-friendly initiatives include free L-plate and P-plate licences, online testing, discounted drivers licence renewal for safe drivers and short-term vehicle registration and car registration discounts. The list goes on.

In the time left to me I would like to comment on the way the Andrews Labor government is proactively putting our taxes to good work across our communities. In this year's budget we received in south-western Lowan a number of initiatives that are fantastic and only available as a result of the Andrews Labor government's reasonable and responsible tax regime. That includes the Panmure Football Club, Portland Gymnastics Club, a new tech school in Warrnambool, the Warrnambool Base Hospital receiving additional funding for endometriosis surgeries, the Budj Bim cultural landscape and ranges, and also a new PET scanner for the Warrnambool hospital, which was received very positively. In Lowan, the rural outreach will also receive \$250,000, and I will finish there.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:36): I rise today to address the motion, which is about a pressing concern that affects every individual and family in Victoria: the soaring cost of living. I want to specifically shed light on the issue. First of all, let me read out again what we have perhaps moved away from with some of the other speakers – what the actual motion that Dr Bach has brought to the house is all about. Dr Bach moved:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

(a) Victorians are paying \$5638 per person –

this is just averaged out –

in tax annually under the Andrews Labor government, higher than any other state in Australia ...

May I just add that when we are hearing all these speeches about an extra \$250 bonus for electricity or \$2000 for kindergarten, how does that work out when the average taxpayer is still paying so much more than every other person in every other state in Australia? It means nothing. It goes on:

(b) the Andrews Labor government has raised taxes on Victorians 49 times since its election in 2014 ...

So they are either new taxes or they have raised the taxes. And:

(c) the Andrews Labor government has failed to act despite soaring cost-of-living pressures on Victorian families ...

In fact what it has done is perhaps brought in some things that are going to make it much worse for every Victorian. Lastly, that this house:

- (2) congratulates the opposition on the release of its discussion paper *Making Victoria's Tax System Work: Reducing Cost Pressures for Families, Community Groups and Business*.

Might I say, it is a mighty fine discussion paper. One of the things highlighted in this discussion paper of course is some of the new taxes, but let me go through some of the old taxes that are in here under the Andrews Labor government. We had an increased stamp duty on new cars in 2017–18. As if that is not more difficult for everybody. Let us look at this: we had an increased fire services property levy, and we have had it not once, not twice but at least three times since the Andrews government has been in. Now, this is a really interesting one: expanded land tax on gender-exclusive clubs. I am sorry, I do not really get it. When we are trying to be very permissive of people to have whatever gender they choose, then we should also be celebrating that by not actually taxing people based on their gender.

Let us have a look at this one – this one I can speak on: the increase to the WorkCover average premium rate. We know that they promised they were going to bring in a 42 per cent increase on premiums to WorkCover in this financial year, but in fact we know that because of an inequitable system this government has been operating through WorkSafe, some people are actually paying significantly more than the 42 per cent. In fact that all comes about because they are industry rated. Basically, you might have the safest workplace and you may never have made a claim on WorkCover in your business, but if somebody that is either a competitor or classified in the same industry actually makes a claim, that impacts your business that has never made a claim. So your premiums can go through the roof, beyond that 42 per cent, because your industry classification allows that to happen. How is that an equitable system? I am sorry, it simply is not, and that is something that shows that we do need to make changes to the tax system in this state.

Let us talk about housing. Over the past five years housing prices in Victoria have risen by a staggering 40 per cent, outpacing income growth and leaving many families struggling to find affordable housing. Home ownership has become a distant dream for numerous hardworking individuals, particularly our young Australians. The median house price in Victoria has increased steadily over the past decade, reaching approximately \$750,000 as of 2021. Rental affordability has become increasingly difficult, with the median weekly rent for a house in Melbourne reaching around \$450 to \$500 a week.

In utilities, electricity and gas prices have risen by an average of 12 per cent in the last two years alone, leaving many families facing difficult decisions about heating, cooling and basic energy consumption. In fact this has been a problem for a long time, and now, with the government trying to take away gas as an option for Victorians, we are going to see increases again.

Education: the cost of education both in terms of school fees and educational resources has increased by 25 per cent over the last decade. This puts a tremendous financial strain on parents and students aspiring to a quality education. The average cost of full-time non-tertiary schooling for a child in Victoria is estimated to be between \$6000 and \$12,000 per year, and the tertiary education costs have been increasing, with the average annual tuition fee for undergraduate courses ranging from \$7000 to \$14,000 – that is from StudyAssist if you want to go and look that one up.

Do not forget the school tax, charging random schools – no particular information on why certain schools are exempt and others are not – for a payroll tax. If they are not already struggling with the increases to WorkCover premiums, now they have the addition of a schools tax. Schools tax, the payroll tax – and so who is going to be paying for that but your average Victorian? Your average Victorian is going to be paying for that, the ones that choose, because the government has not yet built all of the schools that it needed to build. In the south-east, for example, they are going to –

Michael Galea interjected.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Sorry, I visit the schools all the time.

Michael Galea interjected.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: I am not going to do that now for you. But they have to actually consider how this is going to impact the average Victorian who is paying for those independent schools because they want the choice and because they want a decent education.

Matthew Bach interjected.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Health care and medical expenses have escalated significantly, with private health insurance premiums increasing by 27 per cent in the last five years – 27 per cent. And the rising cost of health care can be crippling for those in need of medical attention and medication. Out-of-pocket medical expenses have been on the rise with the average cost for a single visit to a GP –

Michael Galea: On a point of order, Deputy President, I would like to ask that Dr Bach withdraw his very rude and very inappropriate comment about the Minister for Education.

Matthew Bach: I am happy to withdraw. I wonder if it would be parliamentary to perhaps say something like that she has instead –

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: No, sorry. Just withdraw, thank you.

Matthew Bach: I withdraw.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Out-of-pocket medical expenses have been on the rise, with the average cost of a single visit to a GP being approximately \$80 to \$100.

Transport: public transport fares have seen a sharp rise, impacting the daily commute of millions of Victorians. Additionally, car ownership and maintenance costs have also surged, making it harder for individuals to travel and access job opportunities. The cost of public transportation has risen steadily, with a single-zone Myki fare in Melbourne reaching around \$4.50 to \$5. The average weekly fuel price in Victoria as of 2021 was approximately \$1.40 per litre. Now, I can say I have paid significantly more than that. The last time I put petrol in my car it was closer to the \$2 mark.

I know that my worthy colleague mentioned the timber industry closing. Well, of course if you close the timber industry, we are going to have to pay more for our timber because we will have to import it into Victoria, and there are going to be a whole lot of additional costs that are going to actually come into closing down this industry.

The impact of these rising costs is felt all across Victoria, on all demographics, from struggling families to retirees on fixed incomes. It is our duty as lawmakers to address these challenges and take meaningful action to alleviate the financial burden on our citizens. The cost-of-living crisis in Victoria is a matter of utmost urgency, and it requires our immediate attention. By implementing targeted policies and working collaboratively we can alleviate the financial strain on our citizens, ensure a better future for all Victorians and uphold the values that make our state a great place to live and thrive – or at least it was. By enacting these measures we can make a positive impact on the lives of our constituents and create a more equitable and prosperous future for all Victorians.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (14:46): Thank you, Dr Bach, for providing this opportunity to speak to this motion, and I am very passionate about doing so because I am very passionate about our economy. I see our economy much like the way I see our environment and our climate: we have got to maintain and manage it responsibly and sustainably. Sustainability is the key. And when we talk about our economy – and there is so much talk here about taxation – we have got to ask the question: why? Why are we doing this? Why do we have a taxation system? I am going to take my time, and I am going to go through it and all the wonderful things we do with it and ask some questions that I am sure I will not get any responses to about what those in opposition think they would like to see occur with the system.

Part of the 'why' is a fair and just system that enables us as a government to do the things to help our community, to help our state and to support that economy to keep it strong and to keep it sustainable so that we continue to see Victoria growing, thriving and prospering. I believe it is the investment that has been made in recent years – we are now onto our third term, so the last nine years – in infrastructure around this state and in our people and in our students, who have become our workers, that drives this economy that is doing so much and that competes on the world stage in so many different areas. People come from all over the world to join this state because they see the potential of the state and they see the opportunity, and opportunity is absolutely key. When we provide opportunity to people, we get the best out of people. We get the best out of their families. We get the best out of their community. And together we get the best out of each other as a state.

Ann-Marie Hermans interjected.

Tom McINTOSH: I do not think I will take that up, but –

Ingrid Stitt: On a point of order, Deputy President, I just think that Mrs Hermans was afforded the respect, in relative silence, of her contribution being heard by the chamber, so I would appreciate it if she could do the same for Mr McIntosh.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Thank you. Mr McIntosh to continue without assistance.

Tom McINTOSH: Obviously around the world we are seeing inflation, so we have to be very mindful of where we make our investments. I believe this government is investing in the places that make the biggest difference to our people and, as I said before, set this generation up to be as prosperous and successful as it can possibly be. When we look at health – coming back to that key point of sustainability – our health individually, as communities and as a state is absolutely important, and it actually makes really good economic sense. When we make smart decisions about health, when we invest in our health system, when we invest in the workers in our health system and when we invest in education around personal and community health, we are setting the next generation up for success.

Now, housing – obviously in Victoria, around Australia and around the world there are great challenges with housing, and that is why this government is stepping up to the challenges, because the challenges are real. We are aware of them, we are alive to them and we are prepared to take those challenges front-on and ensure that we have a sustainable, affordable level of housing for Victorians going forward.

I touched before on education and training. I just want to speak briefly to early education. The only thing I wish I had more of is the opportunity to get up and speak about early education. I have had the opportunity to go out to and meet with a number of centres and, fortunately, announce record levels of investment. I believe there is something like \$1.8 billion in this budget alone for new centres around Eastern Victoria, where families are going to have the opportunity to send their kids to three- and four-year-old kinder. In Yarram, Foster, Sale – all over the place – and the Mornington Peninsula this government is investing in the very, very start of the next generation. We are setting them up. There are multimillion-dollar investments in our primary schools, our high schools and of course something I am very passionate about, TAFE – free TAFE. We have got this absolute pipeline of support for our youngest Victorians to go from their early education all the way through until they enter the workforce. This is when jobs become critical, and that is something that this government has done: it has ensured there are the jobs for Victorians to support our families, our communities, this state and this economy.

We can see that we are rebuilding. We had a pandemic. It was very, very difficult. It was difficult on us and on the economy, and the steps we have put in place to build back are well underway. We had an incredible bounce back in employment. But it is not just employment for employment's sake, it is good-quality jobs that families can be built around, that communities can be built around and that this state can be built around. I am very proud that we are looking at the complete picture of investing in our people, ensuring we have the right dynamics for our jobs and then connecting those people, those businesses and this community through our infrastructure.

Obviously, our investment in public infrastructure and public transport has been second to none, and the results of that are clear to Victorians no matter where they go. That is the fundamental basis of our community, and then it is our services that we wrap around that that make sure we are caring for, we are thinking about and we are mindful of our most vulnerable and our most disadvantaged. This government has been out on the front foot on family violence and has been out on the front foot on mental health. We are ensuring not only that we are supporting people in difficult times but that we are removing people from these traumatic situations. Again, this investment, this policy implementation, is setting the next generation up for more and more success.

I will just find my notes. I will not be reading from notes; I just have a few small notes that I have made. I do have some questions. Dr Bach a few hours ago in this place – I made a note of it – talked about disingenuousness. I am not saying Dr Bach is disingenuous, because actually I have got a great deal of respect for Dr Bach. However, some of the people putting pen to paper for his speaking notes could be; I do not know. They talk about taxes – taxes, taxes, taxes. I do not know whether they are saying ‘axe’ or ‘tax’ or what is being said. But a number of these taxes have actually been supported by the opposition, like the point-of-consumption tax on wagering, bringing us in line with states all around Australia. I know you will have heard this before, but the foreign landowners tax has been mentioned six times. I think most Victorians would be quite happy to hear about this tax and in fact would be completely supportive, as I believe they were at the recent state election.

Then we could talk about the mental health payroll tax surcharge. The Nationals have said they support every recommendation from the royal commission. Does that include the mental health levy? I do not know, but if there are taxes that are supported by the opposition and those around them, I think it is quite unfair and perhaps even worse to be talking about all the taxes. I will not even go to the number of taxes that have been removed and the number of taxes that are supporting small businesses, including regional Victorian businesses, which I am passionate about supporting, and I am glad we are.

I want to thank Dr Bach for this opportunity, because what this government has done and is continuing to do is set Victoria up for economic success, not just for this generation but for generations of Victorians to come, so that not only are we proud, thriving Victorians but so too will be our children.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:56): I also rise to speak on this motion, and I likewise thank the good Dr Bach for providing us with the opportunity to speak on a motion that is almost as flawed as it is self-congratulatory. Nevertheless I do have to start by saying the cost of living is a genuine and serious issue that many constituents are facing. I know from conversations that I have had over the past several years and past several months that it continues to be a big issue. As other speakers have already gone into, there are a wide range of factors – local, domestic and international – that have all played into that.

It is one thing to stand up and self-aggrandise on some of these perhaps rubbery figures that have been quoted in this motion, but it is quite another thing to actually get on with the job of doing something and actually addressing the issue. It is important for us to note as well that when it comes to the cost of living this is a government that gets on with addressing the issue, making the changes and working every day in different portfolios, from education to energy, to Treasury and transport and others as well, to make things better for Victorians.

A lot has been discussed about tax cuts and there have been a lot of assumptions that some of the minor tax changes in this budget have already caused cost-of-living pressures, even if they have not even come in yet. The road user charge for electric vehicles, the modest increase to 2.8 cents per kilometre, has apparently been cited as driving this change, when it has only just come in. I do not know how many people in my region, the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region, are buying these \$200,000 Tesla Model Xs that are coming out. It is very important that we have these new technologies and new cars, and it is appropriate that there is appropriate road user charging for that as well. We currently have fuel excises that fund our roads, and it is just completely appropriate as we adapt to and

make these changes that we have a fair and reasonable road charging scheme that means everyone is paying a modest fair share that is helping everyone to benefit – individuals, residents, businesses – from improved road and transport networks.

There are a number of fiscally measured and responsible measures that have been included in this year's state budget. Along with other members and also along with you, Acting President McArthur, I had the privilege of attending several weeks of Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings in the last couple of months and looking through the budget in forensic detail. So I am sure you too, Acting President, are all too aware of the vast number of cost-of-living measures that are in this year's state budget.

For one, let us look at payroll tax. Much has been said about payroll tax today. We have already moved to cut payroll tax impositions on small businesses. I think my colleague Mr Berger also mentioned there have already been four lifts in that threshold, but from 1 July next year the payroll tax free threshold will be lifted from \$700,000 to \$900,000. That measure means that there will be 4200 fewer businesses paying the tax.

Matthew Bach interjected.

Michael GALEA: Dr Bach might like to say 'Rubbish', but we have done it four times before. From 1 July 2024 there will be a \$200,000 increase in the threshold. On top of these businesses that will not be paying this payroll tax thanks to the expansion of this threshold, an additional 22,000 businesses will pay a reduced amount, saving up to \$9700 per year each. The payroll tax free threshold will be lifted again, for a sixth time –

Matthew Bach: Talk about self-aggrandising; talk about self-congratulatory.

Michael GALEA: never – to \$1 million from 1 July 2025, meaning a further 1500 businesses will become exempt. This is not about self-aggrandisement, Dr Bach, as you might like to think. This is about actually getting things done that make a difference, make a positive difference, to Victorian taxpayers and to Victorian businesses. You might not like to hear that, but this is another example of getting things done to make things better. Thanks to these measures introduced by the Andrews Labor government in this year's state budget, 15 per cent of businesses that currently pay payroll tax will no longer pay a cent of that payroll tax, and that amounts to 6000 businesses across Victoria in the city, in the suburbs, in my region and in regional Victoria as well. Lower payroll tax for hardworking small businesses will mean many will have that tax demand reduced to zero.

There are a number of other measures in this budget as well, including for our tradies, with the new trade apprenticeship registration discount scheme introduced by this government earlier in its term. Apprentices who need their car for work are already entitled to a 50 per cent discount on their vehicle's rego fee. Around 12,000 apprentices already take up that offer, and this year we are putting even more money back into the pockets of our apprentice tradies as we have doubled this discount, which means free registration for those eligible apprentices. It is absolutely fantastic to help reduce the cost-of-living pressures for these Victorians and for drivers overall. We have already made rego permits more flexible by introducing short-term payments on registration, allowing families who have struggled to make those high yearly charges to spread it over the course of the year as well.

I could go into great, great detail on all the many cost-of-living measures that we have implemented, which is not even to mention the \$250 power saving bonus, which many, many on this side of the house have had great feedback about from the community and I believe, Dr Bach, you yourself got good feedback on when you advertised the Andrews Labor government's power saving bonus program to your constituents as well, which is fantastic to see.

We have also capped regional fares to the metro fare rate, which has seen huge benefits for regional Victoria. There is \$50 million to help more Victorian families access public fertility, with up to

3500 treatment cycles funded each year, and \$42 million to install 100 neighbourhood batteries across the state.

I could go on and on and on and on, but I am mindful of time, so let us just say: what is the alternative? What is the Liberal vision? What would a Liberal budget actually do? How are you going to deliver all these things that you say you will do and not cut? How would you do this without cutting back on TAFE, on hospitals, on ambulances? This is a government that has invested comprehensively in our schools, in our hospitals, in our transport networks and in our infrastructure, and what do we get from the opposition – we do not know. It is a nice plan; it is a nice document – it is a vision, apparently. It is all visions at the moment, I think, for them. But what is the answer? We still do not know. And yet they say, ‘When we were in office things were better.’ Well, I can count several new schools that are being built in just one of the seats in my region right now, in the state seat of Berwick. I know Dr Bach likes to say that we are not investing in Liberal seats with education, but the number of schools in the Berwick electorate alone probably, I would wager, exceeds the number of government schools built by your government last time you were in office in the entire state. So I really do not know what the Liberal plan is other than to say ‘Cut, cut, cut’. With that I will conclude by saying I do not support this motion, though I am very much grateful to the good doctor for allowing me the chance to speak on it, and I will yield the rest of my time.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:04): I also rise to speak against motion 140 in Dr Bach’s name. I am very pleased to have been able to be in the chamber and listen to the excellent contributions of my colleague Mr Galea and other speakers on the government benches in regard to this motion. I have had the benefit of hearing Dr Bach speak, and I am going to also talk about some of our amazing cost-of-living measures that we are going to. But I did take the time to carefully consider this motion that Dr Bach has put forward, and I must take issue with (1)(a). It says:

Victorians are paying \$5638 per person in tax annually under the Andrews Labor government, higher than any other state in Australia ...

