



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**60th Parliament**

**Thursday 22 June 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, Gaelle	Northern Victoria	Nat	Mulholland, Evan	Northern Metropolitan	Lib
Copsey, Katherine	Southern Metropolitan	Greens	Payne, Rachel	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LCV
Crozier, Georgie	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Puglielli, Aiv	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, David	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Purcell, Georgie	Northern Victoria	AJP
Deeming, Moira <sup>1</sup>	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 <sup>2</sup>	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee	Northern Victoria	PHON
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP

<sup>1</sup> Lib until 27 March 2023

<sup>2</sup> 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



# CONTENTS

---

PAPERS	
Director of Public Prosecutions.....	2059
Response of Director of Public Prosecutions Kerri Judd KC to the Special Report of the Office of the Special Investigator.....	2059
Department of Premier and Cabinet.....	2059
Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2022.....	2059
COMMITTEES	
Privileges committees.....	2059
Appointment of a Parliamentary Integrity Adviser for the 60th Parliament.....	2059
PAPERS	
Papers.....	2061
PETITIONS	
Police conduct.....	2061
Response.....	2061
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion.....	2061
Adjournment.....	2061
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Victorian Jewish community.....	2061
Sir Robert Menzies.....	2062
State of the Future youth forum.....	2062
Southern Metropolitan Region.....	2063
<i>Markets &amp; Prosperity</i> .....	2063
Electricity infrastructure.....	2063
Janette Mary Kennedy.....	2064
Firefighters presumptive rights.....	2064
Teenagers Road Accident Group.....	2064
Philippines Independence Day.....	2064
Australia Ceylon Fellowship.....	2064
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region schools.....	2064
Emma King OAM.....	2065
Melinda Spencer OAM.....	2065
Malcolm Hole OAM.....	2066
Melinda Spencer OAM.....	2066
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion.....	2066
MOTIONS	
Budget papers 2023–24.....	2066
BILLS	
Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023.....	2067
Budget papers 2023–24.....	2067
Second reading.....	2067
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Office of the Special Investigator.....	2089
Victorian Managed Insurance Authority.....	2090
Ministers statements: Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative.....	2090
Palestine.....	2091
Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain.....	2092
Ministers statements: Aboriginal Children’s Forum.....	2092
Timber industry.....	2093
COVID-19 vaccination.....	2094
Ministers statements: dairy industry.....	2094
Lake Eildon.....	2095
Cannabis law reform.....	2096
Ministers statements: renewable energy.....	2096
Written responses.....	2097
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Eastern Victoria Region.....	2097
Southern Metropolitan Region.....	2097
Northern Victoria Region.....	2097
Southern Metropolitan Region.....	2098
Eastern Victoria Region.....	2098

Southern Metropolitan Region .....	2098
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	2098
Northern Victoria Region .....	2099
Northern Metropolitan Region .....	2099
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	2099
Southern Metropolitan Region .....	2099
Western Victoria Region .....	2100
Western Victoria Region .....	2100
Western Metropolitan Region .....	2100
Northern Metropolitan Region .....	2100
<b>BILLS</b>	
Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 .....	2101
Budget papers 2023–24 .....	2101
Second reading .....	2101
Committee .....	2106
Third reading .....	2107
<b>MOTIONS</b>	
Parliamentary integrity adviser .....	2107
<b>BILLS</b>	
Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 .....	2108
Second reading .....	2108
Third reading .....	2132
<b>BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE</b>	
Orders of the day .....	2132
<b>MOTIONS</b>	
Budget papers 2023–24 .....	2132
<b>BILLS</b>	
Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023 .....	2137
Introduction and first reading .....	2137
Statement of compatibility .....	2137
Second reading .....	2139
Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Bill 2023 .....	2141
Introduction and first reading .....	2141
Statement of compatibility .....	2141
Second reading .....	2142
<b>ADJOURNMENT</b>	
Family violence services .....	2144
Fitzroy Street, St Kilda, community safety .....	2144
Justice system .....	2145
Broadmeadows train station .....	2146
Building cladding .....	2146
Firefighters presumptive rights .....	2147
Youth crime .....	2147
Power saving bonus .....	2148
Police conduct .....	2148
Australian Open .....	2149
Domestic rabbits .....	2150
Western Metropolitan Region police resources .....	2150
Kyneton water reclamation plant .....	2151
Small business support .....	2151
Caravan parks .....	2152
Lord’s Prayer .....	2153
Responses .....	2153

**Thursday 22 June 2023**

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

*Papers***Director of Public Prosecutions**

*Response of Director of Public Prosecutions Kerri Judd KC to the Special Report of the Office of the Special Investigator*

**Jaelyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (09:33):  
I move, by leave:

That the *Response of Director of Public Prosecutions Kerri Judd KC to the Special Report of the Office of the Special Investigator* be tabled.

I have just a few brief comments if it pleases. I table the report from the DPP to the Special Report of the Office of the Special Investigator for the information of the house. The DPP believes the Parliament should be afforded of her response to the issues raised in yesterday's report, and the tabling of the report acquits that responsibility. Both officers are respected independent statutory office holders. They have separate clearly defined roles, and I support both officers in those respective roles as they are legislated by this Parliament.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Department of Premier and Cabinet**

*Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2022*

**Jaelyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (09:34):  
I move, by leave:

That the *Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2022* and domain 1 to 6 data tables be tabled.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Committees***Privileges committees**

*Appointment of a Parliamentary Integrity Adviser for the 60th Parliament*

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (09:35): Pursuant to standing order 23.22, I present a report on the appointment of a parliamentary integrity adviser for the 60th Parliament, including appendices, from the joint Assembly and Council privileges committees. I move:

That the report be published.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Harriet SHING:** I move:

That the Council take note of this report.

I want to begin by thanking the parliamentary integrity adviser Mr Ray Purdey, who has occupied this role since the first motion appointing somebody to this role. I also want to thank colleagues from the Privileges Committee in this place, in particular Ms Crozier for her work on the subcommittee, which was directed toward identifying opportunities for a parliamentary integrity adviser to undertake a role which involves a number of functions giving effect to the resolution which was made on 30 April

2019, in particular the parliamentary integrity adviser's position to have advisory, education and training, and reporting functions.

These functions are of special importance to members in understanding and delivering on the integrity obligations that they have that are connected to their roles as members of Parliament, including issues relating to the claiming of parliamentary allowances and conflicts of interest et cetera, and to provide advice in relation to the application of the code of conduct in part 3 of the Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978. Also there is the importance of being available to members to consult with the integrity adviser on ethical issues and integrity matters and to provide education and training, including through attendance at Parliament and a coordination with Parliament on the provision of training to new members in particular.

It is important to note that the committee's process around the selection of a candidate to fulfil this role has been done following a significant degree of work from the clerks, and to that end I thank Richard Willis, Vaughn Koops and Vivienne Bannan for their work in undertaking this work of an appointment. In accordance with section (5)(a) of the 2019 resolution, the joint privileges committees of both houses have determined to appoint Professor Charles Sampford as parliamentary integrity adviser under the terms and conditions of appointment that are set out in this report. Mr Sampford does come with a significant level of expertise and experience within academic fields and also in advisory capacities in other jurisdictions. He has also indicated a keen enthusiasm for the provision of advice, education and training with in-person availability at Parliament, and there are also opportunities for people to access advice on ethics, accountability and compliance with codes of conduct.

There are a number of grey areas that exist between the role of the parliamentary integrity adviser and the work that is undertaken by the clerks of the houses, the Secretary of the Department of Parliamentary Services, the compliance officer and others, and that intersects, as members may well understand from personal experience, with, for example, the completion of the register of interests and the proper use of budgets and allowances. To that end, it is expected by the parliamentary privileges committees that the integrity adviser will be mindful of the potential for ambiguity and that the integrity adviser may include observations, suggestions and recommendations about the crossover and grey areas in any reports and meetings with the committees, but importantly the parliamentary integrity adviser will not be giving legal advice about members' situations or circumstances.

I commend this report to the house. I recommend that members read it and understand the process which was undertaken leading to this appointment. I thank everyone involved in its delivery.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:39): If I can just make a few remarks to the committee's report and also thank those that have been involved with it – the committee members on the subcommittee, who Ms Shing has already highlighted, and also Richard Willis, who is in the chamber this morning, and the work that was undertaken by Mr Willis and Vaughn Koops and other members of the secretariat that assisted with this process.

The minister did speak about the code of conduct, and the government and government members should know better than anyone about the history of the misuse of resources. I mean, there is a long history in Labor: former Speaker Telmo Languiller, Don Nardella, the red shirts affair obviously and more recently conflicts of interest for ministers who are dealing with matters of government. This role is an important role for the Parliament in terms of integrity, advising members about what has to be undertaken and looking at what they need to be recording in their pecuniary interests and other registers – members can seek advice from the parliamentary integrity adviser.

Can I just say in my concluding remarks thanks to Mr Ray Purdey, who undertook this role in the previous Parliament. I think that all members should acknowledge the work that was undertaken under difficult circumstances through COVID. Professor Sampford lives in Queensland, and we hope that

he will be able to conduct his role according to what this Victorian Parliament needs, and I am looking forward to him doing so.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Papers*

**Papers**

**Tabled by Clerk:**

Auditor-General –

Correctional Services for People with Intellectual Disability or an Acquired Brain Injury, June 2023  
(*Ordered to be published*).

Principal Health and Wellbeing, June 2023 (*Ordered to be published*).

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in respect of Statutory Rule Nos. 51 and 58.

Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001 – Notice of amendment to the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council for an assessment of forest values of the Immediate Protection Areas in the Central Highlands and East Gippsland, under section 26C of the Act.

Victorian Inspectorate –

Annual Plan, 2023–24.

Reports on controlled operations records and reports, 2021–22, for –

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, under section 74P of the Wildlife Act 1975.

Game Management Authority, under section 74P of the Wildlife Act 1975.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, under section 39 of the Crimes (Controlled Operations) Act 2004.

Victorian Fisheries Authority, under section 131T of the Fisheries Act 1995.

Victoria Police, under section 39 of the Crimes (Controlled Operations) Act 2004.

*Petitions*

**Police conduct**

*Response*

**The Clerk:** I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: a response from the Minister for Police to the petition titled ‘Independent review and inquiry into Victoria Police’, presented by Dr Ratnam on 17 May 2023.

*Business of the house*

**Notices of motion**

**Notices of motion given.**

**Adjournment**

**Jaelyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (09:48):  
I move:

That the Council, at its rising, adjourn until Tuesday 1 August 2023.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Members statements*

**Victorian Jewish community**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:48): I have spoken before in this place about the importance of cultural diversity and inclusion in this state. It does not matter where you are from,

what you look like, what you believe or what language you speak, in Victoria we are proud of our cultural diversity. So I am pleased to see the Andrews Labor government commit once again to supporting and providing funding for our local Jewish communities, particularly in the Southern Metropolitan Region. We are funding a statewide antisemitism campaign, because bigotry and hate have no place in this state. We are creating a Jewish community safety infrastructure fund to build, upgrade and renovate spaces where people can come together to celebrate and share in culture and tradition, building on our commitment to provide extra support for the Community Security Group, which plays an important role in safety and security in the Jewish community in Victoria.

Last week I visited the Caulfield Shule with the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. The Caulfield Shule is an important place for the local Jewish congregation, and it was great to walk around the site, talk with rabbis and other community leaders and learn about the history and heritage of the Jewish community in Caulfield, including seeing the Torah scrolls that are kept within the synagogue. We ran into a local playgroup that also meets at the synagogue, and the parents and bubs were having a great time. The Jewish community has a long, proud history here in Victoria, and I am pleased to see the Andrews Labor government continuing to support their culture and tradition.

#### **Sir Robert Menzies**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (09:50): I rise to defend a famous western Victorian, Australia's 12th and longest serving Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies. I was sorry to miss Dr Bach quoting Sir Robert in this place on Tuesday and Mr Batchelor's mischief-making, because there is a lot more to add on the subject. Firstly, I am sure Sir Robert would recognise a straw man when he saw one, but nobody I know advocates every idea of any past hero, and certainly no-one suggests they form the sole basis of a 21st century political movement. But Sir Robert's enduring legacy to the Liberal Party is not specific ideas and policies, it is the values he articulated. These tried and tested beliefs and principles remain as relevant today to our party as they were to the Australian people who elected him eight times.

One of the few PMs to escape Dr Bach's wrath was the bold John Howard. That amused me. I am not sure where Dr Bach believes John Howard drew his inspiration from, but I can certainly tell him: it was Menzies. Mr Howard adapted Menzian principles to contemporary challenges and so must we. Finally, Menzies's dull government was not revolutionary enough; after the war that was no bad thing. As Bob Hawke said of the Menzian years, 'Basically, they were too long.' What would we give now for long boring years of Liberal government?

#### **State of the Future youth forum**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:52): Recently Parliament held the State of the Future youth forum. I was lucky enough to speak with the attendees, and it reassured me that the kids are coming. The report from this forum includes a bunch of excellent recommendations on many important topics. These young people recommended that we hold an inquiry into housing affordability in Victoria and implement rent freezes for young people: check. I am happy to be on the committee that is investigating renting and housing affordability in Victoria and happy to be pushing hard for the government to freeze rents. Other recommendations were that we should adopt a more casual and relatable approach when consulting with young people and communicating the workings of Parliament; engage with young people outside Parliament House in spaces familiar to them; increase the use of social media platforms as tools for connecting with young people; and provide young people with a window into Parliament, fostering an understanding of what it is like to be an MP and normalising politics. To these I would say, 'I gotcha.' I appreciate that this place can be stuffy and seems to be filled with a lot of older folks making decisions that will impact our lives without really listening to what is important to us. It is time to change this. I want this Parliament to be a place that elects and listens to young people.

### Southern Metropolitan Region

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:53): I have had a few busy weeks of late. On Monday I attended the Williamstown Dockyard tour with the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union. There we discussed manufacturing options for the future of the site. Last week I wrote to almost 500 families about the proposed changes to the payroll tax for non-government schools. I represented the Minister for Crime Prevention in the other place Minister Carbin's at the Neighbourhood Watch's 40th anniversary afternoon tea. It was great to catch up with the Chief Commissioner of Police Shane Patton and the Neighbourhood Watch president Suzanne Dunlop, but most importantly I spoke to the hardworking volunteers without whom Neighbourhood Watch would not run. I popped down to the Mercy O'Connell Family Centre in Canterbury with the Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Health in the other place Kat Theophanous, and I had the opportunity to speak to a young mother struggling to get their child to sleep. Thanks to the amazing staff, they enjoyed their first night of rest in a long time. How good was that? I also visited the Governor for the joint presentation of the address-in-reply with my colleagues from right across this and the other place, who I hope to serve for many, many years to come.

As much as I enjoy the important work at Spring Street, I am excited for the winter break to get back to my community, listen and continue doing what matters to them.

### *Markets & Prosperity*

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:54): I rise to speak today about a new book released this month edited by Harry Stutchbury called *Markets & Prosperity*. Hot off the press and flying into the hands of readers across the nation, it is a great collection of 17 essays from politicians, academics, business leaders and journalists alike focusing on the need to leverage markets and incentives to solve our most pressing problems. It is a group of original thinkers representing a broad swathe of the free market polity in Australia, centre-left rationalists and libertarian ideologues. It even includes some Labor comrades, like Craig Emerson, whose writing is in the book. There is a common theme, a line, that markets are the best way to alleviate problems for people.

I am humbled to have been approached to write one of the chapters myself, on the need for the centre right of politics to seriously engage in the conversation of criminal justice reform. I acknowledge in my essay that we have a proven track record on this side of the house on keeping the community safe, but we should always realise that people are better than their worst moments and those who have followed the wrong path in life should be helped onto the right one and be given the opportunity to do so. We should not be spending so much money locking up non-violent offenders when there is a serious case for rehabilitative justice. Criminal justice reform should be engaged seriously. You can hear more from me and other great writers by picking up a copy of *Markets & Prosperity* from Connor Court press.

### Electricity infrastructure

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (09:56): Last week I visited my federal counterparts at Parliament in Canberra. Whilst I was there I had a meeting with local farmers from my own constituency of Northern Victoria and those of the western region. These farmers had departed from their homes at 2 am to make the trip to Canberra to meet with any politician who would give them their time to hear their desperate concerns about the lack of community consultation by the Australian Energy Market Operator on the proposed transmission lines. These local residents and business owners, our food producers, are deeply concerned about the impacts and ramifications that these powerline structures will have on their land, their land's property value, and the overall health of their stock and the constituents themselves. I have suggested to these constituents to start approaching their state representatives also and potentially make the trip here to our Victorian Parliament to meet with their elected members. It is our job to listen to them and serve them the best we can through sound and fair legislation, and that is what I expect their visit to result in.

**Janette Mary Kennedy**

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:57): On 26 May 2023 we lost an extraordinary woman in Janette Mary Kennedy. Jan was many things to many people, including a mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, former colleague, friend, comrade and mentor. Jan was wife to Cyril Kennedy, who was a former member and whip in this chamber. Many in this Parliament knew Jan as a longstanding ALP member, passionate trade unionist, social justice advocate and voice for the working class. Jan was an exceptional individual who touched the lives of many with her kindness and warmth and who cared deeply for her local community. Everyone who knew her would have their own personal story of the impact that she had on their lives. Jan was ardent in her belief of advancing women within the ALP and was a great supporter of community health. She spent her career devoted to helping people. Starting as a maternal and child health nurse in Melbourne's east, she later founded Waverley Community Health Centre, providing support to those in the community who needed it most, a centre which later became Link Health and Community.

There was no-one more committed to the Labor cause than Jan, and she was an inspiration and mentor to many. I fondly remember the long chats I had with Jan. You could be assured that if she saw an injustice she would be first to step up, call it out and organise to do something about it. She joined the ALP at the age of 17 and was a constant force in her local branch, on policy committees and in the struggle for justice on so many issues. In 1992 Jan ran as a Labor candidate for Bennettswood and unfortunately was defeated. She would have been an excellent member of Parliament. Jan will be deeply missed by all who knew her. Her legacy will live on in her community and across the entirety of the Labor movement. Vale, Jan Kennedy.

**Firefighters presumptive rights**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:58): Female-specific conditions, including cervical, ovarian and uterine cancers, are being added to the list of conditions that are automatically presumed to be caused by firefighting. Since the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Act 2019 men in Victoria have received presumptive cover for testicular and prostate cancers. Women firefighters have waited far too long for this presumptive coverage. Our men and women volunteer firefighters deserve the same access and rights to presumptive cancer coverage.

**Teenagers Road Accident Group**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:59): On Tuesday 6 June I had the privilege of attending the Teenagers Road Accident Group's life-saving Drive 4 Life presentation given to over 1200 students from 12 different local schools, with community speakers and career first responders from VICSES, CFA, ambulance and police. I commend the brave local families and volunteers who shared confronting experiences to save and transform lives.

**Philippines Independence Day**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:59): I thank the Philippine Consulate General and the Filipino community in Victoria for their wonderful family day in Springvale on 18 June and congratulate them on 125 years of Philippine independence.

**Australia Ceylon Fellowship**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:00): I also congratulate the Australian Ceylon Fellowship for their 65th anniversary, and I thank them for their hospitality and another successful dinner dance.

**South-Eastern Metropolitan Region schools**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:00): I rise to inform my Clyde North constituents of the current Engage Victoria consultation process about the naming of their new primary

school. At the moment this new school has the working name of Alexander Boulevard primary school. This will be changed soon to Topirum primary school or Bill Bill primary, these being Bunurong words for 'star' and 'soldier bird' respectively. Another new school that will be opening in 2024 and will serve residents throughout the growth corridor is in Officer and is currently named Officer Brunt Road primary school. This is also seeking public feedback for its new name, Woodin primary school, a Bunurong word meaning 'summer', or Kurmile primary school, a Bunurong word for 'white cockatoo'. Residents can choose their preference through the Engage Victoria website.

Investment in education is fundamental for our rapidly growing growth corridor throughout the south-east in Casey–Cardinia, and I am so proud as well to report on further education announcements in the recent state budgets, with a further two new primary schools in Clyde North and a new Clyde North secondary college. This is all part of the Andrews Labor government's plan to deliver education for the south-east.

### Emma King OAM

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (10:01): I rise to acknowledge Emma King, the chief executive officer of the Victorian Council of Social Service, who was last week awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia for service to the community through social welfare organisations. Emma is a longstanding advocate for vulnerable Victorians and was recognised in this year's King's Birthday honours. Emma King has been the CEO of VCOSS since 2013, the peak body for Victoria's social and community sector. In her role Emma leads the council's work to advocate for a Victoria free from poverty and disadvantage, where all people and communities are supported to thrive.

Previous to this role Emma was the CEO of the Early Learning Association Australia, formerly Kindergarten Parents Victoria, the peak organisation representing parents and providers of early learning services in Victoria. Emma also has an extensive background in the public sector and in workforce and education issues, having worked as a Victorian policy adviser, a teacher, in a range of industrial and training roles at the Victorian Independent Education Union and the Finance Sector Union. Emma represents VCOSS in a range of ministerial advisory groups and committees, serves on numerous boards and is a regular commentator on social affairs. Emma is a champion of wellbeing and inclusive growth. She provides a strong voice of leadership and advocacy on social justice issues for the community sector. Only yesterday here in Queen's Hall Emma was a panellist in a conversation discussing the topic 'Partnering for a poverty-free Victoria'.