I thought, ‘Hmm, what a curious thing to say. I must research this and find out where in fact Dr Bach has got his research from.’ As I went into researching it, I did see that the Liberal Party put out a press release in fact about this on 2 June, quoting the Parliamentary Budget Office figures. I thought, ‘I’d be interested to actually go in and have a look at these figures to see whether they’re accurate,’ and – surprise, surprise – it will not come as a surprise to anyone in this chamber that they are not actually accurate. There is also a story behind what they say about us being the highest taxing government. If you read the Parliamentary Budget Office report, it actually has a caveat there. Let me just read it. This is from the Liberal Party’s own press release, from Brad Rowsell, which says a report has found, ‘Victorians are paying \$5074 per person in taxes.’ That is significantly less than what Dr Bach has quoted in his motion. Maybe they thought, ‘We’ll just round it up to \$5600-odd just for effect.’ But even by their own admission and their own press release, that is not the case.

I thought, ‘Well, I’d like to go further and actually have a look at the source document that they are quoting from.’ They failed at the first hurdle there. They did not even get that right in their press release. Then we go to the next bit of information from when I conducted my analysis of this. I do like a bit of research, as you can tell. I like to make sure that the facts and figures over there are actually correct. As you can tell, they are never correct, because they never let the facts get in the way of a bad story, which is what they want to tell over there. I turned to the Parliamentary Budget Office’s report. It goes on and it talks about different figures and all the rest of it, and then it says:

Limitations

Victoria, Western Australia, and Tasmania have released 2023–24 budgets, while the other states have not. This means that not all states have published forecasts for 2026–27, which limits our analysis in that year. This also limits the comparison of 2022–23 figures, as some states have more updated estimates based on actual tax collected earlier in the year.

We prepared this advice on 4 June 2023.

So, colleagues in this chamber, as you can see, you should never let the facts get in the way of a terrible story and a terrible attempt to try and besmirch this government and say that we are the highest taxing government, especially when you want to rely on a document that you have only selectively quoted from, because you might get caught out, and you might be a little bit embarrassed about it – as you should be when you quote something selectively. It never, ever works out for you, and you just look more and more embarrassing. You are talking to yourselves. Again, no-one is going to buy this. You cannot even get the facts right or rely on source documents, and you think that no-one on this side, on the government benches, is actually going to do the research and look into it.

I note Mr McIntosh's excellent speech from earlier when he talked about all of the cost-of-living measures. The rhetoric that is coming from that side, on the opposition benches over there, is just appalling. It is not even interesting anymore, it is just becoming standard *Sky News* talking points without any thought behind it other than to say, 'The government's bad. The government's wrong. The government is doing all of these things.' But again, when you look into the detail and the actual facts around this, selectively quoting the Parliamentary Budget Office report is always a bad look. It was something that was very easy to look up to find out how terrible and transparently bad it is.

I could go on as well about the cost-of-living measures that this government has funded. I might also just talk quickly about this. I know Mr McIntosh did this and so did Mr Galea. I just want to talk about why we have taxes. Most people actually know and understand that if you want to have a society that provides services, you have to raise money to support those services. It is called tax, and people actually know and understand that.

Matthew Bach interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: If you want public schools and public education, Dr Bach, that means you need to fund it somehow. You need to employ teachers and you need to build schools. We support teachers. We also run public hospitals. The state government runs public hospitals, so we employ people like nurses, we employ doctors and we employ all those people in the public health system that actually run our public health system. If you want to have public services, then you need to support them through taxes. The alternative is that you have a user-pays system, and people who are wealthier end up having a better quality of life and quality of care in their lives than perhaps people who cannot support themselves in the same way.

And that is why the government here, the Labor government, will always support appropriate levels of taxation – because we know the downside of not doing that is going to be such a bad situation and much more worse off, when you then will have a range of people not being able to support themselves and enjoy a reasonable standard of living. I do not want that. I do not want to see people with poor health care not being able to access medical care when they need it. You have just got to look at what happens in America – people cannot afford to go to the hospital system and their health outcomes are so much poorer. They have to sell their house, they have to go into debt just to get basic health care, whereas if they could have got access to preventative health care that they could have had under a system like Medicare in the past, their health needs could have been taken care of much sooner and perhaps their healthcare needs and outcomes would not have been so bad. So the point is there are reasons –

A member: It is true.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Absolutely. There are reasons why we need to have taxes. So for the opposition benches to continue to run this line that taxes are bad – it is actually not resonating with younger voters as well, because younger voters are saying to us, over here on the government benches, 'But I want a decent standard of living. I want access to education. I want access to –

Matthew Bach: A home?

Sonja TERPSTRA: Yes, a home, exactly, because wealthy boomers on your side want to become property developers and moguls and basically hog it all so young people cannot buy homes. So we can go down those rabbit holes, Dr Bach, but I think in the few seconds that I have left I would just like to reiterate the point: if you are going to bring a motion to this house, make sure you get your facts right – rounding something up to \$5638 when the Parliamentary Budget Office did not even use that figure and your own press release got it wrong. And also you did not let everyone know about the limitations in the budget report, in that other states had not actually finalised their budget. So I also encourage people in this chamber to not support this motion, and I thank the house for listening and taking the time to hear my contribution.

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:12): I want to thank all members who have contributed to this debate and also for the lovely vote of thanks from almost all members opposite to me personally for putting this on the notice paper. I want to touch upon just two or three points. Of course the detail in the motion is correct, but I do want to touch on two or three points. It has been interesting to me to hear those opposite laud the Parliamentary Budget Office. That is very interesting, because –

Sonja Terpstra: Well, you didn't in your press release.

Matthew BACH: I do laud the Parliamentary Budget Office – through you, Acting President, to Ms Terpstra. I will pick up that interjection. Before the last election, when I was Shadow Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, I was lauding the Parliamentary Budget Office when they said that the Suburban Rail Loop would not cost up to \$50 billion, which is what Minister Allan said, but would cost more than \$150 billion. And I distinctly remember those opposite rubbishing the Parliamentary Budget Office at that time and arguing that that analysis was incorrect. So it has been very, very interesting to hear those opposite base many of their arguments upon the Parliamentary Budget Office, when so often in the past they have rubbished the analysis of the Parliamentary Budget Office.

It was also interesting to hear the criticism that, if we are going to criticise the Andrews Labor government when it comes to taxation – and we certainly do do that – well then, we should have a plan. Now, the purpose of this document is in order to be able to engage with the Victorian community to give them a say in our tax reform plans – we are 3½ years out from an election. But nonetheless Mr Galea said, 'What would the Liberals do? What are the Liberals going to do?', and then he said, 'Cut, cut, cut.' It is an interesting day to talk about cuts. We just learned today the Labor government has cut the *Western Rail Plan*. We have heard about mandates from those opposite, and of course the government won the last election – the Labor Party won the last election. They won the last election on the basis that they made a whole series of commitments to the Victorian people, and now they are cutting in a whole range of areas. We have been talking about the Commonwealth Games; they promised – no ifs, no buts – they were going to deliver the Comm Games. They even ran a scare campaign against the Liberals on the basis that the Liberals would cut the Commonwealth Games. But now they have cut the Commonwealth Games. They promised the *Western Rail Plan* for so many years – for so many years. But today – today of all days, when there is another scare campaign about Liberal cuts and closures – the Labor Party has cut the *Western Rail Plan*. In addition, they have cut airport rail.

Mr Andrews, in an interview on radio that is currently circulating on social media, has previously said:

We will deliver the projects we said we would deliver.

Word for word:

We will deliver the projects we said we would deliver. We will not be breaking promises and cancelling projects.

Mr Andrews:

We will not be breaking promises and cancelling projects.

It is nonetheless perfectly reasonable of Mr Galea and others opposite to say, ‘Well, what are you going to do?’ Our process, whether you like it or not –

Members interjecting.

Matthew BACH: Maybe there is just a disagreement. What we seek to do, given that there are more than three years before the next election, is thoroughly engage with the Victorian people. Now, those opposite may think that is a stupid thing to do – they clearly do. However, we on this side of the house think that it is very important. We think that taxation is far too high here in Victoria – the highest in the country on any measure. We think there must be tax reform. We think the taxation system must drive investment and reform and it must drive growth, and those opposite have a different view; they are entitled to their view. And, yes, those opposite are very happy with themselves winning another election – that is fair enough. But our view is what we should be doing as a constructive opposition coalition is engaging with the Victorian people and hearing their views about how we can fix this broken system in order to then properly put in place our tax reform plans. Again I want to thank all members for their contributions, and I commend the motion to the house.

Council divided on motion:

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

Noes (19): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Samantha Ratnam, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion negatived.

Production of documents

Medically supervised injecting facilities

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (15:23): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes the:
 - (a) refusal of the Andrews Labor government to release any report conducted by former police commissioner Mr Ken Lay into a second injecting room in Melbourne’s CBD;
 - (b) conflicting commentary given by the Premier and Treasurer about the progress of Mr Lay’s reports;
 - (c) significant impact to local residents and businesses and the Andrews Labor government’s disregard for community safety and public amenity by not ruling out a second injecting room;
 - (d) significant concern from CBD businesses and residents about a rumoured second injecting room on Bourke Street; and
- (2) requires the Leader of the Government, in accordance with standing order 10.01, to table in the Council, within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, the most recent draft of Mr Lay’s report handed to the government.

I rise to speak on this production of documents motion on the Ken Lay report. As I have said before, I do not come to this debate as an opponent of medically supervised drug injecting rooms in principle, but I do have to acknowledge that the government has a track record of failure in its execution, forever tarring any merit of these facilities. Specifically, the government has failed on two points. These are a failure to do any meaningful consultation with local businesses and residents and a failure to release the full Ken Lay report. Since June the Minister for Health and the government have been sitting on this report, and I am calling for Labor to release this report without further delay.

To put, I guess, the issue of injecting rooms in context – and I will mention this later; I will go into this in further detail later – it is worthwhile examining similar policies in other jurisdictions. In the case of New South Wales there has been an injecting room operating at Kings Cross for over 20 years, and unlike Victoria there is no debate over its merits or its location, so we know it is possible for these facilities to actually be done right.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time the government has failed to listen to the community. We only need to look at the North Richmond facility and look at the pleas of North Richmond residents, who have been ignored. Like me, many of those residents are not, in principle, against an injecting room, but they do not believe it should be 50 steps from a primary school, and neither do the parents of that primary school, Richmond West Primary School, many of whom I have spoken to. They are rightly concerned to see injecting needles scattered all over their school grounds and surrounds. It has also had a massive effect on many of the Victoria Street traders, many of whom are concerned about their safety. Unfortunately, the only businesses that seem to be doing well out of the injecting room are glaziers, because about every third shop on Victoria Street constantly has a broken window.

I have also spoken to, as is my job as a member of Parliament, advocates of the injecting room, who tell me that the bungled location of North Richmond has ruined the reputation of these facilities, and it is not hard to see why. Unfortunately, it appears that Labor has not learned its lesson from the North Richmond facility and is doubling down on its poor choices for the location of this facility. The proposed or rumoured location of the Salvation Army site on Bourke Street is just 200 metres from Parliament House, and its surrounds include many restaurants and family-focused institutions like the Princess Theatre. It is not the kind of place we would want to see an injecting room. It could mean we could see drug deals on the steps of Parliament, with police powerless to prevent them. That is exactly what we have seen with the North Richmond injecting room, with local police saying that they were instructed not to patrol the area around the facility and not to enforce the law against illegal activities such as drug deals. This has created a honey pot for drug dealers, with users travelling from distant suburbs to take advantage of this lax enforcement. As one user told the *Age*, ‘It’s a free-for-all’.

Every year over 10,000 students come to this place to tour Parliament House, hoping to learn about Victorian democracy. The proposed location is so close to Parliament station and the tram stop at the top of Bourke Street, which are used by many families who would have to witness such events. We do not want kids who are getting off the tram to go to *Harry Potter* to witness their first overdose, needle or act of violence instead. What I want to know from the government is: will police receive the same instruction as they did for North Richmond and be prevented from stopping drug deals in our historic Bourke Street precinct or even on the steps of Parliament – perhaps in the background of a wedding photo on a weekend? True to form, the Andrews government is ignoring a chorus of voices that are expressing concern. What I am talking about is the fact that many police and the Police Association Victoria have gone on the record to say that their officers have been instructed not to prevent drug deals in an exclusion zone around the North Richmond facility. What I am asking is a simple question: will that be the same for the proposed CBD injecting room? Will police be powerless to prevent drug deals on the steps of Parliament, outside the Princess Theatre or at the top of Bourke Street? It is a very simple question which might be answered with the release of the Ken Lay report.

True to form, as with what happened in North Richmond, the Andrews government is ignoring the chorus of voices that have expressed concern with the proposed location. This includes local traders, institutions such as Grossi Florentino, Becco, Di Stasio and, my favourite, Pellegrini’s. Just as the CBD traders are beginning to come back from the pandemic and one of the longest lockdowns in the world, the Andrews government wants to kick them back down again. One of the traders, Guy Grossi, said the following:

This is going to be completely counterproductive to all that effort that’s gone into the rebuild of this city.

He has described the effect this would have on the city by saying:

The violence and the crime rate in the city is already a problem ...

Visitation is already low. So the last thing we need to do is detract from people coming and using the City of Melbourne.

Bourke Street traders have collectively echoed their concern to the Andrews government, saying:

While the welfare of drug users is one consideration to be made, this should not be to the detriment of the safety and wellbeing of workers, commuters, residents, customers and visitors ...

Injecting rooms are not without significant impact to the safety and amenity of the surrounding communities, and this is well documented. The ramifications would be felt across our city and would damage our reputation nationally and internationally ...

beyond what damage there is already after the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games. Another voice that has been raising concerns is police association secretary Wayne Gatt, who said:

The top of Bourke Street and the CBD in general is the wrong place to put an injecting room ...

The traders you see here, have built this part of the city to what it is. We can't allow it to be torn down by an ill-considered proposal.

From a policing perspective, the CBD is a particularly complex area. Having a significant additional policing responsibility placed in a highly populated community, family and tourist hub, will place a strain on our police that far exceeds the available resources.

We've seen how problematic the Richmond facility has been to the area and its residents. Let's not repeat that mistake in a higher density, more complex and frankly beloved part of our city. If this was to go ahead, the city will never get back what will be lost.

When asked about whether he supports a CBD injecting room, the police union boss said:

It's an emphatic no ...

It's not what the City of Melbourne does need at the moment ...

This is how you kill ...

the CBD. Pellegrini's co-owner David Malaspina has reinforced this idea, stating that an injecting room is:

... going to bring all the drug dealers here. It's going to create a honeypot.

It is an appalling idea. My friend Roshena Campbell, who is a Melbourne City councillor, said:

Having spoken to traders and residents ... I know that they are deeply troubled with this suggestion ...

It would just be the death knell for so many of those businesses that have struggled to hold on for so long after very difficult trading conditions over the past couple of years.

...

There isn't a trader or resident that I could look in the eye and say 'You deserve this on your doorstep' ...

Even mayor Sally Capp said the Salvation Army site is in the wrong location and the rumours have been highly damaging to traders in the CBD:

We have not had any updates from state government on their plans for this facility ...

I ... spend a lot of time up at the Salvos and ... it's not an integrated health facility.

CBD resident Rafael Camillo, who is also the president of the official CBD residents group Residents 3000, said:

We already have enough problems in the city.

We don't even have proper police [and] resource for these people. We've tried to revitalise this city ... bring back this city and bring back tourism, and they want to do this?

I understand CBD residents have been desperately trying to speak with the government and a number of local government MPs, with no success. I will not take this approach. I will always listen to CBD residents and traders in my electorate, because that is my job. That is my job as an elected

parliamentarian: to listen to the community, to go out and listen to the community and hear out their concerns, which the government has not been doing.

Unfortunately we have seen a dubious campaign by opportunists claiming to speak on behalf of CBD residents, who are in my view unrepresentative of locals that live in the CBD. A news story in the *Age* newspaper in May titled “‘People are dying’: CBD residents call for rush on the second injecting room” quotes residents calling themselves yimbys, a term I have associated myself with to mean ‘Yes in my backyard’ in respect to housing and new housing development, but I do not think it was thought of that that term might be used to say ‘Yes in my backyard’ to a new injecting room. One of those residents leading the comments in the article is Jill Mellon-Robertson, who just happens to be a former Reason Party candidate. At the event that day, which was attended by former MP Fiona Patten, who appears to be very involved in the Keep Our City Alive campaign, it was a meeting filled with supporters, and the article mentioned attracting TV attention to that meeting. Official CBD residents groups, I am told, were not informed of the meeting at all and had no say in the discussion. Many of the people organising and attending that meeting work at Cohealth, which may be the provider of choice for the second injecting room in the CBD. This does an enormous disservice to Cohealth, which in allowing its staff to engage in this campaign, I think, has damaged their reputation – by those staff not declaring an obvious conflict.

An associate of Michelson Alexander, a PR firm, was present at the meeting and appeared to be coordinating media for this campaign, and of course that firm does PR for Cohealth and the North Richmond injecting centre. They were also present at a meeting of this group on the steps of Parliament. Steve Michelson is well known to many in this chamber as a long-term Labor man, so I think the conflicts continue. He was actually quoted in the *Herald Sun* article on 9 July as ‘a CBD business owner’ who said the campaign was:

... a call to action that in some ways is site agnostic.