I want to congratulate Emma on this honour. It is wonderful to see her recognised for her work to improve the lives of disadvantaged people in our society.

### Melinda Spencer OAM

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:02): Today I would like to honour the wonderful Melinda 'Mel' Spencer OAM, founder and CEO of Different Journeys autism services in my electorate. Mel was a very worthy recipient of a Medal of the Order of Australia in the recently announced honours list. Mel co-founded Different Journeys in 2016 with Merrin Ayton to connect autistic people, their families and their carers and to break down the social isolation, prejudice and loneliness experienced by the autism community. The award recognises Mel's ongoing advocacy to government for development of employment, education and carer peer support programs to improve outcomes for autistic people and their carers. Also recognised is Mel's establishment of the Pathways for Carers program, a peer support walking program for carers. Mel is also a regular speaker at conferences and represents the autism community on advisory committees across Victoria.

The president of this chamber and Minister Shing also know Mel through her work in our communities as part of the Lilydale Revitalisation Board and can attest to Mel's enthusiasm and commitment to the autism community and the countless hours of volunteer work that she has put in. Prior to her role with Different Journeys Mel served as a Victorian police officer, receiving a number of police service

awards, including the National Police Service Medal. In 2020 she was inducted into the Victorian women's honour roll as well.

I congratulate Mel on the recognition of her tireless efforts on behalf of the autism community, and while I am sure she would point out that a whole team undertakes the work and has earned the recognition, it is the Different Journeys team who are celebrating her achievements. Mel Spencer OAM, thank you for your care and work in our community, and congratulations on a very worthy recognition for your efforts.

#### **Malcolm Hole OAM**

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (10:04): This week it is opportune to thank and to congratulate people recognised in this year's King's Birthday honours. In particular I want to identify the late Cr Malcolm Hole, a tireless advocate for his community who received an Order of Australia Medal posthumously for his service to local government and the community. Malcolm was first elected to the Wellington Shire Council in 2000, and he went on to be re-elected at a further six elections. He was steadfast and fierce in his advocacy for his community. His enthusiasm was legendary. He passed away while serving his seventh term as councillor in 2021. He was the best of his community. I send my love and condolences to everyone who knew him, and my congratulations to his family on this important honour.

#### **Melinda Spencer OAM**

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (10:05): I want to acknowledge the extraordinary work of Mel Spencer, who has been recognised by a number of people in this Parliament and celebrated for her work as the CEO of Different Journeys. Autistic people experience a range of different challenges because of neurological difference. This can often be incredibly isolating and a difficult time not just for them every day but also for their families and carers. Mel is just about the best example I can think of of a local advocate. It has been a wonderful privilege to be at so many of the events that Different Journeys has held and organised over the years. We are so lucky to have her. Congratulations, Mel, on all that you do.

#### *Business of the house*

##### **Notices of motion**

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (10:06): I move:

That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 36 to 93, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

#### *Motions*

##### **Budget papers 2023–24**

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (10:06): I move, on behalf of my colleague Ms Blandthorn:

That the Council take note of the budget papers 2023–24.

**The PRESIDENT:** Pursuant to a resolution of the Council on 20 June 2023, there will be a cognate debate on this motion and the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023.

*Bills***Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023****Budget papers 2023–24***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Ingrid Stitt:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

**And Jaclyn Symes's motion:**

That the Council take note of the budget papers 2023–24.

**Matthew BACH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:07): It is good to be able to make a brief contribution on the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023. On this side of the house we do not oppose this bill. There are a range of issues with the budget that I will speak to just briefly, because we desire of course to ensure that this is passed today. That is so important because we want to make sure that our ambos are paid, our teachers are paid, that there is funding for school building – who knows, maybe even in some coalition-held seats – and that so many important matters that all governments must undertake can be funded. That is notwithstanding some of our deep concerns with the state of this budget. Those concerns have been noted elsewhere so there is not really a need for me to recapitulate them in great detail here today. Nonetheless, we have our deep concerns about the treatment of payroll and land taxes in this budget.

We have our deep concern about the removal of payroll tax exemptions for approximately 110 independent schools. That is what the budget says, but interestingly that has unravelled recently. It is not what the Premier says anymore, so there is an error there. The Premier now says that the payroll tax exemption will only hit, well, fewer schools than that. The Premier says 'less' schools than that; he means fewer schools than that when he says that. We do not know exactly how many. This particular element is going to have a particularly egregious impact in sections of my electorate. For example, in the lower house seat of Warrandyte more than 50 per cent of parents currently choose to send their children to an independent school. There are several fabulous independent schools in that electorate. I have received so many letters from parents in Warrandyte and right across the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region who know what the government denies, and that is that when you slug independent, non-government, not-for-profit schools with \$500 million of additional taxes under this budget alone, of course that will mean some schools are forced to shut down. It will also mean –

*Members interjecting.*

**Matthew BACH:** The Attorney-General interjects and says 'That's false' and Ms Shing says 'Name them'.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! It is getting a bit messy. Dr Bach, without any assistance.

**Matthew BACH:** If those opposite had engaged with schools, as I have – the Minister for Education has not engaged with one; she said so at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. Numerous schools –

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Matthew BACH:** You really want me to name the schools? There are multiple schools whose principals have spoken to me and said that the impact of this tax is that their schools will close down. I am happy to say it again.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Matthew BACH:** All right, I will give you my list. I will show you mine when you show me yours. You give me the schools hit list, Harriet, and then I will tell you mine, despite the fact that I would be breaking confidences to do so. Numerous principals have told me that the impact of this tax, as it is envisaged in these budget papers, with a \$500 million hit to independent, non-government, not-for-profit schools, will not only lead to schools closing down but it will lead to fee increases in the magnitude not only of hundreds and hundreds of dollars every year but thousands of dollars. This is denied by those opposite, but this is the impact on schools when you actually talk to schools, as I do every day. The Minister for Education has not spoken to one independent school since she smashed them in this budget with \$500 million of additional taxes.

The budget papers say that the removal of the payroll tax exemption will raise \$422 million over the period of this budget, a strangely specific figure given that at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee neither the Treasurer nor the education minister could point to any modelling whatsoever. But let us leave that major matter to one side for now. In addition, because the payroll tax exemption is being removed and because so many Victorian independent, non-government, not-for-profit schools have a payroll of over \$10 million, they will be slugged with additional taxes. It will be a triple whammy – not only payroll tax but also the COVID levy and the mental health levy. Now, when the budget was handed down the government did not realise that was the case, because the government did not realise that even one independent, non-government, not-for-profit school had a payroll over \$10 million. The education minister stated so in the other place with confidence. Anybody who knows anything about independent schools knows that so many have a payroll over \$10 million. Some have a payroll of over \$100 million. School budgets are overwhelmingly made up of their payroll, to the tune of about 70 per cent in my significant experience. Nonetheless the government, without knowing the full impact, has hit so many independent schools with a triple whammy.

Despite the fact that the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023 passed in this place the other day, there is still time for the education minister to work with the Treasurer – that is the process, apparently, to determine the hit list – to scrap the tax entirely. Thousands and thousands of Victorians have signed a petition to that effect that was organised actually by a lady from Mr Mulholland's electorate, a lady who sends her children to Aitken College. This is one of these evil high-fee schools. I think the fees for Aitken College are about \$7500. The budget papers – and we are debating the budget papers today – say that approximately 110 schools will be hit. That means that schools with fees as low as \$7500 will be hit.

We have heard in this house over the period of this week that these tax changes have been carefully calibrated only to hit people who deserve to be hit, because they did really well through the period of the pandemic. That is what Ms Ermacora said yesterday: carefully targeted, calibrated taxes to hit only those who can afford it and deserve to be smashed with additional taxes, like the good people of Greenvale, many of whom choose to send their kids to, well, schools that any reasonable person would say are low-fee schools, like Aitken College.

Unlike the education minister, I have met with the principal of Aitken College recently. She has not met with anybody, but I have met personally and had numerous other conversations with the principal of Aitken College, and she says that the impact of these taxes is going to be devastating for her school. You can understand that, when you are hitting schools like Aitken College. It is not Xavier; it is Aitken College out in Greenvale. So many good people in that part of the world choose, for reasons that are their own, quite frankly, to send their kids to independent schools. My daughter is going to the local state primary school next year, and we are really excited about that. Others choose to send their children to independent schools, and that is fine in my view.

So we have a big problem, obviously, with the schools tax. We oppose it. We opposed it the other day. We will continue to do so all the way through to the next election, and if we are fortunate enough to gain the trust of the Victorian people, then we will repeal it.

In addition of course we have got big problems with the increase in net debt. I think I am right in saying that as of today Victorians are paying about \$10 million every single day just to service Labor's debt. It is not COVID debt. It is Labor's debt, largely a result of economic incompetence, in particular enormous waste on major projects. Those opposite will say in this debate, as they said on Tuesday in the debate on the state tax bill, that we have got to come up with alternatives. If we are going to oppose these taxes, well it is our job to come up with alternatives. Mr Mulholland is in the chamber. He came up with some very good alternatives just the other day, and I would endorse them.

Mr McGowan is also in the chamber. He was banging on about fishing rods the other day. I would endorse his alternative proposal. But it would be remiss of me not to say that before the election, just last November, the Labor Party said to Victorians that you can have it all. You can have massive spending on infrastructure projects and you can have a massive increase in health spending with no new or increased taxes. Something has changed since then. It is not the fact that of course there was significant additional spending through the period of the pandemic, the bulk of which we on this side of the house wholeheartedly supported. That had happened before the last election. Of course the Labor Party told Victorians that you can have it all and ran – as normal – a highly effective scare campaign against the Liberal Party and the National Party on the basis that there would be cuts and closures.

Indeed in my electorate we have seen numerous projects halted and pushed back. I am thinking about projects like the North East Link. The time line for the so-called Suburban Rail Loop has been pushed back to the never-never, with the Labor Party basically adopting the policy that we took to the last election, which was much derided. In fact I think there was a debate in the other house just the other day about some of my – in all humility – excellent comments about the Suburban Rail Loop during the election. But that has been pushed back to the never-never in direct contravention of what the government said it would do before the last election. So it is a bit rich – if you will spare the expression – for the Labor Party to come in here and say that it is our job to come up with solutions to its budget woes, because before the election it said you can continue to have it all. It was not true then, and it remains untrue now.

There are significant issues in the agriculture portfolio, and I will largely leave it for colleagues of mine to discuss that. I understand that Mrs McArthur may make some comments in this debate about sheep, for example, albeit I am going to advise Mrs McArthur that she needs to be incredibly careful when she talks about sheep, based on a ruling from the Chair yesterday. I take this opportunity, given that I am talking about the agriculture budget, to raise my concerns about a ruling from the Chair yesterday. President, it is good that you are in the chair as I do it. Yesterday a point of order was raised when Mr McGowan used an expression. He said that when it comes to the schools tax, there had been a 'cock-up', and Ms Shing was offended by that, unsurprisingly. She raised a point of order on the basis that this was unparliamentary language. I jumped to my feet at that time and explained the etymology of that term. 'Cock' is a proper term for a male chicken. A cock is a cockerel – it is a male chicken – and 'cock-up' refers to that, as Ms Shing would understand. You can say what you like about Ms Shing; you cannot say she is unintelligent. I explained to the house at the time that 'cock-up' is a term that refers to a cock's feather in an arrow. If that feather has been placed poorly into the arrow, the arrow will not go straight – a mistake, a cock-up.

**The PRESIDENT:** Can I do something quite peculiar and call a point of order myself. Sorry to interrupt your contribution. I will be very short, Dr Bach, because I know you have got a time limit. I actually reviewed this discussion this morning, and I want to say two things. If I was in the chair and I was Mr Berger, I would have done exactly the same thing. To defend Mr Berger, it is a really hard job being Acting President in these sorts of real-time situations. He did ask the member to rephrase. I probably would have done the same thing. But it is all a learning experience. Dr Bach, we bow to some people's understanding of history, which is better than others'. I am happy to rule that I am okay with that phrase into the future.

**Matthew BACH:** I am immensely gratified by that, President. Thank you very, very much. My concern was, especially in this debate, as we discuss agriculture, that we may now be banned from discussing a whole series of other animals. You see, almost every farm animal has a name that is an appropriate name for that animal but also has a separate meaning that is derogatory. I was concerned for Ms Shing actually, because she oftentimes speaks about her little donkeys. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a donkey is a stupid and obstinate person, so I would hate for her references to donkeys to be ruled out. Mrs McArthur talks about sheep oftentimes in this place.

Now, a sheep, according to numerous dictionaries, is not only a lovely woolly mammal but also a mindless follower, and so my concern is that if we are now going to embrace wokeism in this place to such an extent that we are cancelling farm animals, then we will not have much to talk about, especially when it comes to the agricultural budget. However, as normal, President, you have acted –

**Nicholas McGowan:** What about a pig?

**Matthew BACH:** A pig, a dingo. We heard a question the other day from Ms Purcell about dingoes, and it was a shame Mrs McArthur was not here, because I think she might have interjected regarding sheep. But a dingo is, according to numerous dictionaries, a traitor – if you refer to somebody as a ‘dingo’. So there are real concerns about a whole load of animals, hence I very much appreciate your clarification today, President. Obviously this discussion is directly relevant to the bill given that we are talking about the agriculture budget.

In my electorate there have been a number of important projects I advocated for before the election that I was disappointed to see not funded in this budget. I have spoken about them on other occasions, so I do not need to go into detail. I did, however, want to reference in this discussion the quite appalling pork barrelling of the education budget. An analysis has been done that demonstrates that 93 per cent of capital funding for schools is going into Labor electorates. The education minister, at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing, walked straight into this by saying that – in a rather smug way, if I might say – the government won a significant majority at the election. Absolutely; thus you would expect a slight imbalance from coalition-held electorates to Labor-held electorates or Greens-held electorates when it comes to the education budget. However, the figure is 93 per cent. I think the government holds 60 per cent of seats in the other place; 93 per cent of funding going to Labor-held seats is a clear rort. I have spoken on numerous occasions about any number of schools in my electorate, fabulous state schools, that desperately need capital funding. It was good to hear Mr Galea earlier talking about one school that has received some funding in a coalition-held seat. That must be the exception that proves the rule.

My broad view of this budget is that the Victorian people should not be punished for the financial incompetence of the Andrews Labor government. They should not be hit with a whole series of new taxes – a schools tax, a land tax, a rent tax, a debt tax – that will have, despite the protestations of those opposite, a significant negative impact on so many Victorians. I do not accept, nor does anybody else, to the best of my knowledge, the government’s logic that its tax changes – its significant tax increases – are carefully calibrated only to hit the top end of town. That is not the case. It is not the case for the thousands of Victorians who have signed the ‘axe the tax’ petition to ditch Labor’s schools tax. It is not the case for so many renters, and we have spoken about renters a great deal in this house this week. That is right and proper given the nature of the crisis that is underway right now. I spoke more about Victorians trying to get into the rental market and struggling with sky-high rents just on Tuesday. I do not doubt many of my colleagues around the chamber will want to talk more about some of the impacts of budget measures, including tax increases, upon those seeking to rent.

Of course we will not stand in the way of this bill. There are several elements of this bill that I support, and I have spoken about them previously. But on the whole, in the main, the impact of this budget will be seriously negative on the Victorian people. We get it – we do get it – that under Labor Victoria is broke, but the Victorian people should not be punished for that.

**The PRESIDENT:** Before I call Mr Galea, a few people might have been looking towards me to talk about relevance in Dr Bach's contribution, but the budget covers nearly every aspect of life, so that is why it is wideranging. It is something that I took advantage of myself in previous years, as Dr Bach probably remembers.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:24): It is with delight that I rise to talk about this very comprehensive, very impressive budget, the 2023–24 Victorian state budget. I would like to thank Dr Bach as well for that wonderful etymological adventure through some of the parliamentary and non-parliamentary phrases in this place. It is always informative in this place, and you never know quite what you are going to learn one day to the next. I appreciate that very enlightening discussion.

This is a budget that delivers for Victorians. I have spoken in a number of contributions in this house both in the last sitting week and this sitting week about the many, many things that this budget delivers for my community in the south-eastern suburbs. In fact, as Dr Bach noted, I was speaking just this morning about the two new primary schools already being built, on top of which are three new schools for the Clyde North area which are being built as part of this budget. I also had the delight of visiting Carrington Primary School in the Rowville electorate, which is in Knoxfield, to announce planning funding for their \$13 million redevelopment – another election commitment being fulfilled in this budget – as well as \$2 million of funding for St Jude the Apostle School in Scoresby. It was terrific to see that we are continuing to support public and non-public low-fee private schools as well.

There are a number of other initiatives that I could talk at great length about, including the mental health and wellbeing locals, one of which is going to be built in Narre Warren, which is going to be a huge boon for my community in the south-east. I spoke yesterday in the house about the importance of having access to quality health care close to home, and that is just as important for mental health as it is for other forms of health – it removes those barriers – so that is a really important initiative too. I am also excited for the further planning works that this budget has funded for even more mental health and wellbeing locals, be they in Officer or Cranbourne or other places across the south-east. There are a number of things to celebrate locally.

This is a challenging budget scenario that we do find ourselves in. Much as those opposite might like to say it is all the government's fault, you do have to acknowledge that we have been through quite a considerable period of adversity not just in Victoria, not just in Australia but across the world with the COVID-19 pandemic. As I said yesterday too, this government rose to the challenge, as many other governments did, and did what was necessary to put Victorians first, to keep them out of ICU beds and to keep them in jobs. We do not make apologies for doing that. We also want to make sure that we are not passing the burden of that COVID-related debt on to the next generation, so there is a bunch of measures that have been outlined by other speakers on this bill that we will be putting through to repay the COVID debt that was incurred over the past few years.

It would be very easy for me to spend the next few minutes going through all the things that affect my electorate, but I would like to give a bit of a broadbrush approach to some various different topics that this budget covers across a range of statewide areas, because there really are quite a lot of them. I did have the opportunity in the last two weeks as part of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) to partake in detailed discussions with ministers and officials, along with two other colleagues from the chamber, and it was very good to hear from them firsthand about their priorities and what this budget will seek to deliver.

For example, in the department of Aboriginal affairs there are a number of initiatives, including Closing the Gap funding, transforming the system to enable families and children to get better support – \$20.9 million in this coming financial year and \$26.7 million in the next financial year as well. If we look again at the Department of Education and Training, we will be providing Victorian students with the essentials to support their engagement in learning – again, \$21 million this year and \$26.7 million in the next financial year. For the new schools planning fund – we have spoken quite a

lot about that – there is \$26 million in this coming financial year. There are quite some recurring figures here – it is quite a good number, 26.

We also have a number of asset initiatives. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing – \$26.9 million in asset initiatives in the coming financial years. For the Department of Health, we have rare diseases and cancer, a very important field of research – that funding is ramping up, as it should. This coming financial year it will be \$24.9 million, rising to \$26.1 million and \$26.8 million in coming financial years. Health-based responses to public intoxication – also \$26.9 million in the 2024–25 financial year. Right through to other sectors, such as and including asset initiatives – more PET scanners for Victorian hospitals. This is going to be a huge benefit across the state, including for the people of Frankston, with the Frankston Hospital benefiting from these upgrades too. That is \$26 million in the 2025–26 financial year, which will be a significant benefit for that community. All the way through to the Building Better TAFEs Fund – this is the government that rescued TAFE, coming back from the disastrous former coalition government that gutted TAFE. They even forced the closure of the Swinburne TAFE campus in Lilydale, which was shameful – a TAFE that was reopened by this government, one of the first steps by the wonderful previous member for Monbulk, which was great to see.

We are investing in TAFE too with the better TAFE fund, \$26.1 million, another significant boon before that figure increases again the following financial year too. If we look at emergency services upgrades, we are delivering the emergency services upgrades that our state needs, increasing funding with a total estimated expenditure of \$26.6 million over the forward estimates.

Revenue is an important part of this as well, and there are measures that will be in place to support our small business as well. As with many of the tax changes discussed, one of the things that has been overlooked is the increase to the payroll tax threshold. This is going to be a significant benefit to a number of Victorian businesses, ramping up those threshold levels so that they can continue to invest in and support their staff. Six-thousand businesses will be affected initially, and then when the threshold rises to \$1 million that will benefit up to 26,000 small businesses. So there are a number of initiatives across a number of sectors that will be supporting Victorian workers, Victorian employers and Victorian jobs as a part of this budget.

In the space of transport and planning there are a number of benefits, many of which we were able to explore at PAEC last week as well. Bus routes are an important and vital transport link for many Melburnians and Victorians. I spoke about that in length in my maiden speech as well; it is a topic that is close to my heart. We were greatly benefited to see the zero-emissions bus out the front of the steps of this building on Tuesday morning, and it was terrific to see what the future looks like. As I mentioned in a previous contribution, that bus is actually from the Heatherton depot in my electorate. I had the chance to visit that depot several months ago with my colleague in the lower house Mr Meng Heang Tak, the member for Clarinda, and we got to see firsthand just the sorts of investments that are taking place in our buses and our depots to refit the network to support the rollout of zero-emissions buses. The mileage on these buses is quite remarkable as well.