Just ‘a CBD business owner’ – not someone who may have a financial interest in the injecting room or Cohealth. I also note Michelson Alexander drew criticism from the people of North Richmond for making a political donation of \$2000 to the Labor Party, which to anyone’s mind appears to be a conflict of interest given they run PR for the injecting room in North Richmond and Cohealth. As my colleague Emma Kealy said:

The company providing media comment on behalf of North Richmond Community Health should not be seen as politically aligned with any party as the injecting room is such a divisive community issue.

Many CBD residents have pointed out to me that that meeting occurred with people that largely lived outside the CBD or were associated with Cohealth or associated with the Reason Party, so I would urge media in the future to engage with official CBD residents groups like Residents 3000 or EastEnders before falling hook, line and sinker for what appears to be a heavily coordinated political campaign.

While the Andrews government continues to bungle harm minimisation policy at every turn, we do have to look for a successful model. As I touched on, the Kings Cross centre in Sydney has operated for over 20 years. In 1997 the Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Service recommended the establishment of a safe injecting site within the precinct. The initial proposal was that it be set up in a residential area but that elicited a strong response, as we have seen with Richmond and now the CBD. It was actually the Sisters of Charity that did the research and operationalised the centre. In the year 2000, upon invitation from the New South Wales government, a medically supervised injecting centre began its operation under the guise of the Uniting Church.

The key condition that the New South Wales government set for granting the licence was ‘successful community acceptance’. Those are words that the Andrews government ignores at its peril. All it took to achieve this was a simple change of location to a commercial part of Darlinghurst Road next to a train station, which was a preferred location so as to not create an ant trail of harm and abuse. That is

what the research says. The Sydney service placed a strong emphasis on community consultation and approval, which it still enjoys to this day. It was established as part of a small and discrete facility, removing the associated stigma and keeping the social fabric of the neighbourhood and keeping it strong.

I am not against a supervised injecting room, but I believe Labor's model is broken. What I am against is a government that treats community feedback as a hostile attack rather than an opportunity to improve, an opportunity to listen and an opportunity to find compromise. As my colleague in the other place the Shadow Minister for Mental Health has said and pointed out time and time again, Labor's broken model does no more than pose a critical danger to the safety of children, families, traders, tourists and the wider community. We do need to ensure we do everything we can to make Melbourne the most vibrant and safe city it can be.

I ask the house to support this motion, which notes the refusal of the Andrews government to release the full Ken Lay report, notes the significant impact and disregard for safety an injecting room in the location would have and requires the government to release the Ken Lay report within three weeks. We know that the government has advised Ken Lay to rewrite this report, so its independence appears to be already in tatters. In early March Treasurer Tim Pallas admitted that the government had actually received the report and that it was sent back to be updated. He said:

Absolutely – Mr Lay provided us with a report and the government is considering that report together with seeking to update that report.

But more than 5 hours later Mr Pallas had to issue a statement – probably under threat from the Premier's private office, so he was dragged back to cover his tracks – saying he misspoke when he said the government had obtained the final report:

I referred to interim briefings the government has received – which have been publicly referenced previously. These formed the basis for an extension of Mr Lay's work.

So they told him to go back to the drawing board. That is not our opinion. He said he apologised 'for the error and any confusion'. The Premier and the Treasurer do not exactly appear on the same page on this issue at all. Indeed the Treasurer was sent back with a statement to cover his tracks. All I ask for is transparency. This is a production of documents motion. We want transparency around this. I hope that this motion just being on the table might actually force the government to release the Ken Lay report. We saw with another motion that I put to this house –

David Davis interjected.

Evan MULHOLLAND: We saw it, Mr Davis, with another motion I put to this place on the Glenroy RSL and on RSL buybacks, where strangely just the night before it was due to be debated the government reversed its decision, and the government came out and said, 'We won't be chasing down RSLs for pokies entitlements they can't even use.'

So I hope that this motion will force some action by the government. I say to all members of this Parliament, even those that might be supportive of a CBD injecting room: surely this motion should be supported to get to the bottom of this important report. The Andrews government does need to consult, I stress, and listen to the community. It is imperative that they do that, not just to maintain and improve the amenity of the CBD but to ensure long-term community acceptance of the injecting room and the drug harm minimisation policy more broadly.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:42): I rise to make a contribution on this motion standing in Ms Crozier's name, motion 31, in regard to the medically supervised injecting centres and of course the Ken Lay report et cetera. I think I have spoken on this issue before in this chamber in regard to medically supervised injecting rooms. As somebody who grew up in Sydney and had been around the centres in Kings Cross and the like for many, many years I know this is not controversial in Sydney. It bewilders me that here in Melbourne we still have controversy, which

comes from those opposite, when we know that the point of medically supervised injecting rooms is to save lives; it is about harm minimisation. It saddens me again that those opposite see it as an opportunity to just whip up confected outrage and hysteria over something that really is about saving lives and preventing deaths and actually about helping people.

I have remarked before that in a previous life I worked in Granville, where there was not a medically supervised injecting room but a methadone treatment centre. I have seen people overdose and fall down on the pavement and have seen healthcare workers coming out and rendering assistance and aid to those people. I know for sure that if that had not happened those people would have died. I understand only too well the benefits of having these centres.

Listening to Mr Mulholland's contribution, we have had all the usual tropes thrown at us today: we have connected violence and crime with drug use; we have maligned drug users as criminals; we have failed to adequately understand that drug users often have comorbidities, suffering from mental health conditions and the like. They are people who are suffering with some kind of affliction, and they deserve our empathy, sympathy, understanding and support. But those opposite choose to make this issue a political football so that they can talk to themselves and malign people who actually need our support.

As I said before, this is about harm minimisation. It is about saving lives. It is very easy to say no to things. We can say no to anything. It is very easy to say no. But again, I have heard nothing really of substance from those opposite on this issue. If we do not have this, what do we do? Do we do nothing? That would seem to be perhaps what they want to do. They are not really concerned about people who are struggling with some kind of affliction, whether it is dependency issues, mental health or whatever it is. They are not really concerned with that because, again, they misunderstand and always mischaracterise what people are actually wanting out of a medically supervised injecting room, and that is that they need help. It is about rendering medical assistance to people who need it. Again, this constant stream of negativity and mischaracterisation and misunderstanding of what the issue is actually about is very disappointing. Usually on the government benches over here, when we get documents motions, we support them – we always support them – but we are not supporting this motion. We stand against this motion in this chamber because it is just inappropriate and hysterical.

I think the government has been very clear. I will just talk about the report for a moment. The government is closely considering Ken Lay's report in regard to the second injecting room, and we will release the government response in due course. We will not be lectured to by those opposite saying, 'Well, you've got three weeks to do it.' No, we are not going to do that, because we are considering the evidence. We are considering the report closely. We want to make sure we consider the report, because we rely on evidence and information from experts, not from politicians and those opposite who are going to be on those benches for a very long time. I mean, honestly, people want to see medical services being offered in the places where they are needed the most.

Experts tell us about the first medically supervised injecting room. I will just talk about the Richmond centre for a moment. Since we opened the Richmond centre in June 2018, that facility has safely managed more than 6750 overdoses and saved 63 lives. Those people are a brother, a sister, a mother, a father, a cousin or an uncle to other family members. They have families. To pitch drug users as people that are subhuman is appalling, and that is what those opposite seek to do – to dehumanise people, to say that they are less than anyone else. They are all of us. They can be any of us at any time. People who get impacted by mental ill health may use drugs for a period of time to help manage that issue. They might have a lifelong period of using drugs because they might have lifelong comorbidities. But, again, those opposite pitch those people as less than human – as not one of us but someone other than us. Saving 63 lives means that those families have their family member back. They are not mourning the loss of someone who has died as a consequence of their drug use.

It has taken pressure off local hospitals. It has reduced ambulance call-outs. It has led to a reduction in the spread of bloodborne viruses within the City of Yarra. Again, you can see that by the placement

of that facility, even that local government area has benefited through the reduction of bloodborne viruses. There have been more than 3200 referrals to health and social services, including general practitioners, oral health, housing, drug treatment and bloodborne virus testing treatment. This is about people getting access to health services. That is a good thing. That is an absolutely excellent thing because we want people to get the help that they need when they need it and in the community where they need it. The question is: why did we put a medically supervised injecting centre in Richmond – the first one? Because it was needed there. That is what the experts told us. That is what the expert advice was to us, so we listened to those experts and we did that.

We have also seen a declining trend in opioid overdose prescriptions at St Vincent's, the nearest public hospital emergency department, and we have not seen that trend in other comparable Melbourne hospitals. Again, that is a good thing. When we talk about the CBD injecting room, in 2020, when the Andrews Labor government accepted the Hamilton review recommendations in full, this included the expansion of the medically supervised injecting centre trial into the City of Melbourne to ensure that more Victorians could access these life-saving services.

Ken Lay was the one who did that report and the report has been given to government, and as I said before, we are considering that report. We need to make sure that in considering that report we take into consideration all of the issues mentioned, and we will release it in due course. But it is sad and disappointing that we again are finding ourselves in this chamber debating this issue through another motion from those opposite seeking to malign and dehumanise drug users as people other than or less than the rest of us. No decision has been made yet in regard to the final location for the City of Melbourne supervised injecting centre. As I said before, we are closely considering Ken Lay's report, and we will release the report and a government response in due course.

We are committed to doing the right thing. We have always been committed to doing the right thing, even when it is really difficult. You know, that is something that our government does not shy away from. Sometimes being in government is really hard; it is really challenging. We have got to make tough decisions, but we back ourselves in because we listen to the experts. So we will carefully consider Ken Lay's report, and we are not going to rush this. As I said, it will be carefully considered, and we will release a government response to it.

I know there will be other speakers on this. I am not going to go through everything. There will be plenty of opportunities to talk about it. The only thing missed from the greatest hits of the coalition opposite was we did not hear anything about wokeism today or cancel culture. That was a disappointing omission from those opposite on this debate. But nevertheless we have had just about everything else over there. We have had crime. Did we have gangs? I do not think we had gangs; maybe that one was not mentioned in this. But they have been talking about all the usual tropes that get rolled out when we listen to a motion like this.

Again, this is about harm minimisation. As I have said, something that has stuck with me is that I have seen someone overdose on a pavement. It is a horrible thing to watch. This person had young children with them. You just do not want to see that. You do not want to see the trauma that it causes to those children. This person was a young mother. Those kids deserve to have their mother with them and raising them in a family environment, and it is just sad to watch that. So I personally think all of these things are necessary. It is a health response. It is a harm minimisation response, and our government will get on and deliver it.

I encourage everyone in this chamber to not support this motion. Like I said, we usually support documents motions, but not this time. I will be voting against this. I know my Labor colleagues on the bench with me here will also be voting against it. As I said, I encourage everyone on the crossbench to also vote against this motion.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:52): I do not think my contribution today is going to be particularly lengthy. I have spoken about this issue on numerous occasions, broadly in the

community but also in this place. Also, on the subject of the Ken Lay report, many will know that I have already called for that to be released in this term of sitting.

I am troubled coming into this debate, because in another scenario with another wording of this motion there would have been a scenario where this would, as a documents motion, have been entirely supportable by me and my colleagues in the Greens. With knowledge and awareness of the current state of this chamber, it should be known to those opposite that this is predominantly a progressive room. If you look at past statements from other parties – I do not want to speak for them, but from comments that have been made in this place on this issue – we know that there would be profound support for harm minimisation approaches and for the release of reports like that of Ken Lay. But rather than put forward a motion that would have actually garnered that support from not only the Greens but potentially others, we see a motion before us today that has wording in there, in the preamble, that instead bashes the approach currently taken by the government. It is a missed opportunity, and that I think is a real shame.

I would love to see the Ken Lay report released, because I think having data inform this conversation, rather than the moralising rhetoric that we have already seen a glimpse of from the opposition, would actually make this a lot more meaningful and useful to not only us but the community – and people in the community who really need access to the critically important life-saving health service that is supervised injecting. We saw a bit of a sneak peek already from the first speaker from the coalition of this idea of drug dealers on the steps of Parliament or the impact on the background of wedding photos – I mean, get a grip. With this issue there are people whose lives are literally at risk.

It is news to no-one here, surely, that people regularly overdose from injectable drugs in the City of Melbourne. That has been the case for a very long time, and we have already heard earlier in contributions to this debate that the Hamilton review years ago spoke to the need for services broadly to be considered in the City of Melbourne. This is where the data of the report, like I have mentioned, is really, really crucial. If there were a version of this as a true documents motion that was actually approachable in good faith, then I am sure broadly in this chamber it would get support, but instead we see something that places effectively fear-based optics ahead of the lives of people whose lives are at risk, people who are regularly dying from the use of injectable drugs in our community, and that is a real shame.

I feel like I have made my point. I look forward to seeing the Ken Lay report released. It is something that I am actively going to be pursuing with the government, and that should surprise no-one here, but really I find it a true shame that the coalition have missed an opportunity to do something meaningful here and instead are just doing the same sort of thing they have always done on this issue: moralising and targeting vulnerable people in our community who are using injectable drugs, who need our support.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (15:56): I am pleased to be able to speak on Ms Crozier's motion seeking release of documents related to the report about the second medically supervised injecting facility here in Melbourne. It is an important topic, and as other speakers have mentioned, certainly through the debates we have had previously in the Parliament and in recent months about legislation that sought successfully – it passed the Parliament – to make permanent the medically supervised injecting facility in North Richmond, there has been a considerable and thoughtful debate in this and the other chamber about how medically supervised injecting centres save lives. That is the simple proposition that underpins the government's approach to these issues – that these facilities provide safer places for people to inject drugs of dependence in a supervised health setting. It is an alternative to injecting at home or in public, and those are the circumstances and those are the settings where people who use injecting drugs are more likely to suffer harm and, sadly, die. The key achievement, I think, of the North Richmond facility, which we mentioned in the debate on the prior bill a couple of months ago, is that the conclusive evidence is that the facility in North Richmond is saving lives, and that must be our benchmark for determining success in public policy and success in this field, as it should be.

Of course we know that that facility in North Richmond is not just saving lives but also providing an opportunity to give a range of additional health interventions to those who are passing through its doors. We know that many of those who use that facility do have a range of significant health needs and they do experience significant barriers to accessing different and more standard forms of health settings and that therefore the medical care and support that they can receive in those settings is not only keeping them safe from overdose but providing an important setting for a range of other health supports and interventions to be provided so that they can get treatment and other sorts of support in other parts of their lives, because we know that dealing with a drug addiction is a complex task. It requires a range of solutions and a range of supports so that we can prevent harm and also then promote good and supportive health care, whether that be recovery pathways, support services to improve security of housing and the like or other sorts of actions that can support both individuals and the community which they are trying to serve. That was the fundamental reason why the Andrews Labor government in 2017 announced that it would conduct a trial of the first medically supervised injecting facility in this state's history.

It was not an initiative that came without controversy. It was not a topic that received, clearly, universal support and acclaim from across the community. It is notable, however, that particularly in relation to the North Richmond facility – and I spoke at length about this in the second-reading debate on the bill that we debated in the last few months in this chamber – there was significant support from within the local community to have a facility that would provide a safe environment for the injecting drug use that was already occurring and had been occurring in that location not just for months, not just for years, but for decades to continue in a supported centre where there were wraparound services and where people could be looked after. The local residents knew that you could not bury your head in the sand and pretend this stuff was not happening, because it was. They saw it every day, they saw the harm that was being caused and they saw the people dying in their streets. What they wanted to see was a government that saw the same things and took action, and that is what they got in 2017, when the Andrews Labor government announced the trial. As I have said at length, the trial clearly has worked, and the Parliament has taken action following independent reviews of that facility to make it permanent.

We know therefore that we are building our body of practice in this area on a very solid evidence base. This is not something that has just been a thought bubble plucked from a headline; this is something that has been the subject of years and years of practice and evidence and practice improvement and further evidence collection to lead us to the point where we can be clear that these types of facilities, and in particular the facility in North Richmond, do save lives.

There was obviously in 2020 a review chaired by Professor Margaret Hamilton, which delivered the first review of the trial, and one of the recommendations of that review – this evidence base on which I have previously spoken – was to look at the expansion of these services into a location within the City of Melbourne. So now that we knew this worked, the expert advice was that we should seek to help more people. I do not think anyone should fault the independent advice for reaching those conclusions. Part of the reason behind this was to examine how the patterns of heroin-related deaths had been occurring in the City of Yarra and the City of Melbourne over these periods, and therefore that 2020 Hamilton review made recommendations to government. Obviously, we know that a lot happened in that year and a lot changed in the years after. That is why, when the government asked Ken Lay to make further inquiries and recommendations in relation to this matter, we knew that the environment in which that first recommendation was made had changed by the very nature of the once-in-a-generation event that took place, commencing in early 2020.

That review by Ken Lay was very thoughtful and it was very considered, and as was necessary, its consultation period was extended to May this year so we could ensure that the factors that we were going to go into – the site selection – were very well considered and considered both the safety and amenity needs of the broader community. Mr Lay worked closely with the Department of Health, Ambulance Victoria, Victoria Police, the City of Melbourne and other key stakeholders in exploring

this range of issues. Knowing the work that Ken Lay has done in a number of other settings, whether that be in his time at Victoria Police or his time working on a range of other projects for the government, we know that he will have done a diligent and very thoughtful job. The government is closely considering Ken Lay's report, and no decision has been made regarding the final location of a recommended supervised injecting service within the City of Melbourne.

I think that gets to the nub of what the motion before us today is seeking to do in terms of understanding where this process is up to and in calling for the production of certain documents. But I think it is very clear in the context of a debate about the production of documents associated with the report that we need to reflect on the underlying issues and the policy issues that are and should be fundamental to this debate, and that is that these centres save lives. We know that because they have done it in North Richmond, and we know that not only are they saving lives but they are providing a platform for more support to go to injecting drug users. We should always remember that as the focus of this debate.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (16:06): I rise to speak to this motion that has been moved in my name, and I note the very excellent contribution by my colleague Mr Mulholland on this issue. This is a simple motion. It is calling on the government to release the Lay report. As many have heard in this place for a long time, we have called on the Lay report to be released, because it is sitting on a minister's desk somewhere. We know that. It has been completed. It was completed months and months and months ago, and yet the government refuses to release the report. Now, I think I heard somewhere that the minister was saying that the Lay report would be released in due course, or words to that effect. Well, why would you believe anything this government says, because they keep saying things but they fail to deliver, and as I said, this report has been completed and it is sitting on a minister's desk waiting to be released. It is not being released, and that is not in the interests of Victorians. It is not in the interests of transparency around those that will potentially be impacted by a second injecting room, which is the government's commitment.