You might be a bus user on the 426 Caroline Springs to Sunshine; in the west in Mr Mulholland's electorate you might be on the 526, the Coburg to Reservoir bus; you might be in the Southern Metro electorate and taking the Middle Brighton to Chadstone bus, route 626; or of course, best of all, you might be in the south-east of Melbourne taking the Fountain Gate to Pakenham bus, route 926, a fantastic, important connector bus as well. This government is investing in our bus network with some particular reforms which will benefit people, including the extension of the route 433 bus in Maddingley with service extensions as well, with a new route in serving Eynesbury, in Melton. Also there is the continuation of bus services in my electorate in the Clyde area of Casey, with the route 888 and 889 buses being locked in. These extensions were developed as part of a pilot program last year in consultation with local developers. It is a new method of approach, ensuring that our bus routes in growing areas are extending in line with the population growth and that people are moving in with services at their door, at the end of their street and around the corner. So that is an important initiative;

it has been very successful in the Clyde North estates. Locals have told me about how valuable they find the services and having them ready to go by the time that they move in. So that trial has now ended, but this budget has locked in that funding to ensure that those extensions to those two routes, the 888 and the 889, are locked in for the benefit of my constituents. It is the same deal on the other side of the city too, in Wyndham, where routes 152 and 182 are being continued under similar circumstances.

We also have the fantastic new cross-peninsula bus that has been announced as well, and I would like to give a bit of a shout-out to the new member for Hastings, who has lobbied very actively for this. It is just amazing to see what having a good, active local Labor member can achieve in an electorate. I know the Minister for Public Transport has taken a keen interest in this project too. I spent a lot of time –

**Matthew Bach:** He hates buses.

**Michael GALEA:** He loves buses, Dr Bach. I spent a lot of time in a previous career working across Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula and commuting by bus across the peninsula as well, so I can speak firsthand to the absolute value this would have. If you are in Hastings and needing to access something in Mornington or Rosebud, it is a huge trip.

You have got to go into Frankston, whether you take one of the buses or you take the Stony Point line, before you then get on the 788 down to the peninsula, adding completely unnecessary time to your journey. This new bus service is a vital new connection for that community of the peninsula. It has been called for for years. It has taken a Labor member to actually speak up for his community and get this delivered. I know he lobbied actively the Minister for Public Transport on this project. In fact it was one of his first projects, so I do want to give a big shout-out to him there.

It is also great that we have a public transport minister that understands the role of what strong bus networks can actually deliver for our communities. In the PAEC estimates in fact I was delightfully surprised to hear Mr Carroll refer to the very, very wonderful book *Transport for Suburbia* by Paul Mees. Paul Mees, may he rest in peace, is a since-deceased Melbourne University academic who was at the forefront of transport planning thinking. He saw earlier than most of us did that we do not have to be a car-dependent city and we do not have to be a car-dependent state. Cities such as Melbourne and regional cities across Victoria as well do not have to be dependent on cars, and you can make public transport work even in what are commonly referred to as lower density areas. There is the right thinking in this government about that approach now too.

It is great to see the Victorian bus plan. We have already got bus reviews having recently taken place in Mildura, in the northern suburbs and in the north-east as well, and I, along with many other of my colleagues, look forward to those bus reviews continuing to take place across Melbourne too. It is important to get it right, so it is important that we do it properly, because we know that the majority of Melburnians, for instance, do not live within walking distance of a tramline or a train station. As much as my colleague who I am delighted to have back with us today in the chamber complains about tram tracks in the city, my electorate does not have any tram tracks either. We rely on train services, we rely on buses and we rely on roads.

Buses are a really critical part of our broader transport network that we are continuing to invest in, and these improvements in the budget are a fantastic part of that as well. I know, Acting President Terpstra, you would be delighted too about those bus reviews going on in your electorate at the moment and, as I said, that new zero-emissions bus and those buses rolling out across the state. We already know that public transport, whatever the mode, is far more environmentally conscious than a private motor vehicle. Like for like, 40 people on a bus compared to 40 people in their cars, even with an old-technology diesel bus it is still more environmentally friendly. The trains are even better too, and in fact our trams are even more environmentally friendly because they are now fully solar powered, which is fantastic to see as well.

**Matthew Bach:** Trains?

**Michael GALEA:** Trams. Trains are also very efficient because obviously you have got a large number of people using them. Even with older fossil fuels powering them it is still a more efficient, more environmentally sustainable way to travel. But with these new technologies, with these new zero-emissions buses, that is ramping up even more so and it is really fantastic to see. As I said, I do not have time to go through all the wonderful initiatives across all the different portfolios in this budget.

**Nicholas McGowan:** You can move an extension.

**Michael GALEA:** I am not going to move an extension, much as I appreciate the kind offer, Mr McGowan. Whether it is public transport, whether it is investing in our mental health – this is the first government that has really taken mental health seriously, and I would actually say the first government in Australia, to the same level that the Andrews Labor government has. It is absolutely unprecedented. No matter what good other governments may have done, this is the first government that has actually taken that bull by the nettle and done its absolute best to transform the mental health system in this state. I could talk about any number of projects, but I do commend this bill to the house and long may it pass.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:39): I rise as part of this debate to speak to the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria. We acknowledge the difficult task of delivering a balanced budget post the COVID pandemic, and we are greatly supportive of the equitable approach adopted in this bill. As it is a supply bill, it is not something we would be minded to interfere with on principle.

Despite a notable tightening of the belt, I am particularly pleased to see that our calls to fund the \$500,000 U-Turn program were heeded. The intersection between family violence and alcohol and other drugs, which this intervention program addresses, is important work to help change the attitudes and behaviours of men experiencing substance misuse issues who have used violence. We are also very pleased to see that this budget takes harm reduction seriously. It makes important Drug Court advancements and provides essential funding for drug and alcohol treatment programs. This includes a \$500 million investment into drug treatment and rehabilitation services, 84 new alcohol and other drug trainees and a \$10 million pharmacotherapy crisis package to expand specialist clinics.

As an issue close to my heart, or more accurately close to my uterus, it was great to see the budget include funding for 10,800 additional laparoscopies to help treat endometriosis. This often debilitating condition affects one in nine women and has been misunderstood and underdiagnosed for far too long. I have previously spoken in this chamber on the government's announcement of \$58 million for 20 new comprehensive women's health clinics and a dedicated Aboriginal-led women's clinic. Both announcements are incredibly worthwhile and important reforms to address the gendered inequalities of our health system and to improve the experiences of women and girls of all walks of life.

I acknowledge also the \$6 million commitment to anti-vilification campaigns to counter discrimination and prejudice against Victoria's Jewish and Islamic communities. This comes at a time when we have seen shocking scenes of neo-Nazi hate groups in Victoria and on the steps of our Parliament. Clearly this kind of support for anti-vilification is urgently needed, and I hope it extends to LGBTIQ+ directed hate speech. We acknowledge the further work the Victorian government is doing in the area with their commitment to extend anti-vilification laws to protect members of the LGBTIQ+ community. However, the 18-month time line for these laws foreshadowed by the Attorney-General is a very long wait in the face of escalating violence faced by our Victorian LGBTIQ+ community. I acknowledge the Attorney has got a big job ahead of her. Our community is being attacked by extremist hate groups, including in my own electorate, where council-endorsed family and community events have been targeted. This terrifying vilification continues to escalate further and further, and we need to stand up against it.

It would be remiss of me if I failed to take the opportunity to mention the role that industrial hemp could play in Victoria's budget if we gave it the chance. In this budget we saw the government commit to accelerate the end of native logging and provide financial support to ensure workers in the industry are reskilled for future work opportunities. We commend them for this, but as my colleague David Ettershank rightly pointed out in the last sitting week, this industrial transition raises the question of how we now fulfil the demand for wood, fibre and paper products. This is where industrial hemp could be the answer. It is a sustainable alternative for the building materials and paper products we will continue to need, and it will provide numerous long-term jobs for workers affected by the end of the logging industry. We look forward to the work of the parliamentary inquiry into industrial hemp, and it is our hope that this will lead to industrial hemp being a major player in the state budget's future.

The great missed opportunity, from my perspective – you might be shocked – relates to cannabis. Victoria spends millions of dollars every year criminalising cannabis. That is taxpayer money wasted on policing, in the criminal justice system and in punishment. It limits the opportunities of Victorians to contribute to our economy by burdening them with criminal records. When we criminalise cannabis, criminal organisations become best positioned to make millions of dollars in the cultivation and sale of cannabis in Victoria instead of funnelling those funds through a regulated market. Lawful cannabis could save Victorians hundreds of millions of dollars every year. It would create thousands of secure jobs and reduce unnecessary law-enforcement costs.

With those comments made, we acknowledge the context of this bill in addressing the needs of a post-COVID Victoria and confirm our support.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:45): I am very pleased to rise to speak on the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023. As Dr Bach said, we support the bill as it is an important bill to support supply, but we do have several problems with this brutal state Labor budget. I basically think that this budget is an admission of a few things. It is an admission that this Labor government has lost control of our state's finances, it is an admission that they have mismanaged our major projects – over \$30 billion worth of blowouts – and it is an admission that the state's debt and deficit have blown out. It is an admission of a broken promise made to the electorate no less than eight months ago that there would be no new or increased taxes. They are punishing Victorians by hitting them with new taxes in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis. Under Labor Victorians are paying more and they are getting less.

You only have to look at my electorate, where they are taxing schools. They are taxing non-government schools, of which there are many around the state. There are some really important ones in my electorate. Dr Bach mentioned earlier Aitken College in Greenvale, who have been hit hard by this budget. I just want to point out, as Dr Bach said, that Aitken College is not Xavier. It is a growth area school. It used to be right on the end of the urban fringe and provided a lot of opportunities in the agriculture space for farmers from northern Victoria to come down and learn the skills to one day run their family farms. It is an important school. And I would note that Greenvale Secondary College does not yet go all the way to year 12 and has only just been established, so many parents had no other option for schooling in the area but to send their kids to a good independent school like Aitken College.

If you look further north, there are schools like Hume Anglican Grammar in Mickleham, a great school which runs three campuses across the north. But if you look at the closest public school, Mount Ridley College, it is bursting at the seams. It has 2750 students. When you are that over capacity and the area has such a massive underinvestment in public schooling, a lot of parents feel like they do not have any other option but to send their kids to a good independent school like Aitken College, like Hume Anglican Grammar or like Penleigh and Essendon Grammar. I know its principal has had some pretty harsh words to say, and I know the principal of Aitken College Josie Crisara has called this tax 'bizarre'. She encouraged all of her local parents to contact all of the local members of Parliament, both lower house and upper house, so I know the emails the member for Greenvale has been receiving, and the letters, because I have been receiving the same ones, and I have got to tell you: parents are not happy. Parents in Greenvale are not happy with the representation they are receiving from their local Labor member. I have certainly been hearing from them. I was at a listening post last Saturday in

Greenvale Shopping Centre and had countless parents come up to me absolutely furious about this schools tax. Even the petition that is on the parliamentary website is by an Aitken College parent also furious at this schools tax.

The government has not considered this. It has clearly been botched, let us put it that way. It has been absolutely botched. In the budget papers it says there are approximately 110 schools that will be affected by this tax and it will be decided by the Minister for Education and the Treasurer. We then saw the Treasurer say that it will be up to the education minister, in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and then we saw the education minister say that it is for the Treasurer.

**A member:** It was a complete cock-up.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** It was. And then we saw that the education minister could not name a single school. She could not say whether she had consulted; then she said she had consulted with schools. Asked where and when, she said she went to a dinner, the Independent Schools Victoria dinner. Asked who she consulted with, she could not name a single school.

I tend to agree with Dr Bach that this minister will not be in that portfolio for very long. We know what happens under this government when someone is underperforming. They tend to get booted out pretty quickly or shuffled around, and that is exactly the same thing that will likely happen to this Minister for Education. But I actually blame the Premier and the Treasurer, because they are the ones that have come up with this policy, and the Premier then comes in and says, 'It won't be 110 schools.' The pattern of behaviour of this Premier and the Premier's private office, who want to divert attention from the press gallery, is because they know they are under heat on this issue. He comes in and cleans up the mess that the Treasurer has had to put up with. That afternoon he says, 'Oh, no. It won't be 110 schools. Don't worry about it.'

But we know this government has form on ratcheting up taxes, turning the volume up on taxes and lowering thresholds so more people are captured. There are still lots of schools that are completely uncertain. Apparently, the education minister will be consulting with schools. None of my schools have heard from her. Have anyone else's schools heard from her? We heard from Mr Galea before. He is working with schools to make sure that they are not impacted. Well, if Mr Galea would like to join me out in the northern suburbs and come to Aitken College in Greenvale, that would be great, because he seems to have some sort of magical power that the Labor member for Greenvale does not. He seems to have some sort of magical power. I would like the education minister to join me in Greenvale, and perhaps other Labor members would like to come to Greenvale to see the failures of this government, particularly on Mickleham Road.

We saw no funding for stage 2 of Mickleham Road. They say they are duplicating Mickleham Road, right, but they are only duplicating 1.6 kilometres from Somerton Road to Dellamore Boulevard. How much is that costing? \$222 million for 1.6 kilometres of road. To put this in context, Labor completed the Plenty Road duplication for \$145 million for 6.6 kilometres of road, and the 6-kilometre duplication of Craigieburn Road is costing \$300 million. So why in Greenvale is it costing so much for so little? 1.6 kilometres of road. When people see the signs up around the construction, people think it is going to Craigieburn Road until you tell them, 'No, actually they are only doing a tiny bit of it.' Why? Why are the northern suburbs being forgotten? Then we see front page after front page in the *Australian Financial Review* of CFMEU standover tactics on the Mickleham Road project pushing out different groups that do not have an enterprise bargaining agreement with the union.

**Bev McArthur:** Ghost shifts.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** We see reports of ghost shifting, and then we also see \$109 million was committed and budgeted by the former coalition government for the Mickleham Road project. Labor claims all of the \$222 million – uh-uh. That was funded by the former coalition government. But in comes Catherine King, the federal member, with her infrastructure review of all previous projects and decides to chuck the Mickleham Road project into that review. So in this state budget the Mickleham

Road project, which is under construction, is now 'to be confirmed'. A Labor federal government sweeps out all the money, and so now it is to be confirmed. We have seen no local members, whether it be the member for Greenvale, whether it be the member for Kalkallo or whether it be the member for Calwell advocate for that money to be kept in Greenvale. It is an absolute failure of leadership to our community that we have not seen any Labor members hit back against the federal government and say, 'Wait a second. What are you doing with this funding? That should be kept in our electorates because the community deserve no less.' We have seen the same thing in Wallan with the Wallan diamond. Fifty million dollars was budgeted by the former coalition government and the project is put on ice –

**Michael Galea:** On a point of order, Acting President, as Mr Mulholland well knows, all projects which have already started are being completed, and I would ask him not to mislead the house.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Sonja Terpstra):** I ask Mr Mulholland to continue.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Thank you, Acting President, very wise. I would point to Mr Galea and say: your own budget says the completion date is to be confirmed. Have a read of your own budget. Look at the line item for the Mickleham Road project, and you will see 'To be confirmed'. Given that \$220 million is there, everyone thought that it had to include an upgrade to Craigieburn Road – a duplication all the way to Craigieburn Road. No, it is still just the 1.6 kilometres, and we are now seeing the completion date for that is 'To be confirmed'. They do not know when they can complete it because their federal Labor colleagues have pulled the rug from under them and have taken all the money that was previously committed by the former federal coalition government. That is absolutely not good enough. The people of Greenvale are getting a double whammy: if they send their kids to Aitken College they are going to be paying more in school fees, and if they are stuck in traffic they are going to be stuck in traffic longer because this government is not investing in the crucial infrastructure required to get them from Greenvale to Craigieburn or Craigieburn to Greenvale. When that money is pulled away, it is the Labor cone of silence. You never criticise a Labor mate, otherwise you would be kicked out of the party. You have got members not criticising people who have taken that money that was budgeted for their communities. It is an absolute outrage and a complete failure of leadership.

We saw Mr Batchelor and others the other day saying, 'What would you cut?' Well, we would manage infrastructure projects better. We have seen \$30 billion of infrastructure blowouts by the incoming Premier – I know Mr Galea might prefer another candidate. We have seen \$30 billion of infrastructure blowouts, so we have got to manage that better. I am astonished and disappointed to see union standover tactics on the North East Link and on the Mickleham Road project, which were covered in detail in the *Australian Financial Review*. These are contributing to costs, and these are contributing to the budget.

I mentioned last sitting week \$3000 subsidies for electric cars, which on average cost about \$70,000. The people of Greenvale, the people of Wallan, the people of Beveridge and the people of Broadmeadows – most of them cannot afford a new electric car. Labor wants to subsidise the people of Ashwood to purchase electric cars.

**Michael Galea:** It's been phased out.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Well, they have now cut it, so that is one thing I congratulate the government on. They have perhaps taken my advice. I mentioned fishing rods as well. We saw that blow up in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee budget estimates thanks to the work of my colleague Mr McGowan. They also are spending on things like a Suburban Rail Loop manager of diversity and inclusion, costing \$238,000. The successful applicant is:

... responsible for delivering expert advice and services to the organisation to ensure SRLA is an inclusive and diverse workplace ...

It is a project that you yourselves have blown out. It is not getting to the northern suburbs until 2052. And in response to local advocacy asking when there will be a grade separation and upgrade at

Broadmeadows station, do you know what the government said? ‘That’s all planned as part of the Suburban Rail Loop part 2, the Suburban Rail Loop North, and that is not due to be delivered until 2052.’ Seriously, this is the kind of advocacy we get from Labor in the northern suburbs of Melbourne: ‘Just wait until 2052’ – possibly, if it ever gets to the northern suburbs – ‘to have your train station upgraded.’ I invite any of you to come out and look at Broadmeadows station and ask whether that is okay. I know the member for Bayswater secured an upgrade to a train station. A similar request was made by Hume City Council but was rejected. Why is it good enough for Bayswater but not for Broadmeadows? This budget should be condemned.

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (11:00): I rise to speak on this year’s budget bills. It is important to understand budgets in context. We have emerged from some of the most disruptive years and decades after the global pandemic. We are resuming life while still coming to terms with the toll of what happened. Lives and livelihoods were disrupted, people separated and communities fractured. However, we also came to understand and grow our strength and resilience, learning new ways to communicate and cope with upheaval. Victorians did it tough over the last few years, but our Parliament supported the government to take some extraordinary action. We found homes for the homeless, we found ways to provide income support to millions, we innovated and we experimented with new and bold ideas.

This year’s budget is framed around managing the financial implications of the pandemic, with key measures to address the budgetary deficit and debt, including significant cuts to jobs and programs. But what is missing in this response is a recognition of the other major issues we faced as a society before and during the pandemic – issues that will plague future generations if we do not act now. This budget misses the ongoing social and environmental deficit we continue to face, and it is something that should worry us all.

Budgets also tell us about priorities. The Greens welcome the government’s commitment through this budget to ongoing investment in our health system, implementation of the findings of the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System and support for early years education through free kinder. It was good to see some extra support for programs like From Homelessness to a Home, more funding for community legal centres like the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and significant funding for child protection reform for First Nations children and young people.

We are in the midst of a climate and ecological crisis, the worst housing affordability situation in decades and cost-of-living pressures that are pushing thousands of Victorians to the brink, but you would not know it from this budget. There was nothing in the budget for renters despite the worst rental conditions in generations. There was no commitment to build more public housing. We are spending four times more on the racing industry than on people in housing stress or experiencing homelessness. Instead of investing in restoring nature, we have a \$2 billion cut to the environment department. With this budget this government had the opportunity to invest in our future by expanding and funding public services and the public sector and continuing a range of programs that look after our communities, but this budget lacked the imagination to think bigger and go further.

We continue to be in a worsening climate and ecological crisis. Earlier this year the IPCC released the final synthesis report of its sixth assessment in what it called a final warning to humanity. There is still time to address irreversible climate change, the report found, but we need to act now. UN Secretary-General António Guterres described the report as a survival guide for humanity and called for all countries to massively fast-track climate efforts, saying:

We have never been better equipped to solve the climate challenge, but we must move into warp speed climate action now. We don’t have a moment to lose.

As stated in the IPCC report, acting on climate change requires deep, rapid and sustained cuts to emissions if we are to have any chance of limiting temperature increases to 1.5 degrees Celsius. This means that here in Australia and in Victoria we need a plan to get out of dirty, polluting fossil fuels like coal and gas, starting with no new approvals of coal and gas projects, but there are over a dozen

new gas projects on the books at various stages of development across Gippsland and the Otway Basin. Beach Energy is still looking to drill under the Port Campbell National Park and is just one approval away from connecting four new offshore gas wells to its Otway gas point. To add insult to injury, the Labor government is planning on keeping coal alive with its coal-to-hydrogen plant, which will turn brown coal into hydrogen for export to Japan. Not only does this project involve using carbon capture and storage technology to store carbon dioxide in disused offshore gas wells, a technology that has not been proven at this scale anywhere in the world, but it will lock us into years more of burning brown coal and creating millions more tonnes of carbon dioxide each year.

In this budget it is good to see the government allocate money for flood recovery projects after the devastating floods of October 2022, but there is little money for future climate and disaster mitigation and adaptation. We already know that we are going to see these kinds of once-in-a-lifetime climate disasters increase in frequency and severity. The coming decades will require significant investment in adaptation and mitigation, and the time to invest in this work is now, not decades down the track after increasingly frequent natural disasters have again threatened livelihoods and lives.

There was one beacon of hope in this budget, however, and that was the welcome move to bring forward the transition out of native forest logging to the end of this year – a massive win for our environmental activists who have been fighting to save our precious native forest for decades. It is a relief for our environment and the people and communities who care so deeply about protecting our planet for future generations, and I also acknowledge the advocates within government that have championed this move. But once again we have to understand this in context. There are still areas of forest under threat, and this budget includes a \$2 billion cut to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and its programs at the very same time. These cuts will leave our already fragile environment in an even more perilous state. There are 2000 species at risk of extinction in Victoria, up from around 700 just a few years ago. Our ecosystems are at risk of collapse. This government continues to ignore the findings and recommendations of the ecosystems inquiry, which found that the government has been chronically underfunding the environment and biodiversity by billions of dollars for years. It recommended increasing funding for habitat protection and threatened species conservation, but once again in this budget this government failed to take any meaningful action on biodiversity protection and instead did the opposite by slashing funding for the environment department by \$2 billion.

Once again this budget has ignored the housing crisis. This Labor government likes to point to its Big Housing Build as proof that it has acted on housing and is doing something to address the crisis, but the Big Housing Build is barely scratching the surface of the demand for public and affordable housing in this state, and there was no further funding or a plan beyond the big build announced in this budget. There are over 120,000 people waiting for a public home. The 2021 census found that over 30,000 people are experiencing homelessness in Victoria – a jump of 24 per cent from the previous census in 2016 – and hundreds of thousands of households are in housing stress and spending most of their income on housing costs. The 12,000 new homes created through the Big Housing Build will barely make a dent in the massive need for more public and affordable housing.

Of course these homes are not public homes but rather housing managed by non-government housing associations known as community housing. Our community housing associations play an important role in our housing system. They provide specialist housing for vulnerable cohorts with specific needs; for example, co-op housing run by and for First Peoples or women's housing for survivors of family violence. But the government has an important role to play in our housing system too. In fact it should be seen as a core responsibility of government, but you would not know it from the government rhetoric these days. Public housing is a public service, like schools and education, which governments have provided for years. We used to spend big on building lots of high-quality public homes for everyone, but now this Labor government is turning its back on our public housing system by refusing to invest in new public housing and outsourcing the provision of housing to the private sector. This Labor government has no plans to build any more public housing, and it is neglecting the public

housing that we do have, letting homes fall into disrepair so they can be demolished and the land primed for private development.

Estates like Barak Beacon in Port Melbourne have been home to a close-knit community of neighbours and friends for years, but this community has been ripped apart by this government's redevelopment plan, which will see residents relocated across the suburbs and their homes destroyed. Instead of destroying these homes, what if they could be repaired and renovated to a high standard? Yesterday a number of us were privileged to listen to Office, a not-for-profit architectural research firm, present the findings of their report that shows it is possible for Barak Beacon and other estates that are slated for redevelopment to be refurbished instead. But this government has doubled down, refusing to engage with Office's proposal or even meet with tenants it is trying to evict.

Residents, including Margaret Kelly, marched down to Homes Victoria's offices seeking a meeting with the Minister for Housing, but instead of the minister listening to their pleas, the police were called and the residents were removed from the building. The government has now begun eviction proceedings and is looking to remove Margaret from her home, and she is set to appear before VCAT this afternoon. This government is treating its public housing residents with contempt. I have heard a lot of rhetoric and retort from those in the government over the past few weeks when the Greens have raised the issue of Barak Beacon estate. But if you want an example of how your government is treating public housing residents with contempt, you have to look no further than your treatment of Margaret Kelly and her community at Barak Beacon estate. I hope you all know that today, at 2 o'clock, your government is taking a public housing resident to VCAT. You have started legal proceedings against a 68-year-old woman, a pensioner who relies on you for her home. You are taking her to court to get her out of public housing.

This government should be doing everything it can to provide safe and secure housing for everyone who needs it. But instead of engaging in an overdue conversation about this government's role and responsibility in providing public housing for everyone, you are trying to tear communities apart well before any contract has been awarded for that estate or the other three estates bundled up with Barak Beacon for privatisation. In fact in response to the community campaign ramping up over the last few weeks, which we know your government is very, very sensitive about because you do not want to talk about the fact that you are privatising public housing – you claim to be a progressive government, but you are anything but when it comes to public housing – a campaign that is increasing its power and voicing, on behalf of thousands of people who need public housing, what your government is doing to privatise public housing, you are trying to move people away from that close-knit community.

This is like what happened with previous estates this government has attempted to privatise, like Walker estate in Northcote. At that point you once again attempted to split the community apart because it was coming together to fight your plans for privatisation. You said, 'We have to move you as a matter of urgency. We have got plans to redevelop this site. You can all come back.' Five years later that land has been cleared and not a single thing has been built upon it. There are 120,000 people waiting for public housing and 30,000 people experiencing homelessness tonight in Victoria. You had land cleared so that you did not have residents coming together to fight your plans for privatisation.

That is what you are doing at Barak Beacon estate. You are taking a 68-year-old woman to court today to get her out of public housing. They have asked her at VCAT to meet over the phone. They will not even give her a hearing in person or via Zoom. You want to kick someone out of housing over the phone. That is the contempt that you are treating Victorians with right now. You all bow your heads and you yell at us when we talk about public housing, but all of you should know in the government that this is what your government is doing. This is what your Minister for Housing is doing. This is what Homes Victoria is doing. This is what your Premier is sanctioning. And by staying silent you sanction it yourself. Not one of you can get up and say you defend public housing when you have plans to kick public housing residents, with no home to go to, out of homes that they have lived in for more than 25 years. But that is what you are doing today, on 22 June 2023. Let this day be a day that none of you ever forget: the day you abandoned public housing.

As we saw during the pandemic, this government has the capacity to find homes for the homeless. We found them during the pandemic, and we can do it again. In fact in this budget, thanks to advocacy from community organisations and residents like Margaret and beyond, you found money to extend funding for the Homelessness to a Home program – not enough, but you found some money – which began in the pandemic as a way to find long-term affordable housing for those living in temporary hotel accommodation. This program draws on the Housing First approach, something the Greens have been talking about – we brought in our bill to end homelessness last term. It is a proven model that says the best way to solve homelessness is to provide people with long-term secure housing and then connect them with wraparound services – something we can do in this state.

While this budget specifically mentions more funding for Housing First programs, including Homelessness to a Home, Housing First cannot work unless there are enough affordable homes to house everyone who needs them. There is no point setting up a front-end service when there is nowhere to send people. We have housing agencies who are telling people that they have to find a tent to live in. They are living on couches and they are living on the streets. Your government can find \$25 billion for two toll roads, but you cannot find enough money to build enough homes to ensure that everyone can have access to a safe and secure home.

Without an ongoing commitment to thousands more public homes every year and an actual strategy or plan for continued investment to tackle our housing crisis, there will never be enough affordable homes to meet demand. That is why the Greens have already put on the table with the government that any planning reforms designed to increase housing supply, which the government is starting to talk about, must require developers to pay their fair share and that at a minimum 50 per cent of homes built under these new planning laws must be public and affordable homes. This is the scale of the build that we need to solve the housing affordability crisis, and we can do it. Governments have done it before, and we can do it again.

Of course there is nothing in this budget for Victoria's renters. Renters have too often been treated like second-class citizens in this state, but as renting has become a major way of life in Victoria and more of us rent our homes for longer, renters are rightly demanding stronger protection and better rights. Right now we are in the middle of the worst rental crisis. Rents are at record highs. Vacancy rates are at record lows. Many renters are just one rent rise away from homelessness. Renters have received rent increases as high as a massive \$300 extra a week, and there is currently no relief in sight, with rents tipped to rise another 11.5 per cent across Victoria over 2023. A good government would intervene to protect renters from unfair rent increases. In fact we have done this before, as recently as 2020, when we had a rent freeze and a ban on evictions to keep renters safe at home. Other jurisdictions have successfully implemented rent controls to limit how much rent can go up at any one time – for example, the ACT, where rents are capped at a percentage of CPI. The Greens welcome news this week that, thanks to advocacy and pressure from the Greens and others, the government is setting up a task force to look at reforms for renters, including rent controls, like a cap on rent increases, regulating short stays and strengthening Victoria's vacancy tax. But renters need help now. I would urge the government to expedite the work of the task force and look at urgent action to help renters in the meantime, like introducing a rent freeze.

As covered so far, this state budget fails to address the urgent crisis facing Victorians, and without investing in our public sector, public services, public infrastructure and our environment, these crises are only going to get worse. Thousands of Victorians are doing it really tough right now, increasingly in need of food, material support and community services. But instead of investing in the public and community sectors, this budget is slashing thousands of public sector jobs. Workers are experiencing the biggest real wage cut on record. Our community sector continues to struggle with short-term funding and increased demand. Young people who are experiencing mental health issues are waiting six to 12 months to access the support they need, and people on the public dental waiting list are waiting 16 months for dental treatment. Instead of investing in public services, this government has

spent \$1.1 billion on a brand new prison that is currently sitting empty and continuing its exorbitant spend of \$25 billion for two toll roads.

But it is possible to create the kind of Victoria that I know we all want to see. So many of the injustices and inequalities in our state are a result of policy choices by successive governments – decisions to invest in toll roads instead of public homes, prisons instead of mental health services and consultancies instead of the public sector. We can and should be investing in the services that help build a better society and a better life for all of us. We could be properly taxing harmful industries, like gambling, or making billionaires, like the big banks or property developers, pay their fair share of tax and taking that revenue and using it to help pay for things people need, like more affordable and public housing; higher wages for public sector workers, like nurses and teachers; cleaner, cheaper energy from renewables; and more free GPs, dentists and psychologists. But to do this governments are going to have to find some real courage and vision and they are going to have to start listening to all of us.

Finally, to conclude, I am going to speak briefly on the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 as well. I want to take this opportunity to thank all the hardworking staff that make our Parliament work. To the clerks and their staff, the committee staff, the ushers, the catering staff, gardeners and security staff – all of you – thank you. You make coming into this building a pleasure, and you humanise this place. I also want to extend my thanks to the staff at the Parliamentary Budget Office. You provide an invaluable service to MPs and the Victorian community. My Greens colleagues and I are very grateful for the service you provide and the way you engage with us. Similarly, it is incumbent on us to acknowledge integrity agencies that are vital to the functioning of our democracy. IBAC, the Ombudsman and the Auditor-General play a crucial role in holding the government to account and in ensuring public confidence in our democratic system.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (11:20): I am pleased to rise to speak concurrently on the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 and the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023, affectionately known as the budget bill. I will concur with Dr Ratnam in terms of the Parliament appropriation bill and acknowledge all the wonderful staff and the work that holds us up in this place and ensures that the parliamentary process runs smoothly, that democracy runs smoothly and that my coffee is lovely and hot every time I go into the cafe. I particularly would like to thank the Legislative Council tables office and all the committee secretariat, who do an awesome job and do it under huge pressure. Because of the volume of work that we see in the upper house, including when there are select committees thrust upon us, they are working around the clock. So my thanks to them – and to Hansard for unjumbling my sometimes interesting combination of words.

Moving on to the budget bill, we hear a lot about the fact that this is the COVID debt repayment position. That is okay; that is what the spin doctors in the Premier's office have worked out is a good line to feed the people of Victoria. We do know that the budget in Victoria, the blowouts and the debt combined are more than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania together. They also experienced COVID. They experienced it in exactly the same way, insofar as it came from overseas and devastated our country, but we ended up being the most locked down city in the world and the most locked down state and had the most pressurised regional areas in Victoria as well.

This budget looks to take away payroll tax exemptions for independent schools. We are not sure if it is 110 schools. We are not sure if it is 150. We are not sure, nor is the Premier sure, whether he is responsible. He has said he is not responsible; he has said the Minister for Education is responsible. She has said that she is not responsible, even though the Treasurer said that she was responsible for this list. It is also a budget that increases property tax on, overwhelmingly, mum-and-dad investors that provide a pool of homes for the rental market. That is not a good idea.

It is a budget that has massive debt. It is just eye-wateringly scary the amount of debt that is contained in this budget. All governments trade in debt. Debt is not bad per se if it can be managed and if it does not create the burden on society and future generations that we are going to see with this. Standard & Poor's have noted that we have dropped our AAA rating to AA. That is going to have an impost and

will incur extra tax and extra interest for us. It is just absolutely gobsmacking – up to \$22 million a day in interest payments. That is frightening. We see a budget blowout by 2027 of \$171 billion in the projected outcomes. That is just frightening for Victorians.

When I speak to people in my Eastern Victoria Region many of them just feel so abandoned by the Andrews government. They feel as though regional Victorians are second-class citizens. Now, I know the vast importance – the Nationals know, and the Liberals understand – of regional Victorians. We grow the food that we put on the table right across Victoria. We grow the fibre that we have on our floors, that is structurally sound in our buildings and that we wear on our backs. We create that economic wealth in our regions, and it is felt right across the state.

What is absolutely heartbreaking is the cuts that we see across the whole megadepartments, as they now are. We see that in DEECA, the new name, there is a cut of \$344 million. The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action cutting public land management is a disaster for our environment. If you look to the experts on threatened species, you know that some of the major challenges to those species, the dangers to them and the threats to them, come from weeds and feral pests, yet we are cutting this department. We are cutting funding. The government is cutting funding in Victoria to regional boots on the ground – people on the ground. Only about 11 per cent of frontline workers are people with boots on the ground. The rest are in the CBD of Melbourne.

When you see public health cuts, one of the most devastating parts is the shockingly long waitlists for anyone who needs elective surgery, which is not really elective – it is just necessary surgery that does not need the ambulance at this stage. I have a constituent who was on the elective surgery waitlist over COVID and who went that far downhill and deteriorated to a state that their doctor said, ‘You are no longer elective surgery, you are actually life-threatening, and it must be done immediately.’ That poor person had lost weight and was in absolutely agony. These are the sorts of the things that we are seeing under the Andrews government, and these waitlists are still blowing out. But preventative health programs and community health services have been cut. These are the services that reach out in a very delicate and nuanced way into our small communities in my Eastern Victoria Region and provide that confidence and support for people who may not be able to negotiate or work their way into the system to have those conversations to access proper health. These are being cut under the Andrews government.

We are seeing justice and community safety being cut by \$364 million. When you go and speak to people – again, in the regions – about the importance of feeling safe in our communities, it is about having Victoria Police being able to be there, and my admiration goes to all first responders, VicPol included. It is quite devastating that there has been an attrition rate I think post COVID of VicPol officers leaving the system. They have had enough. They do not feel like they are being supported by the Andrews government, and they are under significant pressure. We do see also a range of issues happening out in country Victoria where there are increased on-farm crimes happening that really people have been quite frustrated with.

We also see that transport and planning have been cut by \$84 million, and one of the key things that has existed for a long time and been very supportive of regional infrastructure and regional projects, regional development, has also been cut. These are the things that put people in our communities on the front foot and enable co-contributions and investment by industry into great ideas that are good employers and innovation in our regions.

On the roads maintenance budget, the major topic that people come to my office, ring me up or speak to my staff about is the deplorable state of our roads. I could spend the last 6 minutes of my speech going through each and every part of my electorate and speaking about the roads. It defies logic. We see, unfortunately, that the rate of fatalities this year on regional roads is going up by comparison to previous years. We know that if you fix country roads you do save country lives and lives in general – the importance of maintaining a proper surface that is not failing after only a few months. It is just appalling that we are seeing this loss of valuable funds into this, and we had a policy that really looked

at, over 10 years, funding of \$10 billion. The budget is actually going back; it is less than when we first took over in the previous government.

Wellbeing cuts – it is really heartbreaking to see some of the stories that we see where there had been services provided. The youth space in the Latrobe Valley is one of those that have lost their funding. During COVID there was such a desperate time when people were really on their knees, and young people in particular were being disconnected and were away from school and away from sport et cetera. Many of them were couch surfing and still are. Those people had a service that was working and supporting them, and to see it being removed is certainly such a shame.

The agricultural funding has been axed. It is down 34 per cent on last year, and the government continue to take very little cognisance of the value of our agricultural sector in Victoria. Certainly I have used my time in this place to highlight the native timber industry. There is budget funding for it, but what that will look like is so obscure, and industry is not being communicated with. There is no plan. The government had seven years to close the industry. We were always opposing that and would have rolled that and kept the native industry had we been there. The government said, 'We've got seven years,' and then on 23 May they cast that aside and gave people seven months. That is just not fair for the industry. There is no certainty in this, and what that budget allocation is for is still uncertain.

In my Eastern Victoria Region there are some wonderful projects that need to be funded. We know with the West Gippsland Hospital that the Liberals and Nationals had made an ongoing commitment for many years to fund that new hospital between Warragul and Drouin. There is a sliver of a budget allocation for it, but it is not clear how much of that is going to go to the West Gippsland Hospital, and they have got 3½ years, supposedly, to build six hospitals across the state. From the way they build infrastructure, with the blowouts, I am very concerned about this really important piece of infrastructure for the people of the Baw Baw shire and indeed the wider area of West Gippsland.

I could go on with roads, and I will just say there are so many important infrastructure programs that need to be dealt with. The Drouin–Warragul bypass – if you ever spend 10 minutes in that space you will see the danger it is for those large transports that come through the town. The Mirboo North–Trafalgar Road – I am just going to say it is the most beautiful little place on earth, but there is a slipway road that is continually dangerous. We talk about safety on roads; this one needs to be upgraded. There is the South Face Road in Baw Baw, and I could mention just about any road in East Gippsland and South Gippsland that needs an upgrade, including the terrible space of the Leongatha bypass, stage 2 – 'kamikaze corner'.

The other things that are not in there include the Corinella Boating and Angling Club. They got \$200,000. Okay – it is not going to build them an absolutely vital piece of infrastructure for that whole community. They are ready, and they have had some funding through the Bass Coast shire, but it is not going to build them the most modest and beautiful structure to support their community. They could have done with an extra \$200,000. That could be a morning tea for the Premier's staff; that would have built really good clubroom facilities for the Corinella Boating and Angling Club.

There is a lot of talk by the government about saving the environment and the importance of stopping erosion, yet there is a cape-to-cape resilience project with examples of how this can be supported through infrastructure – important infrastructure – and they are getting drip-fed bits and pieces. This will not save that important coastline from further erosion. The Tyers CFA have got a shed. It is not big enough to put their fire truck in it, so they actually have to park it down the road. Solar Victoria is overspending by about \$40 million and underdelivering on its performance KPIs. This budget will go through, but country Victorians feel cheated and ripped off.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:35): I rise to speak today on the bill before us relating to the state budget. As I was reading the budget papers I approached this as a young person, particularly considering my experiences before being in this place. At a time when Victoria is facing so many challenges with the ever-rising cost of living and the lack of genuinely affordable housing,

this budget is a missed opportunity to take meaningful action to support everyday Victorians and particularly the most vulnerable in our community. We hear it said often in this place and other places that budgets are all about priorities and they are about taking action. Governments can choose where they allocate funds, who they prop up and who misses out.

Factoring in my experience as a young person and those I studied with and those I speak to regularly, the community expects to see funding allocated towards renters, who are over a third of our community; towards protecting our really important biodiversity; and towards building new public housing and addressing the threat of homelessness our community faces. Instead, as has been noted by my colleagues, we have seen large cuts to public sector workers and to environment funding. There is no funding for renters – nothing – in this budget and no new money for social and affordable housing. All the while this budget delivers \$400 million to the racing industry. Who is calling for that? Where are the priorities of this government?

We furthermore see in capital works funding when it comes to education – and the broad discussion has been widely canvassed in this place – that of the new capital works, we have seen double allocated to independent schools rather than public schools. In my region alone there are public schools and primary schools that are in states of structural disrepair, which has been noted by members across this chamber. What is in this budget for them? Who is looking out for them in this Labor government?

In factoring in community attitudes, the attitudes of young people and future generations and what they expect to see from our Labor government, I must of course take a moment to say on their behalf thank you with regard to the decision to end native forest logging. It is a difficult decision, as has been widely canvassed in this place. There are people on the ground in those communities that need crucial support – they need leadership – to ensure that they can transition away from an industry that has been dying for a long time but propped up, while making losses, by this government. It is something that the community and the Greens have been advocating for – the end of native forest logging – for years.

Hearing the day is finally coming, I also acknowledge that, following pressure from the Greens, we now also have a commitment to investigate action to help renters. The task force that has now been established to investigate the housing crisis will consider a number of measures that we have been advocating for to make renting fairer, putting in genuine protections and making it more affordable. These include rent controls, such as a cap on rent increases; regulation of the short-stay industry, like Airbnbs; and strengthening Victoria's vacancy tax, making it actually fit for purpose to push more empty homes onto the market, increasing supply.