We have seen what has happened in the Yooralla site, which was bought for \$40 million by the Andrews Labor government years ago and it is sitting there empty. Those traders around Degraes Street and the residents around Degraes Street, who my colleague Emma Kealy and I have spoken to, are really concerned about the impacts. They have had COVID, they have had the Metro Tunnel works, and an injecting room is going to impact on their ability to deliver their retail services and the amenity of where they live. They have made their positions very clear.

And of course we have got Melbourne City Council, who does not know what it is doing. One moment they are in support of an injecting room and the next minute the Lord Mayor comes out and says no, it should not be in Bourke Street – and this is the next one. We have got the flagged notion of having an injecting room down here at the Salvation Army site, and that has caused an enormous amount of concern for retailers, the restaurant industry and others – those residents in this precinct. It is not very far from the Parliament, and it has been floated as having a second injecting room. Those retailers, traders and restaurateurs have a right to understand what is in the Lay report. They actually have a right to understand what the government's intentions are, because this has been going on for years. The government know what they want to do; they just do not want to tell Victorians, and that is typical of the Andrews Labor government. They just thrust things onto the community without the proper consultation, without proper understanding, and expect everybody to agree to it.

We saw what happened in North Richmond with the North Richmond site. We know – and the data is there to back it up – that that has been an enormous issue for that community. The amenity has declined. Apart from the millions of dollars that the government is putting into the area, that amenity has declined. It is a less safe place, and it has more antisocial behaviour than when the injecting room was not present. The government will argue, 'Well, you know, that was a hotspot for addicts.' Well, it is a honey pot now for dealers and addicts and others to come into the area. The Police Association Victoria and others have talked about the increase in crime and antisocial behaviour and the impacts on residents and retailers alike. I think you cannot avoid those facts – they are the facts. We do not have the proper facts from the government in terms of the outcomes, because we do not know how

many people have been rehabilitated and have actually come off the addiction of heroin. No-one is telling us that; you cannot get that data. That is why this motion is important, because we want to understand what Mr Lay has had to say. But the businesses, the retailers and the residents have a right to understand what the government's intentions are as well.

Businesses just down here have come out in strength to express their concerns, because they have not got clarity from the government. They make a very good point. The Princess Theatre has families and young people going to see shows like *Mary Poppins* and a range of other family-orientated productions who are going to come out of the station or get off the tram and potentially be confronted by people that need the support of rehabilitation rather than going into an injecting room and coming out. We know what happens in North Richmond. We know what happens when people come out of that injecting room or are doing drug deals and injecting in the streets. So nothing different will happen outside the injecting room here to what happens at the government's failed program out in North Richmond, I would suggest.

I do think it is very important that we have certainty around it, and I note that there has been conflicting commentary between the Treasurer and the Premier on the progress of Mr Lay's report. The Premier says one thing about the progress and then the Treasurer Tim Pallas completely contradicts him. It just shows the chaos, dysfunction and mayhem that is occurring in government around decisions. They are trying to cover one another, trying to cover up what the issues are, trying to manoeuvre and trying to pull the wool over Victorians' eyes about what their intentions are. I do not think anyone is fooled. They know that the government wants to do this; they do. But they have got to consider this, and we say it is the wrong spot, in North Richmond. We have been very clear about that. Others disagree, but we have been very clear about that because of, as I said, the significant impacts to the local amenity and residents.

This is a simple motion. It is just calling on the government to release the Lay report. Get on with it, government. Release the Lay report so that every Victorian understands what is in that report and those that are being impacted by these notions of 'Perhaps an injecting room in Flinders Street, perhaps an injecting room in Bourke Street' can actually understand what the hell is going on.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (16:13): It was interesting listening to Mr Mulholland's contribution before, given he has been a beacon of progressivism of late, particularly around yimbyism and whatnot. I was listening to him saying that he is not against supervised injecting facilities – but. So I am a bit confused on his position now, and not just on Mr Mulholland's but the opposition's. They are not opposed to it – but. Where is the suggestion? Where is the taking up of a position that is something positive, something that can be achieved and something that can deliver for the community? What I have heard here is that Richmond is a boon for glaziers. I am pretty sure there is a fair bit of glazier work around the rest of Melbourne, and Victoria and Australia for that matter. I do not think I have seen a high concentration of glazing businesses in Richmond. I have not done the in-depth analysis, but I am pretty sure there is a pretty even spread.

A member: Look into it. You should look into it.

Tom McINTOSH: And I will. I will be sure to go away and look at it after this.

Again I come back to, 'This is not the place.' These are not some sort of ye olde times where we can send people that do not quite sit comfortably with us or who are a bit of a bother to the other side of the world to a separate continent. We need to take responsibility and deal with the issues in our community, and that is what this government is doing. I mean, it gets a bit comical. There was a comment about people's wedding photos on the steps of Parliament being ruined by drug users. I do not even know what to do with that.

Harriet Shing interjected.

Tom McINTOSH: Yes. I mean, this is the other conversation. It is about all of us, not the ‘other’. But anyway, to continue going through these comments: ‘Ruining our reputation’. If our reputation is for being a caring, considerate, engaging state that looks after its most vulnerable and disadvantaged, and if this is ruining our reputation, well, it is a reputation that I am quite happy to have as part of a government that has a reputation for doing the work that we are doing. Mr Mulholland also talked about how it is his job to represent the community – as it is all of ours. You know, I stand here on the other side taking that very same position. It is my job to represent our community. I represent what I think gets the better and best outcomes for our community and delivers the health outcomes. But anyway, I will come back to that later.

Particularly in the last couple of months I have spent a lot of time meeting with various first responders and paramedics. We have got Steve McGhie in the other chamber, the member for Melton, who is a paramedic. If you listen to the conversations about the very difficult and often traumatic experiences of our first responders, they are finding people in alleyways, finding people in places where they are exposed to the public and having to spend so much time and resources on dealing with situations that are preventable. They are preventable through the numbers that we see – 6750 overdoses, 63 saved lives. Put all that out on the streets and let us see how it impacts on our paramedics, let us see how it impacts on our communities and let us see the outcome of that. That is why I, with the government, absolutely stand here and support the work that is being done. We do not want people dying in the streets. These are real people.

My aunty died of a heroin overdose. She was a heroin addict for 20 years. My cousin was in and out of foster care for much of her life before a family looked after her long term – after being in and out of respite care. My cousin has gone on to do incredible, incredible things. She has worked in aged care, and she is now studying to be a nurse. We need nurses. She is a beautiful young woman now in her early 30s. She has got four boys under six, and she takes it all in her stride and makes an incredible contribution to our state and to our community. It could have been very easy to take the view, ‘Here’s a woman with a heroin addiction.’ My aunty was a very complicated woman. She was a wild woman. She ran in pretty wild circles. If you look at where that behaviour came from, there was trauma early in her life and there was no support, and you can see the way it played out. But the supports that were in place effectively saved my cousin, and now we have a beautiful woman with a beautiful family, contributing to our community. That investment in our people is absolutely worth it.

I went on for a while to become a foster carer with my partner, and so many of the kids were amazing. One kid in particular had family in these Richmond and Footscray crime gangs, and he was being drawn back into that world. I will not go too much more into that, but I just want to highlight the knock-on effects of ignoring or demonising a problem rather than supporting and lifting people up.

Now, these are complicated issues. It is not all going to go away overnight, and that is why you commit to this stuff generationally. It is why we have had the Royal Commission into Family Violence. It is why we have had the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System. It is why we are investing in drug and alcohol support. It becomes a bigger fundamental belief in not throwing people to the side or leaving people behind. We need to remove the trauma. We have got to treat the trauma. We have to stop the cycle. I grew up in Ballarat in the 1990s amongst generational trauma, and the results of that were serious drug and alcohol use. I lost half a dozen mates and many more in expanded circles, which is why I just come back to the point that I am so passionate about this not being used as a political football, about it not being about ‘the other’, about serious solutions being put forward and about not using it as a pointscore opportunity. I know that is not always people’s intention, and I know there are legitimate concerns. As I said before and as Mr Batchelor said in his contribution, it is very, very complicated, but that is why we all need to support the services that are there to ensure that these behaviours, these addictions and these traumas are not entrenched and do not repeat in the next generation.

The other thing with the centre is what it is doing in terms of capturing and referring users to the services that they need, whether that is GPs, whether it is for their oral health or whether it is drug and

alcohol support. It is really important, and I think we see it a lot within our community spaces now, where we are making those decisions and we are planning ahead to ensure that we are able to bring people together, whether it is around schools or community health centres. We are capturing people and giving them opportunities to engage with our various health and service networks so that they can get that help when and where it is needed, because depending on where people are at in their journey, it is not easy to reach out and ask for help. So by putting that support there and not having them have to repeat their story over and over again we are making it simpler for not only the individuals and their families but the workers.

For the workers to be able to build those relationships with the individuals and get the outcomes with them – I mean, it just makes absolute sense. It is more efficient for the workers and it is better for individual, and that is why I am just coming back to that point of ensuring that we are meeting people where they are at. It is like any method of communication. We are all politicians: we are communicating with the public. You meet people where they are at, and it is no different from the drug and alcohol perspective. We need to meet people where they are at, speak in their language, make them feel comfortable, support them and enable them to transition to a better life, as so many, many people have, and come from a dark place to a life of love and happiness.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:24): I rise to speak on this motion as well and would also like to pause to take a moment to acknowledge the words of my colleague Mr McIntosh. That was a very moving and personal contribution, and I think we are all the better for hearing it. It was very, very moving.

This is a motion requesting documents into something that is a very, very, very important subject, but as others have said on this side of the chamber, it is a flawed motion. Frankly, it is actually a redundant motion, and I will come back to that shortly. The motion reads:

That this house:

(1) notes the:

- (a) refusal of the Andrews Labor government to release any report conducted by former police commissioner Mr Ken Lay into a second injecting room in Melbourne's CBD –

well, that is wrong, but we will get back to that later –

- (b) conflicting commentary given by the Premier and Treasurer ...
 - (c) significant impact to local residents ...
 - (d) significant concern from CBD businesses ... about a rumoured second injecting room on Bourke Street; and
- (2) requires the Leader of the Government, in accordance with standing order 10.01, to table in the Council, within three weeks ... the most recent draft of Mr Lay's report handed to the government.

I say it is redundant, and as a member of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, whilst there are no other members of the committee in this room right now, I am sure many of you would have been glued to your screens all throughout that exhaustive two-week period of insightful discussions. Perhaps those members opposite were not paying attention – perhaps those members who were in the room asking questions were not paying attention – because this question has already been comprehensively answered by the minister multiple times on two occasions. It has been answered. I do not know what this motion is here for. I refer to the transcript from Wednesday 7 June 2023, the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing into mental health. I am delighted to see my colleague from PAEC Mr McGowan join the room, because it was in fact Mr McGowan who asked:

Do you commit to releasing Mr Lay's report in full?

The minister responded:

Mr Lay's report will be released.

Mr McGowan also asked for good measure:

And Mr Ryan's report, will that be released in full?

I believe the minister advised that that report had already been released. Shortly after, in case that answer was not actually clear enough, we then proceeded to Mr O'Brien, the member for Gippsland South from the other place, who said:

Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Minister and co. Minister, can I just go back to the Lay report and just confirm that you have committed to release the Lay report that you have received in full?

The minister responded:

I have said I would release the Lay report, and we will be releasing the Lay report with a government response.

There was some back and forth after this, and Mr O'Brien –

Nicholas McGowan interjected.

Michael GALEA: Quite unusual for PAEC, I am sure you will agree, Mr McGowan. Mr O'Brien wanted to know if it would be supplied in full. Minister Williams said:

What I have received I will be releasing. The Lay report will be released.

Mr O'Brien then responded:

Why won't you say 'in full'?

Minister Williams said:

I am happy to say 'in full'. We will be releasing the Lay report in full.

So there you have it. We have a motion here put to the house today. The opposition is using its time today, which I think is actually valuable – I think it is actually important that all parts of this chamber are given an opportunity to raise matters of significance to them, to the state – to have Mr Mulholland raise a motion on a matter that the government has already committed to providing a response to, and we are already committed to providing that report, in accordance, I might add, with the standard procedure. A report is supplied, the government considers it, the government prepares its response and the government releases the report along with its response. That is exactly what Minister Williams committed to us in the PAEC hearings just a few weeks ago, and that is exactly what I expect to happen.

So I am a bit curious as to why this motion has been put up. I hope it is not to merely allow Mr Mulholland to go on a rant about the safe injecting rooms that we have and to try and scare people about what might or might not be happening. I have got to say there are many of Mr Mulholland's contributions that I have appreciated and enjoyed. We have had many good debates in this chamber already about housing. He has been an absolute champion against nimbyism. Yet here we have him saying, 'Not in my backyard. No, let's not have it in Victoria Street, there are all these issues. Let's not have it in the city.' Well, where do we have it? We have not actually heard –

Nicholas McGowan interjected.

Michael GALEA: Have you seen the supposed proposal that we are all apparently –

Evan Mulholland: Do you know something we don't?

Michael GALEA: I do not know something that you do not, Mr Mulholland.

Nicholas McGowan interjected.

Michael GALEA: Let us not get into chamber conflict, Mr McGowan. We are saying these are the locations, and I do not know what is in the Lay report. As I said, it has not been released yet. But when it is, I look forward to reading it, as I am sure many of my colleagues in this place do, and when

we do, we will all examine what it says. It might say it might be around the corner. It might say somewhere else entirely. Let us assess that when it comes out, have a mature debate about it and see what is the best way to do this. This, frankly, nimbyism is not something that I was expecting to come out of Mr Mulholland's mouth today, so I admire the ideological flexibility you have shown.

But I would also like to make a comment: you made a few comments around Victoria Street in North Richmond, and that is actually an area that is quite close to my heart. Even though I am from the south-east, when I was much, much younger in fact, as a toddler and as a young chap, I used to spend a lot of time there because my mum used to work in that area, and I still have a great appreciation and affection for the area today. I also recently had the privilege of representing retail workers in that area just a few years ago, and I know all too well the challenges that are faced with some of the social problems in that area. I can tell you, Mr Mulholland, that those problems did not appear the day that the injecting rooms went in. Much as I would love it to be the case, I cannot say that Victoria Street in North Richmond was a panacea of harmony and sobriety before the injecting room went in. The injecting room is in that area for a very good reason.

Nicholas McGowan: What is wrong with Victoria Street?

Michael GALEA: I love Victoria Street, as I said, Mr McGowan. It is a fantastic place.

Nicholas McGowan interjected.

Michael GALEA: I do have a love for it. Some of the best food in Melbourne, frankly, you will find in Victoria Street, for one, and wonderful people as well. I have also had the chance, as I have said, in previous roles to engage with many different parts of the community and to see some of the ins and outs of this particular issue, and there is no simple fix. But to say that all of the problems are caused by an injecting room is just frankly ridiculous, and it ignores much of the history of the area as well. So I would caution members when they are making these remarks: let us not get into the field of fearmongering or revisionism; let us focus on what is actually best. Other colleagues have already spoken to the incredible benefits that these rooms have at both a broader facts-based statistical level and also a personal level, and it is a really important service to have.

Going back to the motion itself, again, to claim that the government is refusing to release any report conducted by the former police commissioner Mr Ken Lay, as I said, is completely ridiculous. We have on record, which I have quoted extensively in this contribution, the minister committing to release the report and saying that the report will be released in full. Frankly, I am not sure where this motion has come from. I am not sure why you would choose to make this the use of your time today given that we already have that clear commitment from the minister. Nevertheless it is your prerogative to do so. But for these reasons and for those expressed by my other colleagues in this place today I will not be supporting the motion.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (16:33): I too rise to speak on motion 31, which my colleagues have spoken on earlier on. It is the second time that I have spoken about the safe injecting rooms since I have been in the Parliament. I just want to acknowledge the comments of Mr McIntosh about his family, and I think they resonate quite well with a lot of people. I understand those difficulties you do face with families as you go along. My wife is a nurse and prior to being a nurse was a paramedic, and she dealt with quite a few of the people that were involved in drug taking and all of those sorts of activities. I have had some quite lengthy discussions about what those things all mean and about safe injecting rooms and the people that have to deal with them. This motion speaks to the report conducted by the former police commissioner Mr Ken Lay into the second injecting room in Melbourne's CBD.

Acting President Galea, congratulations on your new position as Acting Chair. I am sure you will cover that in leaps and bounds.

The medically supervised injecting centre saves lives. The science proves it and we get it: medically supervised injecting centres save lives by providing a safer place for people to inject drugs of dependency in a supervised health setting instead of injecting at home or, far more dangerously, on the streets or in parks or at local businesses where dangerous needles can be discarded on the road, which just does not provide a proper alternative – instead of injecting in a dangerous place and putting lives at risk. The statistics show that people are more likely to die, suffer harm from drug use and face risks on the street than if they stayed in a safer space, a place where they are less likely to die or suffer harm from drug use and where there is a lower risk to the public.

Harm reduction is not just for the client but for the staff. Think about what happens if an overdose occurs in the street or in a public toilet. This is where most overdoses happen – in stairwells, in houses occupied by large groups of people and in dangerous places and spaces. Where paramedics arrive on a call-out we must consider their safety, but in the safety of a safe injecting room you have all the support you need – clean needles to be disposed of safely and properly, access to rehabilitation and support programs that may play a positive role in someone's life, a needle and syringe program, opioid substitution programs and of course safe pathways out. These services provide life-saving interventions for people who have a full range of health needs who may otherwise experience significant barriers to accessing healthcare services, including housing, medical care, drug treatment and hepatitis C screening and treatment, among others.

In 2017 we announced the bold and brave action plan to take this safety-first, science-based medical approach to address the intergenerational harm caused by drugs in the City of Yarra. The establishment of the trial followed growing concern about the number of heroin-related deaths, two parliamentary inquiries and a coronial finding that an injecting room would reduce the risk of death from heroin overdose. But I want to skip ahead to 2020, when our government accepted the Hamilton review recommendations in full. This included the expansion of the medically supervised injecting centre – or MSIC – trial to the City of Melbourne to ensure more Victorians can access life-saving services in the space that those Victorians occupy, where the drug activity takes place.