I approach this budget thinking of my time at university prior to being in this place, and something I have spoken about many times in this chamber is the current reality that there are people in our community who are using drugs. This is a reality. For people – perhaps former colleagues of mine who at a party may have taken a substance – what currently is in this budget to protect them in that scenario from coming to harm? What services are there currently to check what those substances are? Are they what people think they are? It is all fair and well to receive a substance that from word of mouth is something that you believe it to be, but what services do we have in place to check its purity – to check if it is laced with something or if it is something that is going to give the expected outcome – before taking the substance? I am saddened to see that this budget does not include funding for a drug-checking trial, such as pill testing, which I have canvassed previously.

Something that, frankly, sickened me with the discussion around this budget was the notion both in public media and in this place that we are somehow still talking of chasing surpluses. On behalf of young people, of those doing it tough, such as renters, and of future generations, it makes me sick, frankly, to think that we are talking about a surplus in a time when so many are doing it tough – in a time when so many need support. Do not talk to me about surpluses.

As I have noted and as has been noted by many others, this budget was an opportunity to take action to protect those most in need. The Labor government have missed this opportunity, but I note on behalf

of my Greens colleagues that we will continue to hold this Labor government to account, to push them further and faster on the issues that matter and to make sure that an opportunity such as this one is not missed again.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:41): I rise this morning to speak to the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 and of course the budget measures that are in this bill. As we have seen, this budget was extremely concerning when it was handed down, and we have made many comments around the government's various taxes. This government is very keen on taxing Victorians, so much so that it is a divisive budget. It actually has picked out people that are going to be paying the price for the government's incompetence and mismanagement of Victorian taxpayers money.

That is the problem with the Andrews Labor government. They have got an inability to properly account for taxpayer funds and how they are spending. We have seen the waste and mismanagement over many years in infrastructure projects that have blown out – \$30 billion in infrastructure project blowouts alone. That money could have been and should have been put into health. I look at the payroll tax that is coming in that will be hitting the private aged care sector – a punitive tax that is going to have a very real impact on a sector that needs to be supported by government so the most vulnerable can therefore be cared for and that gives Victorians choice when they are managing their elderly loved ones.

The schools tax my colleagues have covered off very thoroughly. I have many families in my region, the Southern Metropolitan Region, that work extremely hard. They want choice and they send their kids to independent schools. This is an issue right across the state because so many Victorians are going to pay the price of another punitive tax from this government – a tax that is for the first time being put on independent schools. And the government cannot even describe or highlight who those 110 schools are that they have got on their hit list. When asked in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee just a few weeks ago, the minister had no clue. It is extraordinary then that the Premier was walking back around the threshold of those independent schools where the fees are going to be hit. It is clear that the government have really misjudged this, and they know that it is going to hurt hardworking Victorians, who pay their taxes and who rightly expect, when they do pay their taxes, that services are provided, as you would expect under a state government responsibility – health, education and policing. It is very important that we have those services maintained.

But in health we have a budget which has shown where it is failing. In the admitted services, 15 of the 25 performance standards have not been met. I am going to read these out. They demonstrate the significant issues around where the government is failing. This is important in the overall scheme of the government's budget. They are 'NWAU-funded emergency separations – all hospitals', 'NWAU-funded separations – all hospitals except small rural health services', 'Number of patients admitted from the elective surgery waiting list', 'Palliative separations', 'Perinatal mortality rate per 1000 of babies of Aboriginal mothers, using rolling three-year average', 'Subacute care separations', 'Total separations – all hospitals', 'Eligible newborns screened for hearing deficit before one month of age', 'Intensive care unit central line associated bloodstream infections', 'Percentage of patients who reported positive experiences of their hospital stay', 'Perinatal and child mortality reports received, reviewed and classified', 'Unplanned readmission after hip replacement surgery', 'Unplanned readmission after treatment for acute myocardial infarction', 'Non-urgent (category 3) elective surgery patients admitted within 365 days', and 'Semi-urgent (category 2) elective surgery patients admitted within 90 days'.

That is a really significant list of failures. That is in the budget papers. That is where our standards are falling, and that is going to have a real impact on the delivery of better health outcomes for all Victorians. In this budget of course we saw cuts in community health – a very important element of preventative health education and keeping people out of the acute system. I have just read out all those failings in our acute system, where there are so many issues that are occurring. With cuts to community health, that is only going to put that pressure on, and I would hope that those performance measures would improve in the next 12 months, because all Victorians would expect that to be the case.

Getting on to underfunding of hospitals, the government went to the election and promised over \$4 billion of funding across a number of hospitals, but we know that was completely overcooked at the time in terms of their promises because less than 8 per cent of that funding has come through. For West Gippsland Hospital, there was an election commitment of \$675 million; Queen Elizabeth II hospital, over \$1 billion; the northern suburbs hospital plan, \$1.155 billion; Monash Medical Centre, \$560 million; Dandenong Hospital, \$295 million; and Wonthaggi Hospital, \$290 million. That comes to over \$4 billion, but the budget has only allocated \$320 million, or 7.95 per cent of that allocation.

This government is running out of money. We have got a massive debt: \$171 billion and rising. Victorians are paying \$10 million a day in interest alone. Interest rates are going up significantly for so many households, and this government has not understood the basics of fiscal responsibility. Now, as a result, we have that extraordinary interest that we are paying every day and the extraordinary and out-of-control debt that the Andrews Labor government has put Victorians into. It is not all because of COVID. That is absolute rubbish. This is because of the mismanagement of the budgets and the total overspending and roting that has gone on in so many projects. We have seen reports about ghost shifts and the roting in infrastructure projects. Where is the oversight? Where is the accountability by this government to ensure that that sort of behaviour is not occurring? It has been going on for years and yet nothing has been done, so as a consequence it is Victoria's hardworking taxpayers who are paying the price for this massive budget overrun of \$30 billion in infrastructure projects.

If we were to have any faith in this government, then the infrastructure needs of Victorians who are seeking services in their community would have been undertaken. But I think that Victorians have seen – even in the last few months as this budget has come out and as we have been warned about – the dire situation Victoria is in. It has stunned many, many Victorians. They had not fully realised how bad a position Victoria is in, with \$171 billion worth of debt. That is more than Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania combined. We are paying \$10 million a day in interest, and that is going to \$22 million a day in just a couple of years time. These are very, very concerning and alarming figures that Victorians are now waking up to and seeing, just as they have seen their own household budgets come under pressure.

There are cost-of-living pressures that everybody is under and rising energy costs. Those rising energy costs are for households and they are for businesses. What this government is doing is slugging businesses with more tax, so we have seen more and more shut down and more and more people losing their jobs. Ford has announced today that hundreds of jobs will be gone in Geelong. There are banks moving hubs out of Melbourne into other states. ANZ is going from Melbourne with part of their hub into Queensland. This is an alarming situation that should have the Premier and the Treasurer very concerned, but I do not think they are. I do not think they care. I actually think the Premier has switched off. He is out of here. He knows that his legacy is going to be one that Victorians are going to have to pay a very heavy price for for many, many, many years to come.

It is extraordinary, this dire situation that we are in and the cost-of-living pressures that are hitting everyday Victorians, and yet the government's answer is 'Just tax them all.' What we have seen since the election of the Andrews government are 49 new or increased taxes – 49 – after the Premier said, 'I give you my promise that we will not increase taxes – no new taxes', back in 2014. Now we have got 49. So this is what we are faced with. This is the situation that Victoria is in. It is very, very concerning that the situation that we do find ourselves in is not going to get any better under this government. It is only going to get worse, because all they do is spend and tax. I think all in this chamber are concerned about that situation – well, I hope they would be. Again, this budget has a range of issues in it where spending of course is required, but there are many, many problems with the budget, not least of all Victoria's fiscal position. I think all Victorians are waking up to that reality and are looking at this government and hoping that the situation will improve markedly over the next 12 months.

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (11:53): I rise today to speak about the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 and also the motion concurrently. Many of my colleagues have spoken about some of the issues with this budget. It is certainly the worst budget in Australia's history. As reported in the *Age*, the budget imposes billions of dollars in new taxes, delays major infrastructure and imposes cuts to the public service, but net debt will continue to grow. We are now paying over \$10 million a day in interest, and that will rise to \$22 million a day in just a few years. Under the Labor government our state debt has gone through the roof. We have the highest debt of any state – more than Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania combined. In 2014 our state debt was just \$22 billion, and we are now fast approaching \$171 billion by 2027.

This budget will certainly hit rural and regional Victorians on many fronts when they can least afford it. It will have a significant impact on regional Victoria. As my colleague Danny O'Brien pointed out in the lower house, the infrastructure Big Build has become well and truly a big bill – \$30 billion of cost overruns on those projects that we know about and probably more to come. The debt this government has created will be a burden on future generations. Victorians pay more tax than any other state or territory. Instead of reducing wasteful spending, this government has introduced new taxes. Since Labor was elected nine years ago Victoria's tax take is set to double. They have introduced nearly 50 new taxes. This budget will impact renters, families, businesses, schools and jobs. The government has tried to dress this up as a way to pay down COVID debt with these taxes. Clearly there are a range of factors that come into play, and the government's overspending has certainly been one of them.

But it will have an impact on rural and regional Victoria. We know that our roads maintenance funding has been cut by 45 per cent since 2020, with \$260 million slashed this year alone. The Kilmore and Shepparton bypass projects have missed out on funding. We have the roads blitz program and the getting families home sooner and safer scheme worth \$694 million but not a cent going to rural and regional areas or non-Labor-held seats. The mode shift incentive scheme to get more freight off our roads and onto rail is an incentive program that provides financial support to rail freight companies to make investment in the cost of transporting goods, but this program has also been reduced and there is financial uncertainty, so people are not investing in committing to rail transport. We need to get trucks off our roads because they are certainly deteriorating.

The budget has also announced a land tax at a time when Victoria is in a housing and rental crisis. If you would like to invest in the property market to make a house available to rent, you will have to pay an extra \$1000 a year and continue to pay that \$1000 every year for the next 10 years. This government will gain an extra \$4.7 billion a year in additional revenue from land tax – the renters tax – but this will just impact renters and make rents even less affordable. According to the Council to Homeless Persons, homelessness has more than doubled in some parts of the state. In fact there are 30,000 people experiencing homelessness in Victoria every night. They are sleeping in tents or cars, couch surfing or in unsafe accommodation. I have seen tents set up in Bendigo and Castlemaine, and I note that the Mount Alexander shire has just removed the need for a permit for putting tents or caravans on people's properties in their backyards. Northern Victoria is home to two of the 10 fastest growing electorates for homelessness, with Bendigo East rising by 107 per cent and Mildura by 96 per cent.

I am concerned also about the impact on small businesses and jobs, with payrolls over \$10 million being hit. There will be another tax for payrolls over \$100 million, and this will mean \$1 billion a year in additional payroll tax for the government off the back of businesses and employers.

We have seen an impact on smaller programs in this budget as well: on our historical societies – it seems like budgets have been cut there – and on our leadership programs. I have spoken with leadership communities in regional areas. These are important programs, but again they have been cut. I guess too there is just an ongoing decline in this budget. We have seen the debts continue to pile up.

I think it is also worth mentioning the parliamentary services and the impact of the support in this bill. I am six months into being elected and do not yet have a permanent electorate office. My phone has

not been working at the office and the internet is not connected properly, and it is very frustrating to be in this position when I am doing my best to serve the region. I will continue to do so in a temporary office at the moment, but it has been extremely frustrating. Getting the support from the parliamentary services team is very important, I think, for any new member, and I hope that other members in future do not experience the challenges and the battles that I have had in this process. Certainly I value the support that is given through IT and through library services here, through the tours that take place in this house as well, but from an electorate office perspective it has been incredibly frustrating getting the services. We have had an antenna put on the electorate office just this week and I am hoping that that will contribute, but I will have to wait until October to move to a new premises. So it is very frustrating. I will continue to work until 2026, and I hope to be part of a government so that we can help make the changes that this state so desperately needs. While we are not permitted to block these bills, it is clear that rather than stimulate further investment and growth the state budget highlights this government's financial mismanagement –

**Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Office of the Special Investigator**

**Matthew BACH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:00): (193) I have a question today for the Attorney-General. Attorney, when appointing Justice Geoffrey Nettle as the special investigator on 30 June back in 2021, the then Attorney-General said this:

Justice Nettle brings more than 45 years of legal experience, sitting as both the trial and appellate judge in the Victorian Supreme Court and Court of Appeal, as well as serving in Australia's highest court ...

The Attorney went on to say:

This distinguished career stands Justice Nettle in excellent stead to take on the complex and important role of Special Investigator.

Given this praise for Justice Nettle's legal expertise, why does the government not accept Justice Nettle's view regarding the DPP's refusal to authorise criminal charges over the Lawyer X scandal?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:01): Dr Bach, it is not appropriate for me to state an opinion on these matters. We have established the OSI, and I thank them for their important work. The mandate was not to go and find criminal prosecutions, it was to determine and have a look at it to see if there were possible prosecutions. It has been set up, which was agreed to by this Parliament, and, as is appropriate, investigators are not the prosecutors. There is an independent DPP. She has made an assessment on the brief that had been presented – not all of the briefs have been presented – and said that in her opinion there is no reasonable prospect of conviction. It is not for me to determine these matters. It is for independent bodies, and I support both of them.

**Matthew BACH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:02): Thank you, Attorney. By way of a supplementary question, again referring to the previous Attorney-General's media statement from 30 June 2021, she said:

The appointment is another important step forward in restoring confidence in the justice system – ensuring that possible criminal conduct or police misconduct related to the Commission is thoroughly investigated.

Attorney, after a royal commission, a special investigation and tens of millions of dollars in work, not one single person has been held criminally responsible for the greatest legal scandal in our state's history. How does this 'restore confidence' in the justice system?

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Jaelyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:02): I take up that interjection. To suggest that there is a cover-up or something inappropriate here by me – a cover-up by me –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jaelyn SYMES:** It was my appointment of Justice Nettle to the special investigator role. They have conducted important work, and if you look at the foreword of the final report of the royal commission in relation to what that role was:

If the Special Investigator assembles sufficient admissible evidence to support criminal charges, they will prepare a brief for the Victorian DPP to determine whether it is in the public interest to prosecute. Even if there is sufficient evidence to bring charges, the DPP's decision may be difficult. These events occurred long ago. Records may be incomplete and memories may have faded. Ms Gobbo was encouraged in her behaviour by police and now lives in fear of being murdered. The current and former officers acted within what Victoria Police accepts was a failed system and many, perhaps all have had otherwise exemplary careers serving the public good.

This was always a matter that was not predetermined – (*Time expired*)

#### **Victorian Managed Insurance Authority**

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:03): (194) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Housing in the other place. Minister, yesterday the *Age* revealed that your predecessor had ignored advice from the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority that could have helped the growing number of prospective home owners who have been stranded because the state government insurance that they were forced to pay – and have – does not help them when a builder simply walks away from a contract without entering insolvency. What is the government doing to immediately introduce an abandonment trigger and help the growing number of Victorians whose great Australia dream has turned into the great Victorian nightmare?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:04): Thank you, Mr Bourman, for your question for the Minister for Housing. I will be pleased to pass that to him for him to respond accordingly.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:04): I thank the minister. Minister, more than 1750 construction companies have gone broke since this time last year, leaving thousands of Victorians relying on the now very stretched Victorian Managed Insurance Authority. One of those is my constituent Bill Schultz, who will be known to many members here as a passionate advocate for prospecting, just one of the outdoor recreations under siege at the moment. Bill was not building a McMansion in Brighton or renovating a terrace in Fitzroy. He was eking out his slice of dream by building in the Latrobe Valley. Bill is now left renting, with his savings tied up in a half-finished home after his builder Rawdon Hill went bust a month ago. Minister, there is a crisis in residential building and it is hurting battlers in the swelling urban fringe and in places like the Latrobe Valley. What is the government doing to beef up the VMIA and more importantly get these homes finished?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:05): Thank you, Mr Bourman. Again, I will pass your question to the Minister for Housing for him to follow up.

#### **Ministers statements: Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative**

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:05): I rise today as Minister for Regional Development to update the house on the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative elders independent living community project. Aboriginal elders in Ballarat will soon have access to a culturally specific independent living village thanks to a \$2.6 million investment from the Andrews

government. It was really wonderful to join elders, including Noongar elder Alan ‘Big Al’ Harris, who was there at the sod turn earlier this year and who will reside in the village with his wife Leonie once it is complete, and to join BADAC CEO Karen Heap and a number of other elders who have been such a big part of the planning and execution of this project since the funding was announced. Importantly, we were able to acknowledge a couple of the elders who are now in the Dreaming but who worked really hard to bring this project to fruition.

Along with local members Michaela Settle, Juliana Addison and Martha Haylett, we were delighted to turn the sod and to look forward to confirmation of the foundations of the units being laid. This is, really importantly, a project that is located really close to the Ballarat city centre, providing connectivity that is meaningful as far as participation in everyday life goes – and in a culturally specific setting as well. This is eight self-contained units. It has got a central hall for community meals, treatment rooms for medical personnel and also a veggie garden. We want to make sure that elders can live independently whilst getting the care that they need. Ballarat-based DRAR Constructions will build the village. This is a 160 jobs during construction and four jobs on an ongoing basis. Cultural themes and spaces are being designed in conjunction with and in partnership with elders. Congratulations to everyone involved.

### Palestine

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:07): (195) My question is for the Leader of the Government. Minister, national governments recognise other states, but state governments like Victoria often hold clear views and policy positions about foreign jurisdictions, both national and subnational, and even sign accords with national governments, like the Belt and Road agreement. In this context I ask you, as Leader of the Government and also representative of the Premier, the following: given on Sunday the Victorian ALP conference passed a motion calling on the Albanese government to recognise a Palestinian state before the next election, what is the policy of the Victorian Labor government in relation to recognising a Palestinian state? Are we to conclude that the Victorian government will comply with the direction of the ALP conference, or will the Victorian government, as I would advise, thumb its nose at the Victorian ALP state conference?

**The PRESIDENT:** I cannot see how that falls within the responsibility of the minister as far as the executive goes. I do not even think you can try to rephrase it.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Let me finish. There are a few things too. The minister is not responsible for any political party conference. She has no responsibility under the executive. But I will take a point of order if you like.

**David DAVIS:** On a point of order, President, my question was: what is the policy of the Victorian Labor government in relation to the recognition of a Palestinian state?

**The PRESIDENT:** And the minister will say, ‘That doesn’t fall inside my responsibility under the executive.’

**David DAVIS:** President, further on the point of order, I asked: will the state government comply with the direction of the ALP conference, or will the Victorian government, as I would advise, thumb its nose?

**The PRESIDENT:** And that is something the minister is not responsible for as well. As an aside – I am not letting the question go through – can I advise that when there is a question that has multiple questions, even if it is relevant to the minister, the minister can pick one. Anyway, I am not letting it through.

### Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (12:10): (196) My question is to the minister representing the Premier. In March this year the Treasurer travelled to Japan to provide this government's support for a new Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project, or HESC, that will use Victorian brown coal to make hydrogen for export to Japan. To be clear, this project is extremely emissions intensive even if this government's sham carbon capture and storage project does one day miraculously materialise to offset some of those emissions. The Minister for Energy and Resources, who is known to have reservations about this project, has publicly expressed concern that all the emissions risk would sit with Victoria. Why is the government providing support for a new coal project that we know is so destructive for the climate?

**Jaelyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:11): Would you like to direct that to the Treasurer, considering you have asked about his trip to Japan? Putting aside all of your inflammatory language about your views on a project that are not necessarily shared by everyone, perhaps he would like to provide a written answer in relation to his trip if that is what you are particularly interested in. I do not think it is a matter for the Premier when you have referenced a particular minister's trip and the purpose of that trip.

**Sarah Mansfield:** I referenced several ministers' positions, and it was about the government's overall position on this project.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** It is actually either the minister for resources or the Treasurer, potentially the Minister for Planning, but it is not the Premier's portfolio. Do you want to pick one?

**Sarah Mansfield:** We can direct it to the Treasurer.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** I will take that on notice for the Treasurer.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (12:12): The Victorian government has contributed \$50 million to a relatively unsuccessful pilot project for the HESC. We know that both the state and federal governments have been asked for significantly more money for the next stages of the HESC. How much has the Victorian government been asked to contribute to this project?

**Jaelyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:12): I thank Dr Mansfield for her supplementary question. I will pass that on to the Treasurer.