We know that the decision to extend and expand the MSIC trial to the City of Melbourne was informed by a high number of heroin-involved deaths in the cities of Yarra and Melbourne and recommended by the Hamilton 2020 review. That is why we decided to appoint Ken Lay AO APM, a former Chief Commissioner of Police, someone who is widely respected in the community, to lead an independent consultation on the establishment of a second service.

We know that drug use and drug harm have rapidly changed over the past few years. Patterns are different and constantly evolving, in large part as a result of the pandemic. That is why we wanted former Chief Commissioner Lay to take all the time he needed to write a thoughtful and comprehensive report. That is why the consultation period was extended to May this year, to ensure all factors were considered in establishing a second facility in the right location, a place that gets it right for all stakeholders – the community, the local businesses, the clients, the workers and the public.

Ken Lay worked closely with the Department of Health, Ambulance Victoria, Victoria Police, the City of Melbourne and other key stakeholders to explore wellbeing, safety and amenity considerations for the CBD service. But the reality is no decision has been made yet on any final location in the City of Melbourne for the supervised injecting service. To speak to the crux of the motion, the government is closely considering Ken Lay's report and will release the report and the government's response when it has fully considered what it means. We are not in the business of making policy on the fly. We are in the business of improving lives and in the business of improving services available to the CBD – services that will reduce the burden on ambulances and hospital services and, more importantly, will save lives.

Our government is committed to doing the right thing. We will carefully consider this report and make sure that we do not rush the decision. These sites are complex and we need to get it right. Decisions need to be guided by the data and the body of research and evidence on the topic. The Andrews

government recognises the diversity of views within the community, but it must be guided by the advice of the experts and evidence.

To address the part of the motion that talks about the small business owners and the CBD businesses, we know that the local community, local users of the CBD, are more concerned about the volume of drug use, inappropriately discarded injecting equipment and antisocial behaviour that is occurring in the CBD. We know something: the evidence shows that if the existing service was not located in North Richmond, most people would continue to visit the area to access the street-based drug market that has operated in the area for the last two decades. The centres do not attract people to the area who would not otherwise be in the area – that is a misrepresentation of the facts. The Ryan review surveyed people who use drugs in the area and found that those coming to North Richmond solely to access the MSIC was only 6 per cent. Section 1 of this motion talks about the significant concern. Well, I know the significant concern posed to the community if this is done in a dangerous way. That is why I am proud to be a member of the Andrews Labor government, which is committed to making our community safer. We have a lot of things to be proud of on this side of the front.

We are expanding access to rehabilitation, increasing education in the community and delivering more training for our alcohol and other drug, or AOD, workforce. The 2023–24 budget invested an additional \$255.2 million for AOD treatment, rehabilitation and harm reduction services, which includes opening 145 residential rehabilitation beds to ensure that people can access the service they need, closer to home; continuing the operation of 57 adult beds across six metropolitan, rural and regional locations and 80 treatment and eight withdrawal beds – this will be for adults and young children across three facilities in Corio, Traralgon and Wangaratta; continuing Turning Point's AOD Pathways programs to ensure that people are efficiently matched with services they need; expanding opioid pharmacology services; continuing community-based AOD treatment for people involved in the criminal justice system; continuing the successful AOD and family violence behavioural change program and expanding it into the Hume region with the creation of 84 AOD workforce trainee positions; establishing a residential treatment and outpatient service for Victorian workers; delivering our government's commitment to expanding access to naloxone by covering the wholesale purchasing costs, distribution and training, plus evaluating this program, which we know already saves lives; continuing the Rapid and Precise Intelligence on Drugs program, which produces valuable statewide intelligence about emerging drugs, allowing for central public health information to be disseminated – this is done through the department's drug alerts and advisory service; delivering the Emerging Drugs Network of Australia – Victoria program, which provides clinical toxicology reviews of severe drugs and collects and shares drug harm data; and delivering the government's commitment to decriminalising public drunkenness and shift to a health-led response.

I want to wrap up today by saying that dealing with drug addiction is a complex task. We have been strengthening our laws to combat those who prey on the most vulnerable in our community through the sale of drugs since we were elected in 2014, and when it comes to the issue of saving lives and reducing harm, only this side of the chamber will deliver. Only a Labor government can be trusted to reduce harm and support those struggling with addiction to get the support they need for a better life, and only Labor can be trusted to balance the different stakeholder interests to deliver the best outcome.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:43): I was not going to speak on this motion, but I thought I had better clarify something. As a matter of course I normally support documents production motions, and I will be supporting this one also as a matter of course on the principle of transparency. However, I do have some concerns with some of the preamble in this motion, so I would just like to comment. Point (1)(c) effectively says that not ruling out a second injecting room shows the government's disregard for community safety. I think that that is totally inaccurate and I disagree with that. So although I take issue with some of the points in the preamble, I will support the idea of releasing it. I do note that the government have already said they are going to release this report and therefore this is sort of redundant anyway. But if this is going to come to a vote, I just want to make my position clear. That is all I had to get on the record.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (16:44): Acting President Galea, can I take a moment to acknowledge your elevation to Acting Chair, and it is truly a delight to be presenting to this debate in this, your first Acting President shift, so congratulations to you. How very fortunate we all are to be here in the chamber at this time as you mark this special occasion in your parliamentary journey.

I am delighted to join so many speakers before me in speaking to the medically supervised injecting room. Of course I have put on record my views on medically supervised injecting rooms a great number of times, and they bear repeating. The truth is that medically supervised injecting rooms save lives, and the medically supervised injecting room that already exists there in my electorate in North Richmond has saved lives. I have spent a great amount of time talking to the medical professionals there, and the work of our health and mental health professionals there in North Richmond is simply outstanding. It is outstanding, and it is done with the esteem and support and encouragement of the Andrews Labor government.

The idea of a medically supervised injecting centre (MSIC) is complex and requires careful consideration and a detailed body of work, and that indeed is what has happened in the past and continues to happen. These are not decisions that are made on impulse. They are guided by data on patterns of drug use and drug harm, and we really do recognise that there is such a diversity of views. Can I take a moment to acknowledge all those constituents in the Northern Metropolitan Region, particularly here close to the city, who have reached out to me with their views, and I have assured them, as I continue to do, that we must be guided by the advice of experts and the evidence before us. We know that business owners and members of the local community are concerned – deeply, deeply concerned – about the volume of drug use, the really inappropriate and dangerous discarding of injecting equipment that we have seen in various spots around our city and the antisocial behaviour that is occurring in the CBD. In fact next week to mark national Homelessness Week I will be visiting some of these sites with great enthusiasm to understand more directly from our service providers exactly what is happening right here in our city. I have seen it for myself, but now to be guided by our experts, our medical professionals, our professionals that work with people doing it rough and those that use injecting drugs, I am very much looking forward to that opportunity.

Of course there is so much evidence that shows that if the existing service was not located in North Richmond most people would continue to access the street-based drug market in the area that has operated for – oh my gosh – at least two decades. The review into drug use in the area of North Richmond found that only 6 per cent reported coming to North Richmond solely to access the MSIC.

Our experience and our expertise gathered through our time there in North Richmond is incredibly vital as we understand more about the needs of the community and the needs of local service providers, and of course understanding from our hospitals and our other frontline medical professionals just what is going on each and every day. So to the folks that make themselves available to our health professionals can I just say to you: thank you for being there and using a service that really is set up with your life central to it. That is in fact the truth – that there are a great number of hospitalisations that have been avoided. There are a great number of lives that have been saved since North Richmond started in its operation, and these are not figures on a piece of paper – these are lives saved. These are people's family members, these are people that folks know and care about very deeply, so in North Richmond it saves lives, and I have no doubt that wherever this very much tested and based-in-fact service is delivered it will continue to save lives. It will continue to be staffed by the very best medical and health research professionals in the state, and for those that find themselves in a career servicing our most vulnerable can I say to you: thank you. Thank you very, very much.

Of course the information on this and what will happen with this report will come out in due course, and I look forward to making that available and reading that when it comes out, but the truth is that the decision that this government makes will be entirely based on evidence and on facts and on the view of our experts. So with that in mind can I just say I very much thank you, Acting President, for the opportunity to speak here in your first time in the chair, and I look forward to a continued conversation about this in the months to come.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (16:49): Acting President Galea, can I congratulate you on taking on this role.

Thanks to the contributions of all colleagues across the chamber. It has been a very interesting debate but I think an important one. It is important to especially, as I said earlier, listen to residents and local communities that would be affected here while also at the same time acknowledging the importance of, in my view, injecting rooms. But they do need to be in the right place and based on the right research. We would like to see the Lay report because we know – not a lot of others talked about it – that the government did send Ken Lay back to the drawing board.

A member: Maybe more than once.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Maybe more than once. It did not like the original report that came forward. Ms Terpstra had quite an overzealous contribution and remarked that I had aligned with drug users, though I did no such thing. Mr Puglielli said that he is on the record calling for the release of the Ken Lay report. So I hoped that he would support this, but he has indicated that he will not.

Mr Batchelor read some talking points, probably from the Premier's private office – given instructions just like he was disgracefully given some instructions to ask some outrageous questions to Mr Redlich the other day. I like Mr Batchelor, but I thought they were quite out of character. Considering the even-handed way he has conducted himself in the duck-hunting inquiry, watching that, I was embarrassed. I was embarrassed at that performance and the performance of his colleagues in the lower house. But I thought Ms Crozier gave an excellent contribution to this debate, as usual. Mr McIntosh asked me where –

John Berger interjected.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I am summing up. This is what you are meant to do.

John Berger: Get on with your summary.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I am. That is what summing up is about. Mr McIntosh asked me where I would want a location. Well, first of all I would listen to the research. I am on the record saying somewhere like the St Vincent's site would be a very good location for an injecting room. As I said, I am not against an injecting room, and personally my view on harm minimisation and drugs probably aligns more with Mr Limbrick and Mr Puglielli than with some of my colleagues. I said to look at the research, and we know from the research at Kings Cross, which I have looked into, that all of the evidence out of that tells us it should be near an integrated health service facility where there are wraparound health services and somewhere that is located close to public transport so as to not create an ant trail of harm, which is exactly what has happened at North Richmond. There are several good sites where it could be, and I am open to suggestions. One site that would be quite bad for the CBD is the Bourke Street proposal, which is what I have spoken about previously.

Mr Berger gave a contribution, and I thank him for his contribution. But I would say –

John Berger: Just get on with your summary.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I am summing up. But I would say, like many other contributions in this place, it was read word for word and included slabs of text that appear in other colleagues' contributions as well.

But I thank Mr Limbrick for his contribution as well, and I thank Ms Watt for her contribution. I know that she has spoken passionately about this issue in the past, and I do respect her for her contribution. I do note that CBD residents have told me that they have tried desperately to reach out to their local Labor upper house MP, and I hope that she has been able to call them back or get in touch with them so they can pass on their concerns to her. I know Ms Watt will treat them respectfully and courteously and get back to them with the government's opinion as well, and I know that CBD residents have been

attempting to reach out to put across their view. But in summing up, I think this motion should be supported.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (16): Matthew Bach, Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nicholas McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

Noes (21): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Samantha Ratnam, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion negatived.

Motions

SBS headquarters

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (17:02): I am pleased to move notice of motion 74:

That this house:

- (1) notes:
 - (a) the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) is one of two government-funded national broadcasters, both of which are headquartered in Sydney;
 - (b) that according to the SBS report 2021–22, of the 1269 SBS staff 1040, or 82 per cent, were based in New South Wales while only 181, or 14 per cent, were based in Victoria;
- (2) recognises:
 - (a) that Victoria has the highest proportion of population born overseas of any state or territory;
 - (b) that Melbourne's population is increasing faster than Sydney's and becoming ever more multicultural in composition;
- (3) expresses concern that the SBS report 2021–22 and the federal Minister for Communications news release of 27 April 2023 indicate a feasibility study on the possible relocation of SBS headquarters from Artarmon to Western Sydney;
- (4) calls on the Andrews Labor government to advocate:
 - (a) to the federal Albanese government to reverse their plan to relocate the SBS headquarters to Western Sydney; and
 - (b) for a Melbourne-based SBS headquarters and to facilitate the process of setting up a Melbourne location.

I am going to note that this contribution will be brief – I intend to finish in about 12 minutes – and others will make contributions at another sitting week opportunity. I am a supporter of SBS, and I want to indicate that I think it performs an important role in a multicultural society. Our community in Victoria is deeply multicultural. Whichever group you like to look at, the numbers have been growing over the recent period, and I think that SBS should reflect the diversity of Australia.

It is important to note that there are two government-funded national broadcasters. The ABC is a behemoth; it is a huge organisation with more than \$1.1 billion in annual spending. The SBS's spending is also significant, and the spending numbers as indicated in the annual report show that \$486 million was the 2021–22 spend, comprising \$310 million of Commonwealth money, \$19.5 million in expenses not requiring an appropriation and \$156.83 million in money that was from its own source revenue – advertising, in the case of the SBS.

The government through its recent budgets has indicated the growth pattern for both the ABC and SBS over the next four years. By 2026–27 the SBS will be a body that has \$532.2 million in annual spending, comprising \$364.82 million in government grants and \$167.39 million in own-source

revenue – that is the estimated spending of the SBS. SBS has obviously got radio. It has got the television networks. It has got very important links overseas. It has got those very important radio communications that pick up in particular the different multicultural groups in our community, and I pay tribute to the work of those broadcasters and their ability to maintain contact with their communities. The television networks pick up many of the multicultural news services from overseas and indeed a range of shows, including importantly on the SBS On Demand services. ABC's on-demand services, I note, now require you to put in your email details, making it less accessible, but I pay tribute to the fact that SBS has chosen not to do that. I think that is actually an important distinction. I am just laying out the terrain here, noting that the old radio service audiences are actually less than they were, but importantly, the on-demand services are greater.

I want to be quite clear here: Victorians pay about 25 per cent of the taxes in the country, and in terms of government-funded national broadcasters we get less than our share of money back – far, far less. In the case of the ABC, the disparity is huge – 50 per cent of the staff are in Sydney. In the case of SBS, 82 per cent of the staff are in Sydney and New South Wales. In the case of SBS, 14 per cent of the staff are in Victoria.

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: I am not defending Abbott or Morrison – any of that. I am actually a Victorian, and I am interested that we should get a fair share of these things. This is jobs, this is industry, this is producers, this is those who are able to commission shows and those who are able to produce shows. This is a whole sector, a whole industry, and it is hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars a year that we are being ripped off by government-funded national broadcasters. We pay 25 per cent of the tax and we get far less of the money back here to spend on our industry, our culture, our services, our producers, our TV people and our radio people. It goes on and on, including with networks and links into our important multicultural communities. One of my colleagues in the chamber asked, 'Why are you interested in this?' And I said, 'Because it's jobs. It's links to the multicultural communities. It's reflecting the diversity of our society.' I think the SBS has got a very important role, and I think it should be based here.

I note that at Federation Square they have recently cut a floor. They are actually contracting here, and at the same time the federal minister and the federal government are kicking around the idea of moving the SBS from Artarmon, in central Sydney, out to somewhere in western Sydney. Now, I bear no ill will to western Sydney. I say, 'Knock your socks off. Have a good time.' But I say that Victoria and Melbourne are a better alternative for the new SBS headquarters. I do not actually know anyone in the chamber who would disagree with my central contention. We pay the taxes. We want a fair share. This is about industry, it is about jobs, it is about multicultural communities. You have already got one government-funded national broadcaster in Sydney, and we want the other one. I reckon actually the Labor people, when I have talked about this, mostly fundamentally agree. They might point at this or point at that, but do they actually disagree that we should have more producers in Melbourne, more multicultural links in broadcasting in Melbourne? They all say yes, and so do most of the crossbench. I think that is for good reason – because it is actually our culture. Melbourne is now the biggest city in the country. Victoria is the most multicultural state. Why on earth would you not put the main multicultural broadcaster in Victoria? Why would you move it to a spot in Sydney, to a different location? The costs of moving – let us avoid that. If the Victorian government can do something to help – let us first of all send a signal, which is a non-partisan signal, a bipartisan signal, to Sydney, to Canberra, that we would be happy to host it here and we would be happy in a bipartisan way to actually do the work to make it happen.

If the government needed to sign planning instruments to put a new headquarters here, I do not reckon there is a lot of cost in that. If the government was to say, 'We are going to do some sort of deal' or whatever, that would have the support of the opposition. Let us think about how we can do this and get a better outcome and make sure that more of that long-term spending is pumped into the state of Victoria for our multicultural groups, whether they are the Greek community, the Italian community

or the African communities – I could go on. All of us in this chamber understand what I am talking about here. If we can have a better link, that is a strong point for all of us. I am not trying to be partisan here; I am trying to do the opposite. I am trying to say we are Victorians, all of us, first. Let us work on something like this together. Let us make sure that the multicultural communities are better reflected. Let us make sure that we do this as Victorians first, not missing the point that multicultural communities are actually building the strength of our state. Trung, you may say something about this, but certainly the Vietnamese community is very strong in this state. The Chinese community is very strong in this state. The Indian community is very strong. Why would we not draw on those links? Why would we not make sure that Victoria is properly represented here?

I have sent an unrequested submission to the relocation committee that has been put out, headed by Mike Mrdak AO. He is the chair of the SBS Relocation Feasibility Study Steering Committee, which has been put out by the federal minister. I welcome his work, but I do not want him to just look at western Sydney as an option. I want him to look in Victoria. Already Dandenong and Monash have said they would work with the government to do this. The city of Dandenong and the City of Monash, which are highly multicultural areas, have indicated that they would welcome the presence of SBS in Victoria, and I know that there are some northern suburbs that would also want some involvement or some role. I seriously think if we as a state turn our mind to this, we can actually put some constructive pressure on the federal government and say, 'Let's work on this. Let's get a fair outcome.' Victoria is the most multicultural state and Melbourne is the largest and fast becoming the most multicultural city in the country – why would we not have our national multicultural broadcaster here and build the jobs and industries and links that come with that? This is also about projecting Victoria internationally. There are actually two government-funded national broadcasters – you just cannot have both of them in Sydney. It is an absolute outrage. Again, this is not partisan; this is pointing the finger at my old Liberal colleagues but also pointing the finger at the Labor Party nationally too. We want our share here. We pay the taxes. We have got the multicultural community and all the advantages that brings, and more than that, it is the jobs and it is the links to the production sector, the television sector and the new media – all of that. That is what we should be focused on. We have got to look to industries in the future, and here is one where there is all of that government spending coming.