### Ministers statements: Aboriginal Children's Forum

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:13): I rise to update the house on how the Andrews Labor government is partnering with Aboriginal-led organisations to ensure Aboriginal children thrive and live in culturally rich and strong Aboriginal families and communities. Earlier this month I met with members of the Aboriginal Children's Forum and co-chaired the second day of their two-day meeting with Aunty Muriel Bamblett, CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency. The Aboriginal Children's Forum brings together representatives from Victoria's Aboriginal community controlled organisations, community service organisations and the Victorian government. Since it began in 2015 the ACF has met quarterly to promote the safety, health and resilience of Aboriginal children and young people. Through these forums members have advocated for a number of key initiatives in the Aboriginal children and families sector, including Aboriginal children in Aboriginal care, transitioning Aboriginal children to ACCOs and the development of *Wungurilwil Gaggapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement*, which was launched in 2018 to provide a strategic direction to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

In this year's budget the Andrews Labor government committed to the largest ever single investment to continue and expand the Aboriginal-led service system: \$140 million over four years. Through this investment we will work with Aboriginal-led organisations to expand the Aboriginal children in

Aboriginal care program, provide additional Koori-supported playgroups to all 17 areas of the state, allow more Aboriginal families to access Aboriginal-led rapid engagement and diversion family services aimed at diverting families from the child protection system, fund additional Aboriginal families receiving the Aboriginal family preservation and reunification response and expand the Community Protecting Boorais program to an additional 174 children that can be investigated by an authorised Aboriginal agency.

This investment strengthens our partnership with Victoria's Aboriginal community controlled organisations, and it aims to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child protection system. I want to acknowledge the contribution and work of all member organisations of the ACF, and I look forward to meeting with them again later in the year. Aboriginal people know the unique needs of their communities best, and our government is partnering with Aboriginal-led organisations to enable them to provide vital child protection and family services in their communities.

### Timber industry

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:15): (197) My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. Like many others, contractor Peter McConachy has supplied specialised machinery and operators in civil forest management for 20 years, clearing firebreaks, removing dangerous trees from Melbourne's water catchment and during bushfires assisting in direct fire mitigation and asset management. You have flagged in your government's decision to shut down the native timber industry that native timber harvest and haulage workers will – and I quote your website on the forestry transition program – 'be offered alternative work in forest and land management'. In providing for VicForests native timber contractors in forest management, what guarantee will you provide that existing civil contractors will not lose their jobs in the process?

**Gayle Tierney:** The question that Ms Bath has asked is more appropriately referred to the Minister for Environment.

**Melina BATH:** On a point of order, President, at the beginning of this week the Leader of the House said to me that Minister Stitt would be away for the entire week. I asked that in particular. This particular question actually relates to the transition plan and incorporates both VicForests contractors and civil.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think the minister was actually trying to be helpful. I can see Minister Stitt. I accept that there was advice that maybe Minister Stitt might not have been here all week. Can I suggest that you do direct it that way to get an answer. She is happy to take the question.

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:17): I thank Ms Bath for the question. Yes, I was absent from Parliament for some of this week, but I am very happy to be back today. The issue that you raise is a really important one, and from the outset I want to acknowledge the important role that forest contractors play right across the public land estate, including in really important bushfire preparedness work. I am very mindful of the significant contribution that many of these contractors made during those devastating bushfires in 2019 and 2020, and that is one of the reasons why it is an absolute priority for our government to make sure that we are engaging contractors for important land management work going forward.

For the immediate upcoming bushfire season we will be continuing those contracts that already existed so that that work can continue unimpeded. We are in the process of having more detailed discussions with forest contractors and their representatives about a longer term set of work within the public land estate, and that would be not just in relation to bushfire preparedness, storm recovery works and the like; it would be also including the additional work that is going to be associated with that 1.8 million hectares of work that will essentially come out of the timber allocation and into the public land estate. I want to reassure everyone in the house that this is really important work and the government is not wasting time. We are sitting down with those representatives of forest contractors to make sure that

we lock in longer term work. We have already committed that for contractors for the upcoming fire season those contracts will continue through to June next year.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:19): I thank the minister for her response, and I concur with her on the seriousness of this in terms of the fact that in this industry both civil and former VicForests contractors need extension, need longevity and need to be able to have this use ongoing; otherwise they just cannot afford to keep their machines and their workers. I want you to expand on – you have said ‘longer term’ contracts – when that decision will be made about those longer term contracts and what those longer term contracts will look like.

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:20): Thank you for that supplementary question. I am obviously not in a position to give definitive time frames yet or the nature of ongoing work, but they are ongoing and live conversations that are happening now. Both I and Minister Tierney have met directly with representatives of the forest contractors association already, and we have given them a commitment that we will continue to work on these issues. I know that contractors are looking for certainty in terms of what the next period of time looks like for them, and we are also very cognisant of the fact that they are carrying quite large debt associated with the specialist equipment that they have. We are continuing those discussions.

#### COVID-19 vaccination

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:21): (198) My question is for the Minister for Emergency Services. As the minister would already be aware, the firefighters alliance has been trying to get an answer from the minister regarding the inability to return to work due to the ongoing COVID-19 vaccination requirements. Since we are no longer under pandemic emergency law, this requirement is redundant and the alliance would like to see it revoked. Therefore my question is: will the minister respond to the alliance’s request to have the requirement removed as a WHS requirement?

**Jaelyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:21): I thank Mrs Tyrrell for her question and her representation on behalf of the firefighters alliance. At the outset, it is not my answer to give because it is not my responsibility as minister. These are matters for the FRV commissioner as it is an operational matter and certainly not subject to a direction that I can give. I had previously been advised that FRV would have returned to community settings by now. My most recent advice is that that is still the plan and it is shortly to occur. In relation to the individuals that were stood down – no-one’s employment has been terminated at FRV; certain individuals have been stood down – there is a process that is being undertaken, and some of them have been permitted to return to work. More broadly that is a matter that is under current consideration by the FRV commissioner. He will alert me to any changes, and I will let you know as soon as that advice comes through.

#### Ministers statements: dairy industry

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:22): I rise today to highlight the remarkable achievements of two groundbreaking dairy research programs, DairyBio and DairyFeedbase. These programs were established through a partnership between Agriculture Victoria, Dairy Australia and the Gardiner Foundation and have made significant contributions to the dairy industry.

DairyFeedbase has focused on dairy cow nutrition, along with pasture measurement and management. Its transformational research and innovation have addressed key challenges such as reducing the industry’s environmental impact and enhancing productivity. DairyBio has focused on breeding more productive, efficient, healthy and fertile cows and climate-resilient pastures, leading to an increased genetic gain in profitability. The economic benefits anticipated by 2030 exceed \$1 billion and demonstrate the programs’ potential for enhancing farm profits, milk production and herd health outcomes. These initiatives can both benefit farmers through increased profitability and also contribute

to meeting sustainability goals by increasing efficiency of resource use – that is, more milk from the same inputs while reducing emission output.

I am pleased to announce that a new five-year DairyFeedbase program for 2023 to 2028 has recently been endorsed by the industry–government partnership. This complements the second five-year round of DairyBio, which commenced in 2021. These programs have demonstrated the government’s commitment to working with Victoria’s agriculture industry to support ongoing profitability and sustainability while adapting to climate change and working to reduce emissions. I would like to thank Dairy Australia and the Gardiner Foundation for supporting this cutting-edge research and ensuring a prosperous future for the sector.

### Lake Eildon

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:24): (199) My question is for the Minister for Water. Minister, today Lake Eildon is at 97.1 per cent capacity. Yesterday and over the next few days 12,000 megalitres per day is being released from Lake Eildon. At the same time the inflows are 14,000 megalitres per day. With recent rains the ground is saturated, and with inflows exceeding releases the lake will continue to fill. Minister, when is Lake Eildon expected to reach 100 per cent capacity?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:25): Ms Lovell, I am not going to seek to anticipate what might fall from the sky. That is the job of various experts in an imperfect setting, based not on knowing what the future may hold but on informed calculations such as those received from the Bureau of Meteorology.

As you would be aware, our major storages in northern Victoria are not designed for flood mitigation. But as you have pointed out, the storages are high and we have been undertaking controlled releases – as you have indicated, around 12,000 megalitres – over recent days to manage the rising levels of Lake Eildon. We are also undertaking an assessment of the operating arrangements at Lake Eppalock and also Eildon, and Goulburn–Murray Water has begun a review process around the operational rules at Loch Garry and any changes to infrastructure that might be made available as a consequence of that work. That might include gates, valves, pipes et cetera.

We know – and so many people around rural and regional Victoria know – particularly after the flooding that occurred last October, that heavy rains are an enormously distressing event, particularly for people who live downstream and for people who lost livestock, crops, property and buildings. The impact of clean-up and of assistance does continue. We are working really hard to minimise the impact of the recent rains, and that is why those controlled releases are occurring.

As I said, I cannot tell you when it is that the capacity of certain storages will reach certain points. But what we do have is, as you have said, around 97 per cent – it was 96.9 as at 16 June – and we are actually undertaking the hydrogeological testing to make sure that we are managing risk. During any releases, Goulburn–Murray Water will work with communities downstream of Eildon and also landholders along the Goulburn River to manage the risks and the concerns that people are raising. In fact there was a meeting just yesterday, I believe, with landholders and Goulburn–Murray Water, along with a representative from DEECA, as part of ongoing community discussion about preparedness for changes in rainfall events. But I also want to note that given climatic volatility and a 70 per cent chance of an El Niño event – again this is modelling done by the Bureau of Meteorology – we do have a number of areas where we need to be aware of risk not just in terms of too much water but also in relation to not enough.

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:28): Minister, the release of 12,000 megalitres from the lake sees minor flood levels in the downstream community of Molesworth. The Applebys were completely flooded out in October last year, with 98 per cent of their property underwater. They suffered the trauma of stock losses and property damage, including a much-loved horse that left an

orphaned foal. I am aware that Goulburn–Murray Water manage Lake Eildon, but I am keen to know: what advice have you received about the impact on the local communities downstream of Lake Eildon if releases that cause flooding are required over a sustained period of time?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:29): As I have indicated in the answer to the substantive question, and based on the starting point that you made around the release of 12,000 megalitres, there has been a range, between 9000 and 12,000 megalitres per day, to manage the increasing volume in Lake Eildon, and this is part of ongoing discussions with community. We want people, including the family that you have identified in your supplementary question, to have information to hand that helps them to manage risk and also to be able to understand where the longer term forecasts and where the projections are taking us. I have consistently stressed the importance of ongoing community engagement as a priority with Goulburn–Murray Water and that community members downstream of Eildon, including the family that you have spoken to, remain informed throughout the winter and spring periods. And I am continuing to get advice and information, including from the Bureau of Meteorology, from Goulburn–Murray Water and from others, so that we have this information to hand now and over the winter months, when the Bureau of Meteorology’s three-month weather outlook indicates that there is a less than 20 per cent chance of above-average rainfall.

#### **Cannabis law reform**

**David ETTERSHPANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:30): (200) My question is to the Attorney-General. The Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research in New South Wales this month released a study that explored differences in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal adults’ access to their cannabis cautioning scheme. The study found that among people proceeded against for cannabis possession just 12 per cent of Aboriginal adults were issued with a cannabis caution compared with 44 per cent for non-Aboriginal adults. Even when entirely eligible for a caution, the study found that only 40 per cent of Aboriginal people were cautioned compared with 74 per cent for non-Aboriginal people. So I ask the minister: is there a similar level of inequity of cautioning decisions received by Aboriginal people in the Victorian justice system?

**Jaelyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:31): I thank Mr Ettershank for his question. In relation to the statistics that are available in terms of cautioning, that would be something that I could probably ask the Minister for Police to see what information could be furnished. It does not fit within my responsibilities. So I might take that on notice and see how we can break that down. It might not be broken down to the level that would satisfy the specifics of your question, but we can start with what information we can get and go from there.

**David Ettershank:** I thank the Attorney for her response. I think my supplementary is redundant, because it was basically seeking to get confirmation that we would actually receive that specific data. So we will look at what we receive, and I thank you for that.

#### **Ministers statements: renewable energy**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:32): This week I was proud to announce a groundbreaking investment by the Andrews Labor government that will help to revolutionise Victoria’s bioenergy landscape. This landmark initiative provides close to \$10 million through the waste-to-energy bioenergy fund to support 25 projects across the state. These projects aim to harness the power of organic waste and convert it into renewable energy instead of letting it end up in landfills. This funding will enable farming and food production sectors as well as other industries to transform agricultural livestock food and food waste into electricity, heat, gas or liquid fuel. By embracing bioenergy, Victoria will take significant strides towards a greener and more sustainable future. It is estimated that these projects will add 8.3 megawatts of renewable energy capacity to the grid. This is equivalent to powering 4160 homes, reducing our reliance on fossil fuels.

Projects include Goulburn Valley tomato grower Katunga Fresh converting spent tomato plants into gas, which will be used to heat their glasshouse. Excess gas will be returned to the grid, further contributing to our renewable energy supply. Australian Consolidated Milk will convert cheese whey waste into biogas to power its dairy-manufacturing plant. These projects open up new revenue streams for Victoria's primary producers and also create new long- and short-term jobs. This investment makes a decisive step towards a greener and more resilient Victoria, where organic waste is transformed into renewable energy, building a cleaner future for our state and creating sustainable jobs.

### Written responses

**The PRESIDENT** (12:34): I thank Minister Symes, who will get a response from the Minister for Police for Mr Ettershank and also a response from the Treasurer for Dr Mansfield – both of her questions; and Minister Blandthorn for Mr Bourman, the two questions that he had, directed to housing.

### *Constituency questions*

#### Eastern Victoria Region

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:34): (267) My question is for the Minister for Community Sport in the other place. Minister, Victoria is the sporting capital of Australia, and every time I visit a local community I meet sport-mad participants and volunteers that turn up and turn it on week in and week out. Victoria has fantastic community sporting facilities, many thanks to this government. I have visited and even had the pleasure of opening new and upgraded sporting facilities in Eastern Victoria, which is one of the best parts of the job. I also often talk to groups about planning that next big project. Minister, how does the government support community sports clubs and local councils to plan major upgrades to local facilities? Our government will always support sport, no matter your postcode. The 2026 Commonwealth Games will show off regional Victoria to the world and inspire local communities to get active and get involved. After the Games there will be a legacy of fantastic sporting infrastructure in regional Victoria fit for training and the next generation of sporting heroes. In Victoria sport is more than a game: it is a way of life.

#### Southern Metropolitan Region

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:36): (268) My constituency question is for the attention of the Minister for Police and relates to the blockades at that continue to occur down at the Port of Melbourne. I have got a media release from Blockade Australia, who on their website call themselves a political movement, but they are actually quite destructive and they are causing havoc.

**David Davis:** Terrorists.

**Georgie CROZIER:** They are, Mr Davis. They have blockaded the Port of Melbourne, as I said, for the fourth day in a row, and they are continuing to undertake these actions across Australia at major ports. Obviously the Port of Melbourne in Mr Davis's and my electorate is incredibly important for the Victorian economy. On the website of this Blockade Australia outfit, it says:

Blockade Australia is an organising network established in response to this destruction.

They want:

... disruptive and targeted action that shuts down the everyday functioning of this machine ...

meaning our economy. I ask the police minister: what are they going to do about preventing these destructive activists from destroying our economy even further?

#### Northern Victoria Region

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:37): (269) My constituency question is for the Minister for Planning. Residents in Healesville are campaigning to rename a creek with racist connotations to respectfully acknowledge Wurundjeri peoples and their longstanding culture. Local

council requested a review through the department, but progress has stalled. In a similar case at Hepburn shire, Dja Dja Wurrung leaders campaigned for over a decade before they were able to successfully change offensive signage at a central Victorian creek. These are small changes with significant impact and traditional owners are waiting too long to have their voices heard. My constituents want to know if the minister will intervene to change the offensive title of this important waterway.

### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:38): (270) My constituency question is for the Minister for the State Electricity Commission in the other place Minister D'Ambrosio. While Kennett privatised the energy network in the 1990s, the Andrews Labor government is bringing back the SEC and state-owned energy, and we have got a mandate to do so. At last year's state election Victorians voted overwhelmingly to bring back the SEC, because Victorians know that our plan will lower power bills and supercharge our renewable energy revolution. The SEC will push down wholesale prices. It will bring 4.5 gigawatts of new power generation into the grid. That is the equivalent of Loy Yang A. And we have not wasted a day in getting on with it. I am proud to say our renewables revolution will create at least 59,000 meaningful, safe and secure jobs. My question to the minister is this: how will households in the Southern Metro Region benefit from government-owned energy through our plan to bring back the SEC?

### **Eastern Victoria Region**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:39): (271) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I was recently contacted by Graeme, a local constituent from Cockatoo who was concerned about the continued wasteful spending of Victorian taxpayers money when it comes to roads. Graeme continues to see poor regional road designs with faulty drainage systems and cheap, weak materials being used. Graeme said the following:

Years of inexperienced Council engineers, sub standard grading and incorrect materials have continued.

... tens of millions of dollars have been wasted over time because of poor supervision, and incorrect materials.

Over the last 15 years he has written letters, met with government engineers and volunteered his time along regional roads, getting out his shovel to ensure potholes are fixed and water is going down drainage systems. Minister, the Eastern Region is plagued with potholes. Will the government consider different options for building and maintaining better, safer and more durable regional roads?

### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:40): (272) My constituency question is to the Minister for Community Sport. Over the last decades the Victorian government has spent more than half a billion dollars of taxpayers money on the grand prix, and while the relatively small cohort enjoys this upscale one-week event, the impact on the community who enjoy Albert Park year round is immense. Community sport suffers, having to suspend their activities for months on end. Clubs lose members and money, and the grounds of the park are significantly damaged. Having met with the Albert Park Community Sporting Tenants Association, they shared with me that consultation with the community is a bare minimum, and any compensation provided to the clubs is wildly inadequate. Will the minister advise what funding will be allocated to major improvement projects in Albert Park for community sport facilities, and if not, outline why they do not see value in doing so?

### **South-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:41): (273) My constituency question is for the Minister for Creative Industries, and I ask: what is the Andrews Labor government doing to support community radio throughout Victoria? I have seen and heard firsthand the positive contribution made to our local community by Casey Radio. For over 40 years it has been broadcasting now, starting as a part-time operation in Dandenong. Now homed in Cranbourne, it serves listeners across the south-east

## CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Thursday 22 June 2023

Legislative Council

2099

of Melbourne. Earlier this year I was pleased to attend their AGM and met with a number of presenters, technicians and other volunteers. I was so pleased to see that they were also provided with a \$50,000 grant in this year's state budget. The grant was one of our election commitments, and it was hard fought for by local Cranbourne MP Pauline Richards. I also had the pleasure of joining Leigh Drew on the breakfast show earlier this week for an interview to discuss all things state budget. I ask the minister: what is the government doing for community radio in Victoria?

### Northern Victoria Region

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:42): (274) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health. On Tuesday 4 May 2021 – 780 days ago – the then Minister for Health Martin Foley distributed a press release announcing funding to establish a new BreastScreen Victoria reading and assessment service in Shepparton. Mr Foley's media release stated that the Shepparton reading and assessment service would be the ninth such facility in Victoria and would be set to open in late 2021. Well, here we are, 780 days – that is 2½ years – later, and the women of the Goulburn Valley are still waiting for this life-saving service to be opened, and patients requiring additional testing are still being forced to travel to Melbourne. Will the minister immediately establish the promised BreastScreen Victoria reading and assessment service in Shepparton?

### Northern Metropolitan Region

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:42): (275) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Nicholson Street in Coburg in my electorate is a hotspot for traffic collisions and accidents, putting the safety of the pedestrians, cyclists and active transport users who frequent it at risk. Drivers frequently ignore speed limits, which results in high-speed collisions and cars running off the road. There have been at least five accidents on this street in the last six months alone and countless more in the months and years prior. While the community was successful in obtaining a partial speed limit reduction to 40 kilometres per hour, this has done little to deter speeding and other bad behaviour by motorists using Nicholson Street, and the community is seeking further safety measures. Minister, what further actions will you take to make Nicholson Street safer for pedestrians, cyclists and active transport users?

### North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Matthew BACH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:43): (276) My constituency question is for the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep. Will the minister step in to ensure that that Knox City Council does not cut sessional kindergarten services? Many in the house will be aware that Knox City Council recently released plans either to reduce the number of sites at which kindergarten is offered or to scrap sessional kindergarten altogether. I have spoken on a number of occasions, as have many members across the chamber, about how important kindergarten is but in particular about our really high regard for sessional kindergarten, which is local, delivered by fabulous teachers as well and has such a positive impact for young people. Interestingly, the council recently did a survey, and the second most popular council service identified in that survey was sessional kindergarten. We must move forward to seek to ensure that these vital services remain open for young people across that community.

### Southern Metropolitan Region

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:44): (277) My matter today is for the attention of the Minister for Consumer Affairs. It is information provided to me from a number of sites around the state, but particularly in this case the City of Melbourne in my electorate, and it is the issue of Liquor Control Victoria and its failure to process applications in a timely way. Lodgement takes up to 10 weeks, legislative assessment four weeks and determination and finalisation up to eight weeks. I have been provided with a series of examples of three months, 2½ months – long periods for small businesses that are seeking a licence. In particular, the City of Melbourne example was submitted on 16 November 2022, and no determination was made until 25 January 2023. That is a long period for

small businesses waiting where they have signed a lease or where they have got arrangements for some short, brief amount. So what I am asking the minister to do is look into the slowness and delays at Liquor Control Victoria.