I looked at some rule-of-thumb figures on multipliers, and about 1.8 is the sort of multiplier that you can use as a rule of thumb. Think about the money that comes out of the state and then what is injected in spending. You obviously would not move everyone out of Sydney, because there is a genuine broadcasting need up there, but if you moved \$200 million or \$300 million out of Sydney into jobs here and decision-making and headquarters staff here, what would that mean? You can do the multiplication yourself: \$300 million or \$200 million annually moved to Melbourne with a multiplier of 1.8. This is not a one-off; this is annual in perpetuity. Why on earth would we not be doing that? I urge people to look at this sensibly and to look at this in a non-partisan way and to say, 'How can we advance things?' I urge you to support the motion.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Statements on tabled papers and petitions

Victorian Multicultural Commission

Report 2021–22

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:15): As disappointed as I am to see that lively debate on the very interesting topic of advocating to bring the SBS to Melbourne cut so short so soon, I do rise today to give a statement on the Victorian Multicultural Commission's annual report for 2021–22. In the spirit of the previous contribution and in the spirit of multiculturalism in Victoria, I do want to echo actually much of what Mr Davis just said about the wonderful multicultural state that we have here. I recall a few weeks ago that Mr Tarlamis and I and some of our colleagues from the western suburbs were meeting with a group of people who had come from overseas and who were finding out more about Victoria and about our Parliament. Our colleague from the west said, 'I come

from the west. We've got the most multicultural part of Australia,' and Mr Tarlamis and I said, 'No, no, no, the south-east is the most multicultural part of Australia.' It was a wonderful thing for us to be fighting over. I might just say, whilst I am sure we will get to the substance of Mr Davis's motion on another day, it is quite a strange experience to find myself agreeing in principle with what he has to say. So I look forward to the debate on SBS and how we can hopefully attract them to come down to what is of course the best state. No offence to the New South Wales government or people, but why would you want to be in Sydney? You would obviously want to be in Victoria, and being the multicultural capital of Australia, perhaps Dandenong should be the new site for the SBS. You are hearing it more and more – Dandenong.

But I would like to talk briefly about the wonderful work of the Victorian Multicultural Commission as well. I would also like to call out its esteemed chairperson Ms Viv Nguyen, along with her dedicated team of commissioners and other staff as well. We have had successes such as Cultural Diversity Week and the multicultural gala dinner, and these events simply would not be possible without their dedication, their hard work and their commitment to the liveliness, to the encouragement and to the celebration of our state's multicultural communities, bringing together from all around the world people from some 200 places of origin, I believe, who call Victoria home. It is a truly special thing that so many do call Victoria home.

As I just mentioned, in the south-east we are particularly privileged to have such a huge array of different cultures all coming together and all celebrating. I could probably spend the next few minutes just talking about all the many, many different events. We have had Tamil New Year events, we have had Ukrainian celebrations and we have had all sorts of other things as well. I had the absolute pleasure of representing the Minister for Multicultural Affairs Mr Colin Brooks at an LGBTIQ+ Islamic event at the Pride Centre a few weeks ago too. It is important to recognise that there are people from all walks of life who all want the same thing for themselves and their families and their friends, which is to be accepted and to be supported, and it was a real privilege to be a part of that event too. I am sure many other members here could go into great detail about the many, many different things that they have been touched by through their multicultural communities in their electorates, whether they are in the multicultural capital of the south-east or in regional centres – we certainly have significant populations there. I would like to acknowledge and congratulate the leadership team of the Victorian Multicultural Commission, particularly for their exceptional efforts with organising the recent Cultural Diversity Week. We have seen many other wonderful celebrations too.

I also do want to acknowledge that whilst there is much to celebrate, we have also seen a very small, very narrow section of the community try and rise up against that and stand for hate and intolerance. In fact we saw a few of them on the front steps of Parliament a few months ago, and I am sure that in this chamber we are all united in condemning that behaviour and we are all united in saying that is unacceptable. I would also say that there probably is a reason why we see them in Melbourne and we see them in Victoria, and that is because we are the multicultural capital of this country. This state is a celebration of what it means to be Victorian and what it means to be bringing your culture wherever you are from into this state and celebrating it as one as Victorians. It is a disgrace that some people see that and seek to stand against it and organise hideous rallies and whatever they were doing at a gym in Sunshine on the weekend, but the Victorian community will say no to that, has already very much said no to that and will always say no to that. That is one of the many reasons I am proud to be Victorian, because in this state we come from many different parts of the world but we stand as one.

Metropolitan and regional parks regulations

Petition

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:20): Yesterday I was proud to present e-petition 466, which draws the attention of the house to the Crown Land (Reserves) (Metropolitan and Regional Parks) Regulations 2023, which were finally published in the *Government Gazette* on Tuesday 27 June this year and commenced on that day. The petition was supported by 292 concerned Victorians, while

the associated change.org petition has so far garnered more than 5400 signatures. I particularly commend Shourya, who did so much to promote it and who with Chris is with us in the gallery today. If I may briefly restate the essence of the petition, it is this:

As drafted –

and now enacted –

these regulations prohibit bushwalking (regulation 407) and climbing (regulation 906) in –

the parks in question –

... by default. These activities will only be permitted in designated trails and areas specified by land managers. The regulations also include severe penalties for walking or climbing in non-designated areas. This creates problems for other activities such as swimming, orienteering, kayaking, geocaching, and foraging, which often require going off-trail. Trails may be poorly marked and maintained, and the regulations may discourage hikers from calling for help if lost, for fear of penalties, which puts their safety at risk. The proposed regulations would apply to more than 40 parks –

in Victoria –

including previously unregulated areas like Macedon Regional Park and Plenty Gorge Park. These parks are particularly valuable to the outdoor community in Victoria due to their proximity to the city. Each year hundreds of new climbers and hikers are introduced to the Australian outdoors through them. Under the ... regulations, access to these activities would only exist at the discretion of land managers with broad powers.

Before the election this government invited us to believe that any concern raised about these regulations was simply misinformation. They implied there is nothing to see here – that it is all just administrative action to renew expiring regulations and to tidy up and standardise rules across Victoria. Well, I am afraid that is a misleading simplification – misinformation, you might say. They may be correct that some of the bigger headlines about fishing and swimming in metropolitan parks were exaggerated, but these regulations still mark a significant change.

Firstly, as appendix A shows, many of these regional parks were not previously regulated at all. Secondly, the government contemptuously dismissed the suggestion of new fines, but as with our national parks, that is not what I am worried about. It is the reversing of the current presumption that Victorians can access and enjoy this Victorian land. They are not just restricting access to sensitive areas, they will stop access and then may choose to give us permits to enjoy specified parks. It is a trend we see in other places. Victoria has recently closed some of the best and most historic walking tracks in the Grampians, including Briggs Bluff, Dellys Dell, Mount Difficult and Mount Rosea.

Nicholas McGowan: You need a permit to go to the beach.

Bev McARTHUR: Absolutely. You cannot put your foot in the water, Mr McGowan. Wild camping and scrambling across rocks have also been banned. What can you do in this state any longer?

Nicholas McGowan: Stop breathing.

Bev McARTHUR: Stop breathing. These walks are in terrific condition, but their closure and the camping ban force tourists to the \$33 million Grampians Peaks Trail at a cost of nearly \$50 a night.

There is nothing free in this state, not even your park. This is the same instinct we see in the regulations this petition opposes. It feels less like genuine environmental need than a reduction of the park's management needs and a direction of visitors towards government-controlled and money-making options. Worse still, the approach is built on a virtue-signalling oversensitivity to cultural and ecological concerns at the expense of everything else and a total disregard for individual freedom and any form of traditional historical pursuit. I have recently been campaigning against the fundamental change in Parks Victoria's approach to national parks access, which has moved away from a default position of open at all times to all Victorians, subject to reasonable limited environmental restrictions

in sensitive areas, to a situation of ‘We only allow access at our discretion by specific permission for certain purposes.’ (*Time expired*)

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission

Operation Sandon: Special Report

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (17:26): I rise to speak on IBAC’s special report on Operation Sandon that was tabled last Thursday 27 July. Operation Sandon was a five-year investigation that exposed widespread corruption between lobbyists and councillors at the City of Casey to influence decisions made on planning approvals that would result in lucrative profits for property developers. Operation Sandon also exposed how lobbyists showered almost \$1 million on Victorian members of Parliament and state candidates and Labor and Liberal Party associated entities to obtain privileged access to ministers and even the Premier to try and influence their decision-making.

While it is important that proportionate blame for the behaviour that was uncovered by IBAC is directed at those who acted corruptly and without integrity, we must also, like IBAC does, look at the governance and integrity systems that allow this kind of behaviour to occur. Here blame is squarely pointed at the Andrews Labor government. Operation Sandon did not just expose the disturbing cosy relationships between these sleazy, venal property developers and government ministers, it once again also highlighted that this government has done nothing in almost a decade to implement the most basic integrity measures that could help to prevent corruption. Guess what, when you do nothing to prevent political corruption, political corruption is inevitable and utterly predictable.

Because the Andrews government failed to ban property developers from giving politicians donations, as recommended by the Ombudsman in 2015, property developers continue to use donations to corrupt politicians. Because Labor has the weakest lobbying laws in the nation, ex-ministers are directly appointed to public boards by their former colleagues, where they are allowed to simultaneously work as lobbyists for property developers and, in one instance, corruptly use these positions to help get their daughters elected to state government. Who would have guessed that preventing corruption involves strengthening integrity laws to prevent corruption? Not this Labor government, apparently.

So once again, we need these basic reforms. We need to make ministerial diaries public. We need to legislate codes of conduct for ministers, advisers and lobbyists, with real penalties for misconduct. We need to implement spending caps for election campaigns. We need to apply the state’s donation cap laws to local governments, and we need to broaden the jurisdiction of the anti-corruption commission. These are not radical proposals; they already apply in other jurisdictions and have done so for many years. Moreover, these are essential reforms if the most controversial recommendation of Operation Sandon, the removal of planning powers from councils, is implemented, because we know from countless IBAC reports into state government that removing planning powers from councils without strengthening the state’s integrity laws will just shift even more corruption to state government MPs and ministers than there is already.

Most of us must not lose sight that whatever planning reforms result from this report, they will not be the solution to our housing crisis on their own. Removing planning powers from councils and centralising them within the state government will do little to address the housing affordability crisis and will only funnel even more profits to developers unless this government commits to major housing reform at the same time. This government must reverse its record selling off of public housing and legislate minimum requirements for the building of public and affordable homes by property developers. The Greens want 50 per cent of new homes built, if these special powers are brought in, to be public and affordable homes. That is how we fix the housing crisis, and we must address our integrity and corruption issues that are plaguing Victoria right now.

Environment and Planning Committee*Inquiry into Renewable Energy in Victoria*

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (17:29): I rise to speak on the Victorian government's response to the Environment and Planning Committee's report on the inquiry into renewable energy in Victoria, and in doing so I would like to note the nation-leading work that the Andrews Labor government is doing to cement Victoria's position as a world-class renewable energy powerhouse. When the EPC's final report on the inquiry into renewable energy in Victoria was handed down in the last term of Parliament, it highlighted one key thing: that when it comes to transitioning to renewable energy, the Andrews Labor government is delivering.

Since coming to government we have not wasted a moment in getting on with the task of securing a clean, green future for generations to come. We have set ambitious renewable energy targets of 65 per cent by 2023 and 95 per cent by 2035. We are set to be decarbonising at one of the fastest rates in the world, with our world-leading emissions reduction target of 75 to 80 per cent by 2035 and net zero by 2045. We have invested \$1.6 billion into clean energy, the largest investment of any state ever, and committed to bringing back government-owned energy with the SEC, which will cut the cost of household electricity bills, create thousands of jobs and help maximise the potential of Victoria's transition to renewable energy. The government's response to the EPC inquiry into renewables is just further proof that we are not just talking about combating climate change, we are actually getting on with delivering.

I would like to bring your attention to just one of the many aspects of this report that we are taking action on: assisting households in the transition away from gas. The gas sector contributes around 17 per cent of Victoria's net greenhouse gas emissions, so electrifying households and businesses across the state is an important step on the road to meeting our emissions reduction targets. In 2022 the Andrews Labor government released its gas substitution road map – and I was delighted to be at that event – the first road map of its kind in the nation, which details how we will use energy efficiency, electrification, hydrogen and biogas to cut carbon emissions and save Victorians money on household bills while doing it. In fact going all-electric can save new home owners around \$1000 per year, or over \$2200 with solar installed, while converting to an all-electric home can save households \$1250 a year, with a further \$950 in savings if you have an existing solar system.

We are also making sure that all Victorians, including low-income and disadvantaged energy users, can make the transition away from gas, which was a key direction of the gas substitution road map and one of the recommendations made in the EPC's initial report. Through the Big Housing Build we are ensuring that all new social and affordable housing units are energy-efficient, with all-electric specifications pursued where possible. Our energy efficiency in social housing program is also upgrading major gas appliances in 35,000 social housing properties to energy-efficient electric alternatives. This work is supported by the Victorian energy upgrades program, which offers up-front incentives for households and businesses looking to reduce their gas use by installing new equipment, like energy-efficient electric water heaters, to support their energy transition.

All of this is of course underpinned by our recent announcement that from 1 January 2024 gas connections to new homes will be banned. This means that all new public buildings, like schools and hospitals, as well as new homes and residential subdivisions, including public and social housing, will only connect to an all-electric network, making cooking and turning the heat on not only more affordable but also better for the planet.

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the incredible powerhouse of work that the Honourable Lily D'Ambrosio, the Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission and Minister for Climate Action in the other place, has put into positioning Victoria as leaders in climate action. As Minister D'Ambrosio notes in the report response, 'addressing climate change is a collective endeavour', but the significant strides Victoria has made in the fight for climate justice could not have been possible without her leadership, so I would like to acknowledge that.

We of course hear a lot of talk in this place about climate change, but only the Andrews Labor government is walking the talk when it comes to real climate action and building a better, healthier planet for future generations to enjoy.

Department of Treasury and Finance

Budget papers 2023–24

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:34): I rise to speak on the state budget for this year, which raises of course all the funding for flood recovery, and in particular I want to talk about the town of Rochester. I was the guest speaker at the Rochester community breakfast on 20 July, and there were three key points that the Rochester community kept raising at that breakfast. One was the storage levels at Lake Eppalock, which I will come back to later because that was their main point. The second was housing and the need for housing in the town, and the third was their financial counselling, which is provided through Anglicare but whose funding is due to expire in November of this year.

Now, I have had a telephone conversation with the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and I have emailed him all of the details about this. I have not heard back yet, but I am hopeful that when he has been given the information he will see the need to continue financial counselling in this town. So far Anglicare, which is funded to provide two financial counsellors, has assisted 158 families. 114 of those cases are still ongoing. There were around 30 families – this was on 20 July of course – on a waiting list to be allocated a caseworker, seven of which had only come in in that past 24 hours, and the waiting time to actually be allocated a caseworker was nine weeks. As I said, they were only funded for two financial counsellors, which is causing these backlogs in work. But I know that from the work that the financial counsellors are doing nine families received a combined total of \$500,000 in additional insurance payments due to the work of the financial counsellors, so I would urge the government to continue that work. Anglicare tell me that they really need to be funded for up to three years. They have provided financial counselling after all of the major bushfires and other events in this state for some time, and they say that that counselling is needed for three years.

Housing is a big issue in Rochester, not only for home owners but also for renters. Of course the government are providing caravans for those who are rebuilding on their own block, and while they are a solution, I would hate to be living in a caravan in the winter that we have just had – it is very, very cold. We need to see some of the money that has been allocated to the Commonwealth Games actually go to some of these really badly flood-affected communities like Rochester and Mooroopna to rebuild housing in those communities, because not only do we need the home owners to rebuild, we need a rental market as well and rental opportunities so that we can bring workers to this town.

The biggest issue that they raised at this meeting was the storage levels at Lake Eppalock. Of course Minister Shing had been in Rochester just the day before and had had a community meeting, and this is why it was the biggest issue at the community breakfast, because the town were very disappointed in that meeting. A newspaper article that talks about my visit, which is headed ‘Lovell brings home bacon at “hearty” breakfast’, actually says:

While Mrs Lovell’s presence was celebrated, the visit of Victorian Water Minister Harriet Shing a day earlier didn’t receive the same celebration – her inability to act on the Lake Eppalock storage status falling flat with those at the breakfast.

And it did fall flat. In fact the community really feel that there has been no listening to them, and Sharon Williams, who is a member of the Rochester Flood Mitigation Committee, said she came out of that meeting feeling gutted. She said the community felt they had been slapped down. They felt that Ms Shing had slapped down the delegation of residents, telling them that they live on a flood plain and they need to build resilience. Other members said to me she told them that they live on a flood plain and they should expect to be flooded. These are only things that I am repeating from what I have been told, but this is a huge issue in the town.

Lake Eppalock today is at 100.65 per cent. Last year at this time it was at 49.46 per cent. The residents are only asking that Lake Eppalock be dropped to 90 per cent just to provide some airspace in case there is another major flood event or another major rain event. As I said, this time last year it was at 49.46 per cent, and we still see the damage that was done in that community by that flood. This year, at 100.65 per cent, if we were to have a major rain event, Rochester would be washed away.

Holmesglen Institute

Report 2022

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:39): Tonight I rise to speak to the annual report for the Holmesglen TAFE for the year 2022. Why does this report matter? Because education matters. Labor's Gough Whitlam and Labor's legacy for education reforms have shaped generations of Australians and empowered individuals to reach their full potential. By emphasising the importance of education Labor and Whitlam transformed the lives of countless individuals and contributed to the social and economic progress of Australia. By promoting equity in education we laid the foundation for a more inclusive and prosperous Australia, leaving a legacy that continues to benefit generations to come. We know that the pandemic caused severe economic disruption, and TAFE institutes have allowed us to bounce back and drive economic development.