#### **Western Victoria Region**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:45): (278) My constituency question is for the Minister for Water and concerns the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority's proposed changes to regulations on use of the Barwon River. The Geelong Water Ski Club is a friendly local club with recreational waterskiing and educational programs, but it also develops world-class athletes who frequently win national titles and represent Australia at world championships. The club's facilities can host national championships, one of only four sites nationwide which can. For nearly 70 years the club, which owns 500 metres of riverfrontage, has coexisted happily with other river users. Now, for no reason anyone understands, rezoning changes and a ban on use of the river in the morning threaten the future of training and the viability of the club. Minister, will you ask the authority to look again at how the club's future can be assured?

#### **Western Victoria Region**

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (12:46): (279) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it relates to the poor state of roads, particularly around Ballarat. I ask the minister: will you release the maintenance schedule for Ballarat and surrounding state roads? I spoke to a constituent just recently, Hayden, who detailed a shocking experience he had on a road coming to Ballarat from Smythesdale. Hayden hit a pothole near a bridge, and the pothole was so warped that it almost acted like a launching pad and launched him onto the other side of the road. He had his young daughter in the car as well. Luckily there were no vehicles coming the other way and he avoided any collision with oncoming traffic; however, he did do damage to his vehicle. Hayden's experience is not uncommon. Poor roads do have real consequences for regional Victorians, and a lack of maintenance can cause a fatality. I hope that nothing like this ever happens in the future, but we need to be aware that these sorts of things really have consequences.

#### **Western Metropolitan Region**

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (12:47): (280) My question is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Could the minister please provide some information and context as to why government assistance has ceased supporting the East Meets West Lunar New Year Festival in Footscray while at the same time promising \$100,000 per year to Richmond's Victoria Street Lunar Festival for the next four years leading to the election? Again I feel like the west has been left behind and short-changed. Our state government and the Victorian Multicultural Commission have recognised the importance of celebrating multicultural affairs, and festivals play an important role in the west. The East Meets West Lunar New Year Festival in Footscray is run by volunteer groups, and it attracts tens of thousands of people. Before COVID the festival had grants; however, in 2021, 2022 and 2023 the funding ceased. My constituent has raised the issue to me as impacting the entire community, and it is one of the most recognised communities in Footscray.

#### **Northern Metropolitan Region**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:49): (281) My constituency question is directed towards the Minister for Planning, and it concerns the Andrews government hoarding almost half a billion dollars in the Growth Areas Infrastructure Contribution Fund up in Spring Street instead of delivering it for these communities. This money has not been spent in two years, and it could be used now to relieve pressure on families. My colleague and member for Western Victoria will be interested to note in the Melton area there is \$172 million unspent sitting in government coffers and propping up the budget, and in Wyndham there is \$168 million. The Premier, in acknowledging massive swings against the government in these suburbs, said that they do not want to have bought into a housing estate and have to wait 20 years for that to become a community, they want to see stuff

in their area that other parts of the state have. So I ask the minister: will the government commit to spending this money in growth suburbs that is needed now?

**Sitting suspended 12:50 pm until 2:02 pm.**

### *Bills*

#### **Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023**

#### **Budget papers 2023–24**

#### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed.**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (14:02): I rise to speak on this appropriation bill, the Treasurer's ninth. Like any good series, it builds on the previous episodes, and there has certainly been a constant theme in Mr Pallas's output. Yet again taxes rise and spending rises, and hardworking Victorians get hammered. The Treasurer boasts of increased revenues as if that is a good thing, but the rise from \$83 billion this year to \$89 billion next year is \$6 billion taken from businesses and taxpayers. This budget reveals government revenue will hit \$99.9 billion by 2026–27. We will soon be the hundred-billion-dollar state – nothing to be proud of. And where is Mr Menzies when you need him? He would never have had a budget like this.

For me, the biggest headline from this budget, however, is that Victoria is broke. It is alarming – every single day Victorians will fork out \$22 million in interest repayments alone before we even start to pay back the still-rising debt. After every budget in the last Parliament I warned about reckless spending, government expansion and poor project management. It is now on steroids, that whole episode. In fairness, this is the budget where Labor have finally noticed. Sadly, I think the worst is still to come. This budget holds as much water as Geelong's promised new swimming pools will after the Commonwealth Games – blow-up ones, portable. Why do I say that? Well, the tax rates and charges hikes are real, but despite the much-hyped 4000 public service jobs cuts, Victoria's public sector wages bill will actually grow from \$35.3 billion in 2023–24 to \$38.3 billion in 2026–27. In fact, instead of cuts, this government will build the bureaucracy by 59,000 with the Lazarus-like resurrection of the SEC.

There are some real cuts, however. Health spending, for example, is down \$1 billion from this year to the next, following a \$2 billion cut just last year. Regional roads – a \$250 million cut, now 45 per cent down since 2020. Regional development does not escape – halved from \$211 million to \$106 million. Agriculture loses more than a third, from \$687.3 million to \$454.8 million.

And what about the taxes? I was particularly taken by the Treasurer's laughable attempt to say we are the least taxed state. We know the Victorian Chamber's post-budget lunch is a lighthearted affair, but he must have been seriously short of comic material to try that line. Two years ago I said of the Treasurer's earlier effort:

This is a budget which finally buries the Education State and heralds the taxation state.

Clearly I should have waited. The ideological attack on independent schools recently announced really underlines this. If we want less of something, we tax it – and so it is with parental choice and independent education, which are really in the firing line here.

Speaking of ideology, landlords – even mum-and-dad investors, like certain Labor ministers, no less – have copped it. Many of these landlords do not own the homes they rent; they pay a mortgage which has been hit by interest rate rises their tenants do not pay. They also pay rapidly inflating costs of maintenance, real estate fees, landlord insurance, VCAT fees if things go wrong, and now land tax and rate rises. They paid stamp duty when purchasing the property and will pay capital gains when they sell. Many did not raise rents during lockdown. Some even froze payments to help renters who had lost income. Landlords pay these costs. They carry the risk, and they face an increasingly

bewildering, backbreaking burden of new government regulation, which at any time might escalate. In the same cynical way that Daniel Andrews tried to describe not-for-profit charitable educational schools as businesses to shift the outrage at his government's tax attack, he took a swipe at supposedly rich, exploitative landlords. He wants Victorians who rent to blame their landlords when their rent rises. These costs and risks mean nothing to him. 'Claim it off your tax', he says. Thanks, federal government.

The truth is landlords are not the reason for the housing crisis. They are not the reason renters' costs are rising. We cannot and will not allow Labor to shift that blame. I might mind less about the vast tax burden, the degrading of our competitiveness and the damage to our economy if I felt confident the money would be well spent, but it will not be. It never is and never has been under this government. The Treasurer manages to rake in ever higher revenues – \$6 billion more in this bill alone, and yet simultaneously sets us on a course to a record debt of \$171 billion. 'How has he managed it?' one may well ask. The only explanation is truly epic levels of public spending, spending which we know, on this side of the house at least, will not create one single sustainable job. This is a government which spends other people's money – badly, I might add – then puts its hand out for more.

And who pays? This economic mismanagement was avoidable stupidity, but it is Victorians who will bear the brunt of Daniel Andrews's mistakes – in increased taxes and cost-of-living pressures and in cancelled infrastructure projects. The truth is, as this budget shows, whatever Labor says Victorians pay, whether it is big or small business, mum-and-dad investors, wage earners or consumers and now parents of children at school, we are all paying for their mistakes. We knew about the business-wrecking WorkCover jack-up, but rent hikes caused by slugging landlords, rate rises and increased school fees can only slash economic recovery. I have heard much of this justified by government members here as temporary. Well, as you know, nothing is so permanent as a temporary government program.

Even before the impact of this budget kicks in, the earlier destruction of our competitive economic environment is being felt. It was deeply concerning to learn today that Ford intends to axe a quarter of its entire Australian workforce, with the majority of the 400 job losses coming in Geelong. The budget does nothing to stop other companies choosing to leave and go elsewhere; in fact it makes it worse. So many companies are choosing to leave this state because we are totally uncompetitive to operate in.

We hear encouraging words, but it is plain what a Daniel Andrews promise to regional Victoria looks like. The budget papers are clear. The Geelong fast rail is stuck in a non-existent station, with no spending committed in this budget period and no completion date. The only thing ahead of schedule is the axing of Victoria's timber industry, with the job-destroying, foreign-import-promoting ban on native timber brought forward from 2030 to 2024 to appease inner-city environmentalists and those people sitting over there who have no nuanced understanding of the industry. How does anyone expect to build the housing revolution without timber? How does anybody expect all those fabulous people in the Gippsland area who work so hard in the timber industry to become baristas? It is a monumental disgrace that you buckled under to the extreme-left environmentalists to win yourself some votes.

In fact the only regional issue this Labor government is truly addressing is the workforce shortage. Cancelled infrastructure projects, heavy business levies and wallet-busting tax rates and charges will trash our economy. There is no workforce shortage if there are no jobs at all, and if they are all coming from the public sector then who is paying: that declining number of taxpayers that are left in the system. Long after the short-term laugh the Treasurer gained for his 'least taxed state' line has died, the consequences of this bill will be felt. On this side we will be working even harder to ensure there

are no more sequels to Pallas part 9. We will have an alternative ready to go, an alternative based on a basic and cherished principle, and I quote:

... the prime duty of government is to encourage enterprise, to provide a climate favourable to its growth, to remember that it is the individual whose energies produce progress, and that all social benefits derive from his efforts.

That is everything which is missing from this budget, and it is everything the Liberal Party stands for. It is not a fully fledged policy – that of course is for us to develop. But it is a principle and a promise to all Australians that we believe in them, not in government. I am sure Dr Bach does not need me to spell out just who wrote those inspirational words.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:13): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to this budget debate. This state budget follows a trail of increasing debt, increasing tax and increasing impacts on the cost of living for everyday Victorians. This is a budget of high tax, it is a budget of increased debt, it is a budget of increased borrowings. I am very concerned about the impact of this budget on the Victorian community. I am very concerned about the impact of this budget on small businesses. The Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has been very clear about the impact of this budget on small businesses, and that builds on its work assessing the regulatory and taxation impacts of the state government's regime that was in place prior to this budget and through it.

I want to say first, though, that the state government promised in 2014, they promised in 2018 and they promised again in 2022 that there would be no new or increased taxes. On each occasion they made methodical and clear promises. The Premier famously, on election eve in 2014, indicated to Channel 7 that there would be no new or increased taxes – the then opposition leader, as he was. In 2018 Tim Pallas and the then Premier Daniel Andrews made a statement in the last week before the campaign. They reiterated their 'No increased taxes' promises, which have been breached so extensively – 49 times now in fact new taxes have been introduced or increased. It is an extraordinary record of lies and deceit that has been put in place by this government.

In the week before that election in 2018 they promised they would increase the state debt from 6 per cent of GSP to 12 per cent of GSP, and we know the rest and the history of what has happened since then. The state saw a surge in debt in that 2018–19 and 2019–20 period as the cascading impacts of the major projects landed – more and more cost overruns, more and more massive blowouts impacting the budget bottom line and the state's debt. Whether it be the Metro Tunnel at \$3 billion to \$4 billion; whether it be the West Gate Tunnel, which is delayed and massively over budget; or whether it be small projects such as the Mordialloc bypass or the Victorian Heart Hospital, which went from \$150 million to \$577 million nearly nine years after it was promised and was five years late, there are massive increases in costs. These increases in costs have been reflected in the budget through borrowing, largely. The state government has taken the money that it got from the contracting out of the port. They have taken the money that they have got from the decision on registration and so forth and they have used that money. Effectively that money has been leached out the door on these cost blowouts and these shocking outcomes for the Victorian community.

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** We all agree with investment in infrastructure, but nobody agrees with the cost blowouts on the infrastructure. When you take a project like the metro at \$9 billion, that is one thing, but when it is nearer to \$15 billion, you start to scratch your head and ask, 'Is that a good deal? Have we managed the project properly? And what have we got to show for a \$4 billion, \$5 billion or even \$6 billion blowout?', which is the likely outcome in the end. The heart hospital at \$150 million is a good project – we are in favour of it; we announced it first – but is it the right outcome that it is \$577 million and five years late? Nobody thinks a five-year delay and an increase to \$577 million is what should have occurred. It should have been managed properly from the start, and that is true right across the whole of government. The debt is heading for \$171 billion in the period at the end of the budget estimates – massively up.

What I want to do now is just step the chamber through a number of tables. These tables were compiled directly from budget documents. They are similar to the ones I incorporated last year. I have spoken to the Leader of the Government, to the President and also to Hansard, all of which confirmed there is no difficulty incorporating these documents.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Mr Davis is seeking to incorporate material into *Hansard*. I understand that he has provided material to the President and the President is satisfied that it meets the terms of standing order 12.15 for incorporation of material into *Hansard*. Is leave granted for incorporation?

**Leave granted and material incorporated at page 2154.**

**David DAVIS:** I should say that there will not be colour in *Hansard*. It will just be black and white. If you want to see it in colour, you can look at my website, but otherwise you will have to look at it in black and white. If we step through these charts, they make some very clear points. The borrowings go from in 2014–15 a very modest level, comfortably below \$50 billion, to by 2026–27, at the end of the forward estimates, \$210.7 billion. That is Victoria's borrowing. If you look at the annual interest bill, you can see the surge, the increase, coming through the period.

I just want to knock one thing on the head – this idea that it is all because of COVID that we are borrowing. It is absolute bunk. It was a deliberate decision of the government to surge up the borrowing from 6 per cent to 12 per cent of GSP, and 12 per cent is a very low number now compared to what we are actually going to head to. What I would say is that the decision there is given the lie by the fact that on 31 December 2019 the state budget was in clear and significant deficit. I will make it clear to everyone: 31 December 2019 is a BC date – before COVID. That surge in debt had already begun. The set and forget on the major projects had already commenced. The heart hospital that I referred to before already had committed \$577 million, up from \$150 million. It is listed as \$577 million, but it is not yet fully open and functioning. My point is that all of that debt is due to the mismanagement of major projects. Of course there was borrowing in COVID, of course there was debt in COVID – even some of that was mismanaged – but even allowing for that, the huge surge in debt comes from the major projects and the overruns.

If you look at the annual interest bill in the next chart, you will see the huge surge in the interest bill. If you look at the tax revenue in the chart above – of course Victoria gets much of its revenue from other sources, some through charges and so forth for services but some of it from the Commonwealth – the huge surge in tax is shown very clearly, from well under \$15 billion to well over \$40 billion estimated for 2026–27. That is a huge increase in total tax revenue. When you look at the land tax revenue, you can see the surge in land tax revenue that is put out in these tables – and this is straight from budget papers over the period – and you can see the massive increase in land tax revenue. All of that is hitting small businesses. It is hitting families and it is hitting small businesses, and it is hitting them very, very hard indeed.

When you look at the land transfer duty, you can see in the budget estimates that there is actually a fall this year from a peak of nearly \$10.4 billion down to just over \$8 billion, but if you look at the trendline, you can see the trendline right through and going up to almost \$9.4 billion in the 2026–27 period. Land transfer duty – massive increases and a widening of land transfer duty. I predict that the numbers in the budget will underestimate what is collected. They have dropped the threshold, and they are clobbering a huge range of additional people with land tax. The land tax scales have not been properly adjusted again, so they are clobbered and clobbered and clobbered. This directly hits small business; small business is suffering very significantly.

The payroll tax increases have been discussed heavily in this chamber. Those who have made provision for their retirement through rental properties and so forth will be hit very hard – sorry, that is on the land tax. On the payroll tax, there will be a huge hit not only through the schools but through a whole range –

**Georgie Crozier:** Aged care.

**David DAVIS:** I am just about to get to aged care as well. We have discussed the schools at length in this chamber. The hit on the small and struggling private schools is going to be very significant. When did anyone think it was a good idea to put a tax on education? When did anyone think it was a good idea to tax aspirational parents? The schools will be forced to pass through most of the cost – or some of it may be absorbed by a reduction in teacher numbers and a reduction in staff numbers. There is a failure of the government to understand the scale of this and the fact that the new thresholds are cutting in. The thresholds, at \$10 million and \$100 million, are both very significant and are leading to much increased revenue in payroll tax but are also making Victoria less competitive.

Ms Crozier mentioned aged care. Those aged care providers are going to really feel the pinch here. They are going to hit those thresholds and they are going to have more payroll tax to cope with because of these changes made this year, and that is going to hit directly the viability of aged care providers.

**A member:** You've finally noticed aged care, have you?

**David DAVIS:** I tell you what: older Victorians who are in aged care are going to be very, very unhappy.

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** You just want to hit them, you want to clobber them. Why do you want to hurt them so much? Why do you want to actually force this through?

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** Are you saying Regis and Bupa are not providing good care?

**A member:** I just said 'good pay, good care', thank you very much.

**David DAVIS:** So you want a good tax.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Order! Can we just have the debate through the Chair. Mr Davis has the call.

**David DAVIS:** What I would say very clearly is the tax that has been put on aged care is going to be passed through to those who pay for the aged care. The Commonwealth at the moment are actually trying to support aged care providers. They are trying to put in place better arrangements, they are trying to put in better supports, and the state government is scooping the money out on the other hand and that will impact directly on the quality of service. You cannot take that money out without having an impact. It is going to be reflected in higher fees for those who are in aged care, older and vulnerable Victorians, or it is going to be reflected in a lower standard of care. I say the payroll tax increases are huge and are going to cause tremendous trouble for many of these sectors over the period ahead.

Industries in Victoria that compete with other countries and other states are going to face real challenges as these higher payroll tax thresholds are implemented. It is going to be very difficult. The net debt chart makes it very clear where we are headed, and you can see from these charts the enormous surge in debt up to an estimated \$171.4 billion by 2026–27. Victorians are beginning to become increasingly concerned about that debt. As we know, it will be greater than Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania combined by the end of the budget estimates period. Three states combined will have a debt lesser than Victoria's at the end of that period, when we reach a terrible outcome of more than \$170 billion. If you look at the net debt to gross state product chart, you will see the surge in debt kicking off in that 2018–19 year, really surging through there to 2019–20 and beyond.

Be again very clear: this is not mainly COVID debt. This is mainly debt from blowouts in infrastructure projects, projects that have been improperly, poorly managed with poor cost containment, and the projects just blow out. We know more than \$30 billion in cost blowouts from these projects has gone straight onto the budget bottom line, and that is where much of the debt is

coming from. Net debt to gross state product is a very clear measure of the outcomes, and we should understand that this is going to crimp Victoria's future.

Finally, I want to draw the chamber's attention to a chart of projected net debt in the Australian states. Looking from 2018–19 and beyond, right up to the end of the forward estimates, you will see Victoria sadly rockets ahead in the scale of our net debt compared to any other jurisdiction in the country. It is not a coincidence that we have got one of the most incompetent governments, a government that is addicted to debt, a government that is going to hurt Victorians, a government that is not able to control and taxes the other side of the equation as it scoops in more and more tax.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Bev McArthur):** Pursuant to a resolution of the Council of 20 June 2023, further debate on the motion to take note of the budget papers will be adjourned. The bill will now be considered in committee of the whole.

**Committed.**

*Committee*

**Clause 1 (14:30)**

**Matthew BACH:** Attorney, just a few questions from me. Attorney, the budget papers reveal that even with the appropriations proposed the net debt to gross state product increases from 20.6 per cent in the current fiscal year up to 24.5 per cent in 2026–27. Can the government guarantee that Victoria's net debt to GSP ratio will peak at that point, at 24.5 per cent?

**Jaelyn SYMES:** In relation to debt I think I just would like to begin by reference to the fact that the government certainly used its balance sheet to support businesses and families in relation to the unprecedented events involving COVID. What I can tell you is that if it had not been for the pandemic, we would have had surpluses every year. That is our record. We delivered consecutive surpluses in the past. The pandemic meant obviously that we lost our AAA credit rating, which increases the cost of all our debt. It also means that we are servicing \$31.5 billion more debt than we otherwise would have been servicing, so that obviously affects our operating result. We have a cash surplus every year over the forwards, and a higher cash surplus from these measures means government needs to borrow less to fund its infrastructure program, for example, returning debt to where it would have been by 2033. That is what is anticipated in relation to those time lines.

**Matthew BACH:** Attorney, you mentioned our credit rating. Have you been advised on any pending updates to credit ratings from S&P or Moody's?

**Jaelyn SYMES:** I have not. But I will ask if there is any update from the box.

Following the budget, S&P noted that the fiscal outlook is improving and provided headroom in our AA rating. Moody's, which has also maintained our rating, expressly pointed to the intrinsic strength of the Victorian economy relative to many of our global peers.

**Matthew BACH:** Back to the issue of our net debt to GSP, the budget says that net debt to GSP will stabilise in the medium term. That is the expression that is used in the budget papers. Is it possible to have a definition of 'medium term' – how many years, within what period?

**Jaelyn SYMES:** 'Medium term' is not specified, Dr Bach, but net debt to GSP almost stabilises at the end of the estimates, which is the government's goal.