Holmesglen's success ensures the provision of quality education, drives economic development, fosters research and innovation and facilitates global collaboration. TAFE institutions serve as crucial pillars of society, nurturing talent, creating knowledge and shaping the future. It helps us navigate life and contribute to society. It opens doors to being employed, and the flow-on benefits are immense.

In 2022 Holmesglen was successful in delivering excellence in education and applied research, helping students to succeed in their careers and contribute to society. It provides high-quality vocational education and training and higher education programs which benefit Victorian industries and fill key roles in our community. Its success can be attributed to its three-year strategic plan, with 2022 representing the midpoint of its implementation. Its strategy consists of six key areas: (1) a strong service delivery model; (2) industry and employer engagement; (3) excellence in teaching and learning; (4) distinctiveness in the delivery of programs; (5) organisational development; and (6) providing the technology for tomorrow.

Consider the partnership with Northwestern Polytechnic in Alberta, Canada, which has developed a collaborative online international learning program – a world first – in nursing, or its extensive list of courses and educational programs, where students have gone on to achieve various awards, including the apprentice of the year awards, the Premier's award and international education and higher education awards.

The school community and enrolment figures showcase the trust that so many in my community place in the team. In 2022 they enrolled over 18,000 learners in their senior secondary certificates, vocational programs and higher education degrees. They also enrolled over 7000 learners in skill sets and non-award programs assisting with foundational and specific work-related skills. And it played a vital role in enhancing productivity, competitiveness and sustainable growth within economies. Here are a few examples. They have introduced the Play Like a Girl sports degrees, which are dedicated to the empowerment of girls and women in sport. Their employment centre combines the Victorian government funded Skills First and free TAFE programs, skills and job centre services and the Reconnect program. They have fostered industry collaboration and innovation by launching new partnerships with Chadstone shopping centre and the Professional Golfers Association. One thing I am particularly proud of is the Holmesglen Foundation, which has distributed \$849,500 for scholarships and grants, awarding 100 scholarships and grants. I commend their dedication to inclusivity and diversity.

The annual report refers to their gender equality action plan, which was approved by the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector. Its workforce is committed to the principles and practices of

equal employment opportunity, and it recruits the most qualified, experienced and capable employees through a transparent and merit-based selection process. By fostering an inclusive environment from the top down, Holmesglen empowers students to unleash their full potential and contribute meaningfully to our society. I am proud that my community is so well serviced by one of Australia's largest TAFE institutes, with a proud 40-year history in supporting our learners, business partners and communities.

I commend the Andrews Labor government for investing in exceptional education, training and applied research, and for backing Holmesglen all the way. It is an institution that continues to evolve and adapt to the changing needs of the workforce, ensuring that graduates are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary for success. I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Holmesglen, its staff and its students for their exceptional achievements. Let us continue to support and invest in this invaluable institution that plays a vital role in shaping our community's future and driving economic development for a prosperous Australia. I invite the Minister for Higher Education, Minister Tierney, with my colleague in the other place the member for Ashwood Matt Fregon to visit the Holmesglen campus and thank the staff for their incredible work. I am truly proud to be a member of a government that supports higher education.

Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee

Review of the Pandemic (Quarantine, Isolation and Testing) Orders

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:44): I rise to speak this afternoon on the report *Review of the Pandemic (Quarantine, Isolation and Testing) Orders*. The report was undertaken by the Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee, of which I was a member. The report was handed down in July 2022, and today we received a response from the government, which is a couple of paragraphs. It does not say anything about the work that the committee did on it. I want to acknowledge those committee members who did this work, because it was important work.

I mean, we seem to have forgotten what went on just a few years ago with the pandemic and what happened here in Victoria: the incredible restrictions that we were all placed under, the longest lockdowns of anywhere in the world and the harshest of restrictions in Victoria, with the worst outcomes. We have had the worst outcomes in terms of the number of people who have died, and we have had some very difficult implications as a result of the decisions made by the government, including school closures – we know that children were impacted very, very significantly.

The Liberals and Nationals wrote a minority report at the time of this report. In that report we said we were of the view that there was an inconsistent approach from the Andrews government regarding the management of COVID-19. I think as time has gone on, with more and more coming out, we know that to be the case. We actually never did get the truth. We actually never did get the health advice that was provided – we know that now, and that is coming out. That is why I think it is incredibly disappointing that the government's response to this work undertaken by the committee has just been very flippantly regarded.

Now, the committee as a whole did have a number of findings and recommendations around the evidence that we received and the information that was provided to the committee. The minority report that we did had a total of 26 recommendations. Those recommendations were very thorough in trying to determine and understand exactly what we need to do around managing such a situation. I think it is extraordinary that the government's only response to this report is this: thanking the committee – that takes up one paragraph; there are some other things around the Independent Pandemic Management and Accountability Committee and the communications; and also talking about the act. But there is one line from the government about this report, and it says:

Many of the findings and recommendations from the review will be taken into account in future pandemic preparedness planning.

That is it. That is extraordinary. We were underprepared when we came into COVID, and they have learned nothing – this government have learned nothing. The despair and extraordinary impacts that their decisions have had on Victorians will not be forgotten – they are very, very significant – and that is all the government have to say about the work undertaken at a time that caused so much heartache, so much dislocation and so many problems for so many people.

I certainly will not forget the many people that I had to deal with and the tragic, sad, frustrating and extraordinary circumstances that they found themselves in. I will not forget that and they will not forget that, but this government want to forget everything about their management of COVID-19. Victorians know that there was mismanagement; they know that there was not the health advice provided that we all expected and deserved. Quite frankly, the flippant disregard for the work undertaken by the committee shows just how the government treated the entire pandemic. They actually did not care about the welfare of Victorians.

Adjournment

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (17:49): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Boroondara road safety

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:49): (345) My adjournment is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in the other place, Minister Horne, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me in the City of Boroondara and inform my community on what the Andrews Labor government is doing to help drive down pedestrian and road trauma in their neighbourhood. I was proud to recently announce the Victorian government is investing \$100,000 in the City of Stonnington to help drive down pedestrian and road trauma. It is part of a package of community road safety grants in Victoria which provide up to \$1.5 million in funding to empower local communities to prevent injuries and save lives. The pedestrian innovation grant will allow applicants to seek funding for programs that innovate road safety strategies, education and more and has a focus on pedestrian behaviour and pedestrian behaviour strategies. While other grants and initiatives focus on infrastructure programs, these grants will focus on the mechanisms that are used to support our road safety infrastructure. Whether it be behavioural change strategies, educational programs or behavioural economics, there are many initiatives that local councils in Victoria can apply under, and I encourage them to do so.

We know that despite being only one-fifth of the population, Victorians over the age of 60 make up half of all pedestrian fatalities and one-third of serious injuries each year – and I do not accept this. As a former branch secretary of the Transport Workers Union Vic/Tas branch, I have dedicated my life to road safety, and I know that only through a holistic, multifaceted approach to road safety can we cut the number of lives lost and serious injuries on our roads and make our community safer. I encourage local councils in Victoria to focus on crafting innovative strategies to protect our elderly population.

The other focus of the pedestrian innovation grant is making urbanised spaces for pedestrians. The Stonnington council's trial of the pedestrian innovations grant is another way we are tackling road safety for vulnerable road users, and for those reasons I would love to see similar measures implemented by Stonnington's northern neighbour the City of Boroondara. I look forward to welcoming Minister Horne to the other side of town soon to have the important conversation on lowering the rate of road trauma in the City of Boroondara.

Commonwealth Games

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (17:51): (346) My adjournment is directed towards the Minister for Regional Development. I am seeking an explanation on the Commonwealth Games debacle, and I am glad this house has agreed to establishing a select committee so we can look

into the shocking incompetence that caused the government's decision to cancel the Commonwealth Games. This has trashed our reputation on the world stage. When the government announced this decision I was actually in Italy in a small town called Lamezia Terme, in Calabria, visiting some family there. My zio switched on the TV and there was a news presenter reading in Italian about the shocking decision to cancel the Commonwealth Games. And then all of a sudden I saw Mr Andrews, Jacinta Allan and Ms Shing as well speaking on the decision to cancel the Commonwealth Games. Far from running a games like no other, this government has turned Victoria into a global laughing-stock.

The mishandling of this games has left heartbroken many athletes, coaches and families, especially in the north, who were training hard and looking forward to the prospect of competing in front of a home crowd. One promising talent in my electorate is Wallan's Mitchel Langborne, who recently represented Australia in the 800-metre running competition in the European tour in July and placed second in the final. Bruce McAvaney, who we all know – the legendary sports broadcaster – said it was embarrassing for Victoria. The AOC called the cancellation 'a blow' to the ambition of athletes and to the participation in sports of future generations. The chief executive of the Commonwealth Games Federation called it 'absolutely embarrassing'. It is extraordinary that we are in this place today discussing this matter when it was only last sitting week that Ms Shing, sitting across from us, was breathlessly selling the virtues of the Commonwealth Games. She said:

We know that wherever our Commonwealth Games have been had around the globe we see around about a \$3 billion return on investment ...

which would deliver around 7500 jobs. We have talked about the legacy, but the return, one would conclude, is lost.

Only to top Ms Shing's incompetence would be that of the now sacked former Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery Jacinta Allan, who we know is responsible for about \$30 billion in infrastructure project blowouts. According to media reports, one Labor MP described Jacinta Allan as the Minister for Fyre Festival, which I think is an unfair characterisation – at least Fyre Festival had one band playing before it was cancelled. That is what Labor MPs are briefing out. Perhaps it was a fan of Mr Ben Carroll in the other place, perhaps it was Mr Galea or perhaps it was even Mr Erdogan who said that. I seek for the minister to come forth about what she knew and when she knew it. And when she was speaking to this Parliament just last sitting week, did she know about the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games and did she mislead the Parliament?

Modern slavery

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:54): (347) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General Minister Symes. In Australia today tens of thousands of people are experiencing modern slavery. These exploitative practices cruelly and unjustly undermine personal freedoms. They can include human trafficking, slavery, forced labour and child labour. We do have a national action plan for a federal modern slavery act to address modern slavery in a global supply chain; however, there is more work to be done. In Melbourne just last year a healthcare worker raised the alarm to authorities after noticing a woman was showing signs of human trafficking. This action resulted in a couple being charged with modern-day slavery offences. Clearly it is still an issue in Victoria.

Other states have taken steps to strengthen their legislation in this area, particularly with respect to expanding reporting options and supports. For example, in New South Wales they introduced their own modern slavery act. This act establishes an anti-slavery commissioner and reporting obligations for certain commercial organisations, bans goods linked to modern slavery in procurement processes involving government agencies, equips healthcare workers to report modern slavery incidents and establishes a hotline dedicated to collecting reports of incidents. Advocates have encouraged other Australian jurisdictions to adopt similar measures.

The action I seek is that the Attorney-General take a more proactive approach to help prevent modern slavery; consider whether we can improve measures to identify and support survivors and help

community members report modern slavery incidents; and consider introducing our own anti-slavery commissioner.

Gambling regulation

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (17:56): (348) My adjournment is for the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, and I am seeking an update on the recently announced gaming reforms, particularly as they will apply to gaming venues in my electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region. Australia's strongest gambling harm reforms are happening right here, right now in Victoria. An estimated 300,000 Victorians experience harm as a result of gambling each year, leading to significant financial distress, mental health concerns and relationship issues. Harm minimisation is a key part of addressing gambling-related harm, and that is exactly what the Andrews Labor government are doing with our recently announced gambling reforms. Under this reform package all electronic gaming machines will require mandatory carded play and patrons will have to precommit to set the amount for their loss limits. This will also ensure that money in these venues is tracked, stopping the practice of money laundering through our gaming venues. We are going to limit how much can be inserted into a machine, taking it from \$1000 to \$100 at a time. This will support people who use electronic gaming machines to make informed decisions about their spending and reduce the amount that can be lost.

We know that some venues are taking advantage of the current rules to stagger their opening hours to provide 24-hour access to gambling in venues right across our suburbs. That is causing untold harm and damage to too many vulnerable members of our community, so we are going to act to stop this practice, making it compulsory for all pubs and clubs to close their gaming machine areas between 4 am and 10 am by mid-2024.

The government is also making it mandatory for all new gaming machines to spin at a rate of 3 seconds per game, slowing the pace of gaming and further limiting the amount that can be lost. Limiting losses is an important part of this harm minimisation strategy. It is very important in my part of the world. We know in the City of Glen Eira, for example, there are more than 650 poker machines and members of the community lost more than \$70 million on these machines in the last financial year. These reforms we have announced are going to reduce these losses. The approach is based on the evidence and centred on people who are suffering from gambling-related harms, and we know that these changes will help them.

Cost of living

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:59): (349) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Treasurer, and the action I seek is for the government to address the current cost-of-living crisis, provide assistance to struggling Victorians and address the structural issues that led to this crisis. It is no secret that we are in a cost-of-living crisis. I am certain every member of this place has spoken to their constituents who are struggling and begging for help. We in this place have the privilege to not be financially affected by this crisis. We must not forget this privilege was given to us by the people. We have a responsibility to help Victorians, as the people with the power to do so, and we need to be doing more.

Last week I sat down and decided to take a look at the grocery prices from a major supermarket from 2019 as opposed to 2023, with the knowledge that this supermarket chain recorded millions of dollars in net profit in the last year. I put together what I would view as a standard Aussie basket – you know, the ingredients for a spaghetti bolognese and sandwiches, yoghurt, fruit, milk, tuna, rice, 2-minute noodles et cetera – essentially the basic items that you would need to feed someone for a few days. I tell you: that basket was almost 40 per cent more expensive in 2023 than it was in 2019 for the exact same items and brands, 40 per cent more expensive, because whilst national ABS data says groceries overall have increased by 9.6 per cent, that does not take into account the massive increases on items more commonly found in everyday baskets. A survey completed by the *Guardian* just last week found that 72 per cent of people are reducing the amount of food they buy due to the cost. Foodbank are

reporting more people than ever are accessing Foodbank services for the first time. Victorians are skipping food or accessing food banks due to cost, whilst the supermarket chains report record profits.

Groceries are just one singular problem out of many that are making up this cost-of-living crisis – a result of years of policy failure from many governments, state and federal, that have ignored monopolisation and corporate profiteering and a result of rampant neoliberalism that has allowed essential services to act in the interests of their profit margin instead of for the consumer. That neoliberalism has seen the systematic dismantling of public services and of nationalised essential industries, allowing them to fall into disrepair to excuse them being sold off to the highest bidder at the cost of the people who we are supposed to represent. Where is the line? How broken do things have to be before you take genuine action?

Safer Care Victoria

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:02): (350) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and it relates to the Safer Care Victoria sentinel events annual report 2021–22. This report has not been released to date. It is 17 months overdue. The last report, for 2020–21, was released in March of last year. The data in these reports are incredibly important. They talk about adverse events that have occurred to patients, and we need that data to understand how the system is operating and what needs to be improved, and to understand the issues within our health services, such as hospitals and the ambulance services. This is critical information that comes to the department. The department has that. They have a report, and we need to see that report. We need to understand, as I said, where the system has failed patients and how adverse outcomes can be prevented in the future.

Victorians, I think, expect timely data to be released, but we know this government has a history of secrecy. I have just been checking, and the latest data on elective surgery waitlists and ambulance response times is now well overdue. It was for the last quarter, 30 June, and it is now 2 August. So we need that information as well. It is critical that we have that in the interests of transparency and the interests of all Victorians. The action I seek is that the minister release this report so that we can understand exactly what is going on within our hospitals and health services around sentinel events.

Dental services

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (18:04): (351) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and the action I am seeking is that she acknowledge the health impacts of being unable to afford timely dental care and take action to reduce public dental wait times across all of Victoria. Next week is Dental Health Week, an important time to take stock of an area of health care that is seriously neglected. Unfortunately we have a legacy in this country of separating dental health care from our broader public health care system, and that has devastating effects on people's health.

Dental health is inextricably linked with bodily health, because our teeth are actually part of our body. Not only does poor oral health immediately impact eating, speech, self-esteem, education and employment opportunities, dental disease is also associated with a host of medical conditions, including infections, stroke, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, adverse pregnancy outcomes, neurodegenerative conditions, inflammatory bowel disease and respiratory conditions, and with wait times for public dental care sometimes reaching in excess of three years in some parts of the state, people are being forced into emergency services, placing extra burden on our already stretched hospitals. In 2021 there were over 17,000 potentially preventable hospitalisations in Victoria due to dental conditions – that is 17,000 hospitalisations that would likely not have occurred if people had access to timely and affordable dental care.

An interim report from the Greens-led federal Senate inquiry into access to dental care in Australia outlines the findings of a nationwide community survey. This survey received the largest amount of responses to a committee survey in our nation's history. The interim report demonstrates that the biggest barrier to access is cost – people simply cannot afford to go to the dentist. Victoria has public

dental services, but eligibility for these is highly restricted and wait times are significant, with many people waiting years to access basic care. Victoria has the second-highest waiting list in the country.

At the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee this year the Minister for Health made assurances that dental health wait times had been reduced to 14.8 months on average. The improvement was largely attributable to a one-off voucher scheme designed to deal with COVID waiting list blowouts. Freedom-of-information data has shown that this statewide average masks marked regional variation – your postcode still determines whether you will have to wait years to access public dental care. For example, the average wait time as of June was 44.7 months in Richmond and 38.1 months in Warrnambool.

Like other areas of health, investing in prevention is critical to avoiding the need for emergency care or the development of chronic disease, yet accessing routine preventative dental health care is just too expensive for too many people, and a significant proportion of our community can only seek dental care in emergency situations. This needs to change.

Energy policy

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (18:07): (352) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources and concerns the recently announced ban on gas connections to new homes and government buildings due to start next year. I have a huge number of questions on this, so in no particular order, here we go.

How will the ban reduce emissions when the majority of electricity is still generated by burning Victorian brown coal? Using electricity in Victoria is currently five times more carbon intensive than using gas in our homes. Now, you need to listen to this, you Greens over there. Reducing energy supply options will increase prices. How will those on low incomes – these are your people – cope with higher prices? Were the economics surrounding the claim it will bring lower prices produced by the same consultants who costed the Commonwealth Games fiasco? I bet they were. Residential electricity in Victoria is currently more than two times as expensive as gas on a per unit of energy basis. Do you get that? Why are we happy to export natural gas for others to use but deny it to ourselves? Talk about punishing our own people. Finally – and the main focus of my request this evening – what will be the impact on commercial and industrial gas users? If you give them an inch, they will take a mile, these people.

Despite the fraction of overall Victorian CO₂ emissions arising from domestic gas heating, the government has seen fit to ban it. What does this say to our businesses, I ask you, to manufacturing and to agriculture, which rely for essential processes on gas and simply cannot begin to viably replace it with electrical energy? I know you do not like milk, you people over there – oh, no, Georgie is not here – but we need the gas to process the milk powder, team. If you want more houses, we need the gas to kiln-dry the timber – even the farmed timber, not even old-growth forest. How long until a further expansion is banned? First, I am sure it will be new connections for industrial and commercial users – they will be stopped – and how long after that will the replacement be curtailed? Then an ultimate moratorium; these people love moratoriums. It might seem fanciful, but I can tell you it is not to businesses who are considering investing considerable capital. They need absolute guarantees. So, Minister, the action I seek is an absolute guarantee that you will not at any stage in the future ban the industrial and commercial use of gas. Nothing else will so quickly stop investment drying up and Victoria becoming an agricultural and manufacturing wilderness.

Department of Transport and Planning

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (18:10): (353) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. The Transport Integration Act 2010 requires the

Department of Transport and Planning to prepare and periodically revise an integrated transport plan for Victoria. In 2021 the Auditor-General found that the department:

... have not ... demonstrably integrated transport planning and are yet to meet the Act's requirements for the transport plan.

In fact the Auditor-General found that there are 40 separate plans and strategies, and despite what the department argued, the Auditor-General found that these plans and strategies do not together constitute an integrated transport plan for Victoria. Secondly, another of the Auditor-General's recommendations seems very sensible and a reasonable accountability measure. They ask that the department establish completion time lines for all outstanding priority transport plans and start tracking progress against them.

My adjournment is to the minister. I ask that you fulfil these statutory requirements and produce Victoria's integrated transport plan to provide direction to the department and ask it to fully accept the Auditor-General's recommendation to establish completion time lines for all outstanding priority transport plans and start tracking progress against them.

Remembrance Parks Central Victoria

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (18:12): (354) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Health. The action that I seek from the minister is for her to immediately remove the current board of the Remembrance Parks Central Victoria trust and replace it with a more compassionate and considerate board and ensure that any new board members also include representatives who live in Greater Shepparton to give Shepparton families of loved ones interred at either Pine Lodge or Kialla West cemeteries a voice. Poor management and cruel policies implemented by the RPCV board have had a devastating impact on my constituents who have laid their departed loved ones to rest in our RPCV-run cemeteries. My continued calls for the minister to replace the current RPCV board with a more compassionate board are a direct result of the disgraceful treatment of grieving families by the RPCV trust board under the leadership of chair Marg Lewis, a former Labor MP. With Mrs Lewis at the helm, RPCV has had a chequered past, with several failures of governance raising anger within impacted families and the public.

Firstly, in 2022 RPCV attempted to raise the cost of burials by approximately 300 per cent, and this exorbitant increase was only thwarted by a vigorous backlash from funeral directors and the community. Then without any warning or consultation with families RPCV desecrated graves by removing cherished family mementos and memorials. This action by the trust caused unimaginable pain to grieving families and caused the resignation of the then CEO.

RPCV's annual general meetings have been held up to six months late, despite legislation requiring them to be held by 30 December each year. Worse still, no record can be found of the 2021 annual meeting even being held. I have concerns of possible financial mismanagement by RPCV, with contradictions contained in the 2021–22 annual report regarding \$543,000 in cash received from Greater Shepparton City Council. The operating statement on page 25 of the report states this cash had been added to RPCV's perpetual maintenance reserve. However, the balance sheet and changes in equity statement reveal that no money has been transferred in or out of the reserve since the 2019–20 financial year.

Only two weeks ago I was contacted by numerous families of loved ones who were laid to rest at Pine Lodge Cemetery conveying their devastation at RPCV's decision to change the style of headstone design for new gravesites at the cemetery – again made without any consultation or notification to families in the Greater Shepparton community. It is time the RPCV board included representatives from Greater Shepparton, and I call on the minister to act immediately to make this happen.

Public housing

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (18:15): (355) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing, and my ask is that the Victorian Labor government stops privatising public housing and builds 100,000 public homes within the next 10 years. In just six days Margaret Kelly, the last remaining resident of the Barak Beacon public housing estate in Port Melbourne, will be forcibly evicted from her home by this Labor government. Barak Beacon is one of the precious public housing communities in Victoria which are about to be destroyed and privatised by the Victorian Labor government. Margaret has been waging a courageous fight against the privatisation of her home and the destruction of her community. She is being supported by community members, many of whom are young people currently at the forefront of the dire housing crisis engulfing the country and who know that public housing is a precious public asset that should be protected. But this government have forgotten that fact, because the truth is that despite the way they try to hide it behind glossy websites and terms like ‘redevelopment’ or ‘social housing’, this government want nothing to do with public housing, and they are in a hurry to get rid of their stock and their responsibility.

Estates like Barak Beacon are set to be carved up, with approximately two-thirds of each handed over to private developers for expensive housing. The remaining land will be handed to community housing providers. No public housing will be rebuilt at Barak Beacon or any of the sites that they are privatising and demolishing, and the model hands developers large profits, with taxpayers footing a bill of almost \$500 million over the next 40 years via direct payments from the government to these private companies. Privatising these four estates alone will cost over \$700 million for just an extra 52 community homes, coming to a figure of nearly \$1.3 million per community home. This neoliberal experiment this government likes to call the Big Housing Build will only facilitate some community housing and a majority of for-profit housing and result in the destruction of hundreds of public homes.

At one time good governments saw it as their responsibility to make sure their citizens could access safe, secure and affordable housing. To achieve this vision those governments built public housing, the most direct and effective way of making housing affordable. If we are to build the thousands more public homes we desperately need now, we need land to build them on and to not hand the only public land we have to private developers. When governments stop building public housing they give up on making housing affordable. More public homes means less people pushed into homelessness and less people needing to compete in the private rental market. It puts downward pressure on housing costs and makes housing more affordable. It is the most straightforward and most effective solution to our housing crisis. I ask the Minister for Housing to stop the Victorian Labor government’s privatisation of public housing and build 100,000 homes – public homes – over the next 10 years.

Ballarat train station

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (18:18): (356) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, who up until recently was the Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery – or probably more accurately, non-delivery. The action that I seek is that the government commits to funding the train platform opposite Mars Stadium in Ballarat. Through the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee budget hearings we discovered that the events platform could not be built because of ‘a factor of time’, given the Commonwealth Games were due in 2026. Lo and behold, that very same minister cancelled the games and trashed the reputation of Victoria in the process.

Given that there is now no factor of time for this project, what possible excuse could we have for the non-delivery? Domino’s Pizza deliver better and more efficiently than this government does. They are on time and on budget, and they even give you a receipt. You can even track the progress of your order with a little map. Wouldn’t it be great if this government had some way of tracking your order as well? Wouldn’t it just be great? But no, we cannot have that, because it might shine a light a little bit too much on the complete mismanagement and incompetence that we have seen in the Commonwealth Games debacle.

Honestly, the only excuse not to build the platform is that Victoria has run out of money. And what happens when Victoria runs out of money? Things get cancelled. It is absolutely shameful that my community of Ballarat continues to be ignored. A train platform would not only help improve public transport and prevent congestion but would help support major events, including AFL games and live music.

On Tuesday 4 July I was joined by Commerce Ballarat, the Committee for Ballarat and the Ballarat ag society, along with my parliamentary colleagues Bev McArthur and David Southwick in the other place, in calling on the government to build a platform in Ballarat. It is really a no-brainer. Just build the platform. Deliver something instead of abrogating your responsibility as a government, particularly on behalf of the people who live in my home town of Ballarat.

Wilsons Promontory National Park

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:20): (357) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Environment in the other place. For those who have been there, Wilsons Promontory National Park is the most beautiful jewel in the south, with granite outcrops, beautiful varied forest systems and shorelines of squeaky, perfect sand. Many people love to visit Wilsons Promontory, and it is under the auspices of Parks Victoria.

Parks Victoria for many decades had a traditional ballot system in order to book your summer holidays or your time down there in this wonderful jewel in the south. The problem is not the people of Parks Victoria – they are still down there doing their most amazing work, communicating with the public and serving the public in situ – it is the back-end part, it is some consultant. The website was going to have the most amazing update so that you could book online. This system has failed monumentally. Basically on the first day that it was opened it crashed. I recall when I was teaching in the state system we had a brand new system that cost multimillions of dollars and it crashed on the first day and they threw it out. Unfortunately not only have people who want to book their special time at the Prom not been able to, but there is also some concern about the private details of campers who registered or tried to register with the system being released in some way.

What I would like the minister to do is, first of all, fix the system for our Victorian community and the interstate community who want to come and visit our wonderful promontory and provide a time line for when it will be fixed. Fix the problem and communicate with Victorians when it is going to be fixed. Also, I would like the Andrews government, through the Minister for Environment, to detail what, if any, breaches have occurred to those people who tried to register and have security concerns and what security measures are going to be put in place when the system is finally fixed to protect people's personal data and to provide a guarantee that it will not happen again.

If I have not said it enough, our wonderful Wilsons Prom is the most beautiful place. When I was training for Kokoda I ran – ran is an overstatement – I walked up and down Mount Bishop. The view from that place alone is awe inspiring, and I encourage people to go. At the moment it is catch as catch can – take a day visit – but hopefully the system will be up and running. I call on the minister to do this as a priority.

Electricity infrastructure

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (18:23): (358) My adjournment is to the Minister for Energy and Resources and seeks that she provide the business case and current project costs for the Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector (VNI) West project. Residents across the region have contacted me to raise concerns about this project. Like the Commonwealth Games, the Labor government may be rolling out a plan without first doing their homework on how much it will cost.

The state government has promised to generate 95 per cent of electricity from renewable sources and have 6.3 gigawatts of battery storage connected to the grid by 2035. The minister has sought to fast-track the development of VNI West – a proposed new high-capacity overhead transmission line.

According to news reports, the project is expected to cost \$3.25 billion. I trust the state government's business case for this project put a cost on the social, environmental, economic and mental health impacts of this project on local communities. In addition to the cost of constructing 80-metre-high towers – the size of the MCG lights – over 400 kilometres and compensation costs to landholders, there is the cost of declining land values and the loss of prime agricultural land, the cost of lost tourism to the region and the cost to the community that is harder to measure.

As our coal-fired power stations retire, the government expect to fill the supply gap with renewables. The VNI West project is due to be completed by 2030, yet Hazelwood has already closed, Yallourn is due to close in 2028 and Loy Yang A by 2035. The Star of the South, Australia's most advanced offshore wind project, has not even started construction and hopes to be operational by 2030. The first Big Battery to be built on an Australian coal site recently opened at the site of the former Hazelwood power station. It is just 150 megawatts and has the capacity to power about 75,000 homes for 1 hour during the evening peak. That is 75,000 homes for 1 hour – greater Melbourne has over 2 million homes.

Labor's latest gas ban will drive up further demand for electricity, and Victorians will pay higher energy bills. Labor have been in power for a long time, but it appears they do not know how to manage this in Victoria. Instead of securing Victoria's energy generation, they seem to want to disrupt it. I am concerned that in the minister's rush to keep the lights on, good planning has gone out the window. Victorians are already paying record energy bills. The Essential Services Commission has confirmed Victorians will suffer a further increase of up to 25 per cent in power prices. The state government provided the \$250 power saving bonus to win votes, but this short-term fix has not provided more secure and reliable energy in this state. Labor's poor management of Victoria's energy production is driving up power bills and putting families and businesses under pressure.

Cooks' Cottage

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (18:26): (359) Today I want to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Local Government, and it concerns Captain Cook's cottage. We are all familiar with Cooks' Cottage. As youngsters we all visited Cooks' Cottage, and we understand the importance of it. Some of us are old enough to remember the bicentenary of 1770 to 1970 and remember the many discussions that occurred at that time. Indeed Captain Cook, as a European, did become the first person – or his mission, his ship the *Endeavour* was the first – to sight the Australian coast on 19 April 1770. Those who have connections to Gippsland will understand where Point Hicks is, and I remember Henry Bolte and those things on the television – seeing the vision and activities as they unveiled a plaque at the site. Captain Cook, a great navigator, is a person of enormous significance not just to Victoria but to huge areas across the Pacific – North America and New Zealand – and this is a point of national significance. In no way does that diminish the fact that there were Indigenous communities here in Victoria, but it is true that Captain Cook's was the first expedition to sight the eastern coast of Australia – the first Europeans – and in doing so did set off a chain of events.

Cooks' Cottage here in the Fitzroy Gardens, Melbourne, is a point of international significance, a point of national significance and a point of local significance. The idea that this important heritage would be trashed, would be closed down and would be removed is just extraordinary. History is important. Melbourne was obviously settled in 1835, but Cooks' Cottage, having been moved here for the celebration of the centenary, is an important monument of history in itself and an important recognition. Sir Russell Grimwade, a philanthropist and businessman, provided the resources and the money to move Cooks' Cottage from Great Ayton in England. An Australian bid was made of £800, and it was moved, item by item, brick by brick, with indeed I am told 253 packing cases, and reassembled here. It is important for Victoria and it is important for Australia, and the idea that some bozos at the City of Melbourne would not recognise the significance of Cooks' Cottage is profound. I call on the Minister for Local Government to intervene and ensure that the bozos at the City of Melbourne do not trash our heritage, do not destroy Cooks' Cottage and leave it available to the Victorian community into the future.

Energy policy

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:29): (360) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action that I seek is for her to repeal the decision to ban gas in new homes from 2024 onwards. Could energy become a luxury item in Victoria? Because in the midst of an energy crisis this government has decided to cut gas. As we are all aware, as of next year Labor has banned gas connections to new homes. This ban is being touted as a win for the environment. It is not. Less gas means more brown coal. Gas has roughly half the emissions of coal, and this decision will drive up emissions and not reduce them. Electrification only delivers environmental benefits if the electricity generation is clean, and we do not have those resources in this state. Victoria still relies heavily on brown coal fire. We are moving away from that, but it is certainly not going to be cheap, which leads me to the second justification.

The second justification is cost. According to the Victorian Labor government, getting rid of gas will save households \$1000 per year on their energy bills – but it will not. Less energy will drive up the prices. Anthony Albanese made a similar claim during his election campaign, saying Labor’s Powering Australia plan will cut bills by \$275 per year for a home. Well, not long after that he deleted this promise from his campaign website as electricity prices skyrocketed by 56 per cent following Labor’s wasteful spending agenda, which is driving inflation.

I am going to read from the Seeley International media release that they released recently:

The Victorian Government’s foolish and short-sighted ban on gas in new homes will only push emissions higher and increase the risk of blackouts.

This is yet another policy that Victoria cannot afford, and I ask that you do not push ahead with it.

Schools payroll tax

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:32): (361) Yesterday I tabled a petition in this place that had been signed by no fewer than 4436 of our fellow Victorians, and my view is that this petition should be respected and that these Victorians should be heard. These Victorians said to our Parliament that Labor’s new schools tax:

... was announced without prior consultation and is based on an arbitrary definition of a ‘high fee’ school.

These many Victorians went on:

Many schools have indicated that they will be forced to cut services, programs or staff to foot the new tax with some indicating they will have to pass the cost directly onto parents.

They went on:

Many parents work incredibly hard and make significant sacrifices to send their children to independent schools and should not be punished by the Government’s deteriorating debt position and budget mismanagement. This new tax will increase cost of living for many families.

The exact wording of the petition – that being the preamble that was agreed to by 4436 Victorians – is that the Parliament:

... reject the Government’s proposal to impose payroll tax on many independent schools in order to support and uphold diversity and choice in education in Victoria.

On this side of the house we are great believers in choice in education. We do not believe that the many, many Victorians who choose to send their children to state schools, for example, should be forced by the Department of Education to send their children just to one state school that has been determined by some bureaucrat down the road who happened to draw straight lines on a map. We also believe that the many Victorians – 42 per cent of Victorian parents – who want to send their children to an independent school or another denominational school, perhaps a Catholic school, should not be punished for doing so.

The Premier, when he unveiled his schools tax, said that these schools had received a sweetheart deal on payroll tax. They were 'high-fee' schools. High-fee schools? This petition has actually been brought forward from a parent at Aitken College in the electorate of Greenvale, and Aitken College has fees of under \$8000. Under the initial proposal from the Labor government, this school was deemed a high-fee school.

At a now-famous dinner that the Minister for Education went to and I went to too that was organised by Independent Schools Victoria, I happened to sit next to the outstanding principal of Aitken College Josie Crisara, and I was talking to her about the demographic make-up of her school. So many people in the north of Melbourne, so many people around our state, work so hard to be able to choose to send their children to independent schools. The action I seek is for the minister to scrap this regressive tax.

Responses

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (18:35): There were 17 matters raised today: Mr Berger to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Mr Mulholland to the Minister for Regional Development, Ms Payne to the Attorney-General, Mr Batchelor to the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Mr Puglielli to the Treasurer, Ms Crozier to the Minister for Health, Dr Mansfield to the Minister for Health, Mrs McArthur to the Minister for Energy and Resources, Ms Copsey to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Ms Lovell to the Minister for Health, Dr Ratnam to the Minister for Housing, Mr McCracken to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Ms Bath to the Minister for Environment, Mrs Broad to the Minister for Energy and Resources, Mr Davis to the Minister for Local Government, Dr Heath to the Minister for Energy and Resources and Dr Bach to the Minister for Education. I will make sure that all those matters are passed on to the relevant ministers for an appropriate response.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6:36 pm.