**Matthew BACH:** That is very clear. I appreciate it. Regarding the view of different ratings agencies – and I thank you for those comments – I am aware of some other comments that have been made. I am sure that work has occurred in the Department of Treasury and Finance regarding the

impacts of any future downgrades, notwithstanding the comments that you made before, and I accept those comments. So I ask: according to any work that has occurred, and I am sure it has, in the department of Treasury, what impact will further downgrades in the state's credit rating have on net debt and also on annual interest servicing costs?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Dr Bach, it is a hypothetical that you are raising, but the interest expense is based on the assumptions in the estimates. I cannot give you much more of a forecast in relation to what will happen in the future as the way that you have outlined your specific question.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Attorney, in schedule 2, 'Attributable to COVID-19', page 30, Treasury and Finance, there is 'Hotel quarantine costs – interstate reimbursement' of \$11,830,082. Could you provide to us where those hotel quarantine costs were – which states they were – just a breakdown?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** I am advised that we do not have that information.

**Georgie CROZIER:** In relation to schedule 2, page 26, the 'Alternative quarantine accommodation hub', could you just provide a description of what that is for me?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** I am prepared to say it is Mickleham.

**Clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 9 agreed to; schedules 1 and 2 agreed to.**

**Reported to house without amendment.**

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (14:38):  
I move:

That the report be now adopted.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Report adopted.**

### *Third reading*

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (14:38):  
I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Pursuant to standing order 14.28, the bill will be returned to the Assembly with a message informing them that the Council have agreed to the bill without amendment.

### *Motions*

#### **Parliamentary integrity adviser**

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT** (14:39): I have a message from the Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly has agreed to the following resolution –

That Professor Charles Sampford be appointed as Parliamentary Integrity Adviser, from 31 July 2023 to the day that is four months after the next general election, under the terms and conditions of appointment in Appendix A of the Privileges Committees' joint report on the appointment of a Parliamentary Integrity Adviser for the 60th Parliament

which is presented for the agreement of the Legislative Council.

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (14:39): I move, by leave:

That the message be taken into consideration forthwith.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Jaclyn SYMES:** I move:

That the Council agrees with the Assembly and resolves that:

- (1) Professor Charles Sampford be appointed as parliamentary integrity adviser, from 31 July 2023 to the day that is four months after the next general election, under the terms and conditions of appointment in appendix A of the privileges committees' joint report on the appointment of a parliamentary integrity adviser for the 60th Parliament; and
- (2) a message be sent to the Assembly informing them that the Council have agreed with the Assembly's resolution.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Bills*

**Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Ingrid Stitt:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

**Matthew BACH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:40): It is great to rise to make a brief contribution on the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023. On this side of the house we have a strong view that it is very important to fund Parliament. We would like to sit next year, so we support the bill. Obviously the bill provides funding to a whole series of important integrity agencies, the work of which is vital for our state. We are on the record on this side of the house arguing for more funding for these agencies, but nonetheless to have some is better than none. Hence we support the bill, and I commend it to the house.

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (14:41): On behalf of the government I would like to speak briefly on the bill as well. It is an important bill. Mr Berger, are you going to speak on the bill too? I have got to leave some for Mr Berger. This is one of the favourite bills of the year, right? It means that we can come here. It supports the fantastic people that support us. It extends to our fantastic electorate office staff as well. What I like most about this bill is that it is an opportunity to thank everyone within the Parliament, from the attendants to the clerks to Hansard to the audio people – I am trying to endear myself to the people in the room – to the catering staff and the security staff as well. They do a fantastic job. It is always a great opportunity to be in a position to acknowledge that work and thank them. It is great that we have a bill that ensures that they get remunerated for that important work that they do.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:42): Today I rise to speak to the 2023–24 budget handed down by the Treasurer Tim Pallas in the other place, and specifically I rise to speak about the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023. This bill provides the appropriation authority for payments from the Consolidated Fund to the Parliament for the 2023–24 financial year. The amounts contained in schedule 1 of the bill provide for the ongoing operations of this place and the other place – this Parliament. It provides funding for new initiatives, from the output to new asset investment. In addition to the usual annual appropriations contained in this bill, funds are also made available to the Parliament by way of special appropriation.

I am a new member of the Parliament, but in my past life I was the branch secretary of the Transport Workers Union Victoria–Tasmania branch, and in that past life I had a very large staff. I had an

assistant secretary, a chief of staff and the privilege of having a talented, diverse and hardworking branch committee of management. I had a team of elected senior organisers and a dozen organisers as well. I also had an office manager, a finance manager, a membership officer, a communications adviser and a receptionist. I even had two staff lawyers. I had a national branch structure that provided us ongoing legal, communications, campaign and strategic advice. It is safe to say I had a great crew of advisers and a team to support me. I led a team of 40. It is safe to say that this new job of mine is a big change, and in this place I have 2½ full-time equivalent staff. That is why the invaluable work of the parliamentary services is so remarkable.

I would like today to draw attention to a few incredible hardworking members in this place and the whole parliamentary structure. Firstly, how could I go past the Deputy Clerk Anne Sargent, an invaluable resource to me on the rules and all things procedural in this place, or my amazing human resources partner Grace. Grace knows who she is and the great work she has done for my team, and I appreciate her help assembling my team and her professionalism and prompt service. Then there are the Hansard reporters, who ensure that everything in this place, even the bad, is recorded forever. The security personnel keep us safe. The Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) ensures that everything cost-wise is good and proper. Then there are the committee staff who run the committee that I am on, the Economy and Infrastructure Committee. And of course who could forget the famous, well-regarded and dearly missed Barry Cull, who left this building three weeks ago after decades of service for the Parliament. As I walk into this place, the hardworking cleaners make sure my office is clean. They seem to work 24/7, as they seem to be walking through the annexe at all times of the day: 5 am, 11 am, 11 at night and even the night shift, 8 or 9 pm. Of course there are the tour guides, who stand guard in the foyer each and every day to ensure that the tours are on time. I am particularly grateful for these staff, who I have had the benefit of getting to know over the past few months as they take schools from my community of Southern Metro on tours and run mock parliaments and are always kind enough to let me know when these things are happening so I can speak to the next generation. Then there are member services, like the lunch and learn.

This bill appropriates \$277,752,000 for the 2023–24 financial year. That is an increase of 3.4 per cent on the 2022–23 financial year amount of \$268,739,000. This budget provides funding for the PBO's uplift in resourcing requirements in the lead-up to the next election, well in advance of the 2026 election, and I am confident that our prudent and wise budget will ensure that the Andrews Labor government wins another resounding Danslide.

Consistent with previous years and consistent with prudent and wise budgetary measures, the Andrews Labor government will always implement and find savings. Consistent with previous years Parliament has received an exemption from the general efficiency dividend, as the savings imposed are modest when viewed in relation to the state's final budget. The lapsing historical restoration of Parliament House – these renovations that we see every day, which were provided for in the 2020–21 budget – is also reflected in this budget.

This bill is a source of funding not only for the important work that takes place in this chamber but for the work that takes place in this building, and it is important to note that other funds are appropriated for the Parliament's purposes by way of special appropriations in other pieces of legislation. However, this bill funds the work of the Legislative Council, the Legislative Assembly, parliamentary investigative committees and the Department of Parliamentary Services, the Parliamentary Budget Office and the Victorian Inspectorate. It also funds the Victorian Auditor-General's Office, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Ombudsman.

I am pleased and glad that I can speak on this bill, because it gives me the opportunity to talk to this house and my community about the important work that is done in this building. Sometimes – often, I might add – members of the Parliament get a bad rap, but there is a lot of misinformation about the work that goes on in this place, so let me clear some of it up. I see time and time again on my Facebook and Instagram feeds, on the internet, in the newspapers and on the news the hard work being done, and it can only be done with the support that these appropriation bills provide.

Let us start with security. A few months ago I had a security incident at my office. A person off the street came into my office and refused to leave. He was threatening and threatening to go to Parliament. What was worse was that it was the first week for my newest staff member, and what a welcome that was. It was only thanks to the quick work of the security team that we got him to leave. They are on call 24/7, keeping us safe, and I am grateful for it.

How about IT? One cannot go past Chris and the work that he does for his team every day. My electorate officer tells me a funny story about Chris, which I am sure this whole chamber would appreciate, especially those who know him. My electorate officer was transferring over from Minister Carbine's office to help me set up the office. In that process, he needed to transfer his email over to my system and he got locked out of his email. It was 8 pm on 26 December, or Boxing Day, and my EO texted Chris. Within 10 minutes the issue was resolved, on Boxing Day no less.

You can see the dedication, passion and hard work of the people that work in this building to ensure that we can do our jobs and that our offices can function each and every day. In Parliamentary Services there is a human resources team, which I have already mentioned. There is the catering team, the Sessions and Strangers staff and the financial management team. The workers behind the scenes are essential to democracy. This bill also helps pay for our staff members. It helps oversee the recruitment, hiring, onboarding and ongoing professional development of parliamentary officers and electorate officers. For this I am extremely grateful.

Parliament is constantly updating. This means a new online, mobile and flexible data-driven Parliament operated through SharePoint, Billy and of course Oracle – just like out of *The Matrix* – all strange and mysterious beings to a technically challenged member like me. Of course there is the high-quality information that we send through our Microsoft Outlook emails every day. I am still getting used to my Microsoft calendar and the different views between weekly, daily and monthly; all the meeting requests and calendar invites; and of course the dreaded Microsoft Teams meeting with a minister.

This is all part and parcel of this place, from the parliamentary library and the insights, research and information products they provide, to Hansard, which I turn my attention to. Hansard never seem to stop working. I get emails from them from time to time asking for some transcript, to ensure that everything I say is accurately recorded for history. It is remarkable. And then there are the pink and blue sheets diligently prepared by the tabling office. It is how I plan my day, and it is a vital resource for all members. Every week I also visit offices to grab one of the many reports tabled in this place and the other place, and I make sure that I am up to date with the latest goings-on in this state. This appropriation bill funds nothing less than a proper functioning of this place. There is a video-on-demand team – I am not even sure which department they are from – but when my team and I request a video, even late at night, they send us what we need. These workers protect the integrity and the operation of Parliament.

Going back to the specifics of the bill, the bill provides that the Treasury may issue the stated amount from the Consolidated Fund in respect to the financial year 2023–24 for the purposes set out in schedule 1. Subclauses (2) and (3) of clause 3 provide authority for additional appropriation if necessary for increases in salaries and related costs that may be the result of any legislation or determination during the year. Clause 4 provides for the Consolidated Fund to be appropriated to the extent necessary for the purposes included in clause 3. Clause 5 provides for the amounts specified for an item in schedule 1 that are to be applied subject to section 31 of the Financial Management Act 1994 on the basis that the amounts specified for that item are not exceeded. The clause also states that if depreciation is included in the provision of outputs of a department in schedule 1 of the bill, these additions to the net asset base of the department may be increased subject to the Treasurer's approval by an amount up to the depreciation amount. Clause 6 provides for the application of amounts in 2023–24 for the arrangements, expenses and obligations that arise in 2023–24 but do not require payment until a future year. I also note that in accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 is

compatible. I also note that for those in this place, members of Parliament, their salaries are not funded by the Parliament appropriation bill.

To sum up my contribution today, Parliament is essential to Victorians. It is the place of democracy. It is the essential branch of government. In fact Mr Ettershank said yesterday it is one of the three pillars in our system of the separation of powers. The Westminster tradition that Mr Ettershank reminded us of goes back for centuries. It is the honour of my life to serve in this esteemed place.

I want to end the day by quoting a few of my colleagues in this place. I also note my colleague opposite Ms Crozier asked how productivity, investment and confidence in this state increase under the Andrews Labor government. This is so obvious, but I will answer it anyway. Take one very basic example, level crossing removals – a very Andrews Labor government project: this will improve efficiency by making it easier, safer and quicker for workers and the public to get to work and to go about their daily activities. So yes, this is how productivity has increased and will continue to increase under the Andrews Labor government. That is why I have decided to end today by quoting a member for Western Metropolitan – that is, the words of Mr Ettershank:

The COVID-19 pandemic presented the most difficult financial management circumstances that a government could face. Thousands upon thousands of Victorians lost their livelihoods and lost their health. During this time, more than ever, Victorians needed the support of their government. There was no road map. There was no rule book for the pandemic or for the potential economic meltdown that it could have so easily induced. The government had to envisage the support that the Victorian people needed at the time and act swiftly, with the worthy intention of saving lives and warding off economic disaster. The Victorian government was not alone in pursuing this course of action. Who can forget Josh Frydenberg, suddenly an unexpected born-again Keynesian, quoting John Howard, saying that a massive government support program was too important for politics.

I look forward to the day when coalition members support the Andrews Labor government budget.

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:55): I rise to speak very briefly to the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023. I want to take this opportunity to thank all the hardworking staff that make our Parliament work. To the clerks and all your staff, the Hansard team, the committee staff, the ushers, the catering staff, the gardeners, the security staff, the cleaning staff and everyone who contributes to making this place tick – and apologies if I have missed anyone – you all make such a valuable contribution and you make coming to this workplace and building a pleasure.

I also want to extend my thanks to the staff at the Parliamentary Budget Office. You provide an invaluable service to MPs and the Victorian community. My Greens colleagues and I are very grateful for the service you provide and the way you engage with us.

Similarly, it is incumbent on us to acknowledge the integrity agencies that are vital to the functioning of our democracy. IBAC, the Ombudsman and the Auditor-General play a crucial role in holding the government to account and ensuring public confidence in our democratic system. Thank you, all.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:56): I also rise today to speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023. This important piece of legislation which we are considering today signifies our shared commitment to responsible fiscal management and to ensuring the proper functioning of our democratic institutions. The appropriation bill 2023 has a distinct purpose to make provision for the apportionment of specific sums out of the Consolidated Fund for the Parliament for the upcoming financial year, 2023–24. This is not just about managing numbers on a balance sheet, it is about maintaining the vitality of our democratic systems, the institutions that provide –

**Jaelyn Symes:** The Parliament bill.

**Michael GALEA:** Forgive me – Parliament, yes? Is that right?

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** We passed the appropriation bill. We are on the appropriation for Parliament.

**Michael GALEA:** Forgive me; I left out the parentheses. I did mean to say the Parliament appropriation bill – the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill. This is not just about managing those numbers on the balance sheet, it is about maintaining the vitality of our democratic systems and the institutions that provide stability and ensure accountability in our state’s government. The Attorney-General had me very worried for a minute there that I was speaking on the wrong bill, but that was entirely my fault.

The core of this bill lies in the provision of appropriation authority for payments from the Consolidated Fund to the Parliament for the next financial year. This funding allocation is an essential part of maintaining and enhancing the operation of our democratic institutions. By authorising these payments, we enable these agencies to carry out their necessary functions – services that benefit all Victorians. It is an embodiment of our shared commitment to upholding the principles of democracy, accountability and transparency.

This bill has a critical impact on several key entities within our parliamentary framework. It funds Parliament’s core operations, ensuring the smooth running of the legislative arm of our government. Furthermore, it provides for the Parliamentary Budget Office, a body vital for our economic planning and strategy. The Victorian Inspectorate and the Auditor-General, entities at the forefront of ensuring transparency and fighting corruption, are also beneficiaries of this bill, as is the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, whose work is fundamental in maintaining the integrity of our public institutions. I will note as well that this bill also supports the Victorian Ombudsman.

Parliament’s core operations are indeed complex machinery, with multiple departments performing varied yet interdependent functions. From legislative processes to constituent services, these operations require a solid financial foundation to ensure their continued and efficient functioning. This bill provides the necessary means to maintain these critical operations. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the appropriation bill for Parliament is not solely about the funding of our current operations; it is also about catering to ongoing liabilities such as employee entitlements. Of course, as two previous speakers have outlined, the people that work in this Parliament are our most valuable resource. The clerks, Hansard, broadcasting, catering, cleaning, security and I could go on – all of these individuals work and dedicate their working lives to making this a thriving place of democracy, and I do want to give a particular shout-out to them as well. This bill ensures that their entitlements will be secure. It also ensures that we have set aside funds to cater for these entitlements that may be realised in the future as well. By making appropriations through this bill, we demonstrate our commitment to the people who make our Parliament function efficiently. We recognise their service and ensure that their rights and entitlements are protected.

Let us take a glance at some of the noteworthy achievements of the Andrews government that underscore their effective budget management and dedicated delivery for Victoria. In the Berwick electorate, thanks to the government’s foresight and strategic planning, we will see the opening of two new primary schools, Clyde North primary school and Thompsons West primary school, and a new secondary college, Clyde North secondary school, as well, in 2025. Furthermore, construction is well underway at Alexander Boulevard primary school, which will open next year.

Looking beyond the education sector, the Andrews government has also demonstrated a firm commitment to health care, with plans in place to establish a new women’s health clinic at Casey Hospital. This initiative will provide care and support for various women’s health issues, affirming the government’s commitment to health care for Victorians.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Order! I think you are speaking on the wrong bill. You are talking about health initiatives and stuff. That is the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023. This is the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023, to do with the running of the Parliament. I just draw you back to the bill that you are actually speaking on.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Deputy President. Facilitated by the Parliament, yes. It was just a brief detour to outline some of the other things that our Parliament allows us to do. But I will return to the substance and say that the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 is a critical and crucial instrument. It is going to provide the necessary authority for payments from the Consolidated Fund to our Parliament. It supports the indispensable work of our governance institutions, ensuring the accountability and transparency that Victorians rightly expect.

I commend this bill to the house. Let us work together across party lines to ensure that our Parliament and its departments and their staff have the necessary resources to continue serving our great state and its people effectively and efficiently.

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (15:02): I rise today to speak about the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023, at the outset acknowledging the tireless contributions made by the many people who are at the heart of this institution when it comes to the delivery of services, whether relating to our security or relating to our capacity to contribute, from the work of people in the attendants spaces and the work of the clerks to the people who provide secretariat services for the many committees and the work that they undertake. This bill is an opportunity, as much as anything, to share with the house the unanimous support for the contributions that are made.

Ours is a chamber that often sits later than those people across the way might appreciate. Some might say that that is because the wheels of democracy turn comparatively slowly here, whereas I would say that it is a rather more accurate characterisation to say that we in fact work harder. Nothing bears this out more than the dedication and the commitment that we see from staff of the Parliament. From Hansard, those people who are responsible for the Oxford commas that I love and admire and respect but which are reviled by too many others – Dr Bach, I note your affection for the Oxford comma as well – right through to the people who make sure that we are able to come to work and to do our jobs, your jobs are fundamentally important to the way in which this institution, this Parliament, is upheld. Every year when we talk about a budgetary allocation we are in a position to note that resourcing this framework is of crucial importance, and we are in a position to note that the work of the Parliament endures beyond any one of us, endures beyond the narrative of any particular government of the day, and that as a consequence of that it deserves the respect that a budgetary process and allocation such as this affords it.

There are a range of other line items that are funded through the parliamentary appropriation bill, and indeed it is this particular omnibus approach to resourcing which enables us to see a range of measures delivered through the budget which go beyond the Parliament as well. Making sure we have funding for integrity bodies, for the way in which the Parliament is resourced for everything from catering through to security through to the people who clean our offices is absolutely germane to the smooth functioning of everything that the Victorian community can and indeed should expect.

There are many people who work behind the scenes to make these things happen, and it is very easy for us to stand up and to talk about the various things that come across our desks and that we seek to ventilate on behalf of our communities and constituents. What people should never underestimate, however, is the volume of work that sits underneath this. To that end we are better for the contributions made by those who you do not see, who are not standing with a microphone talking about the things that we hear here on a daily basis whenever there is a sitting week. We are better for the care and the diligence, the attention to detail, the thoroughness and the relationships which are formed and which are sustained over the duration of a Parliament. I have seen over the years countless examples of expertise, of kindness, of wisdom and of generosity provided not just to members who have been here for a very long time, not just in the farewelling of people after lengthy careers in public office, but to new members.

Thinking about my experience, being elected in 2014, I relied really heavily on the advice, the judgement, the expertise, the guidance and the care of people here in this Parliament, from learning

where and how the best ways are to get to the chamber and my reliance on the attendants to guide me through a fundamental lack of a sense of direction right through to the clerks and the way in which they have assisted with procedural matters. The clerks themselves would bemoan the fact that I have sat comparatively close to them over the course of the nine years that I have been in this Parliament. This has afforded me a wonderful opportunity to ask them incessant questions about the nature, history and context of procedural matters and determinations, from *Erskine May* right through to *Rulings from the Chair*. When it comes to the application of standing orders, when it comes to the lengthy engagements that we often have in a procedural sense, it is the machinations and the expertise of our clerks and of the staff who assist them that really do bring a measure of gravitas and a measure of consistency to this place. When we get to our feet it is with the wisdom and the benefit of the expertise and professionalism of the staff that we are able to do so.

I also want to acknowledge a particular person here in my contribution today. Barry Cull was an exceptional contributor to the work of this Parliament, and for many years Barry was a constant, a feature in the library, just behind the enormous marble statue of the lion, and Barry was able to provide immediate advice, often with the benefit of a bowl of lollies beside him, that helped members to understand the nature of the rules, the regulations, the systems and the decisions that surround us in the work that we do. Barry is the human face of the way in which this Parliament operates.

Another human face that I do want to acknowledge is Nick Paraskavas, who was an attendant here at this Parliament for many years. Nick was one of the most genuine, good-humoured and smart people that I think this Parliament has ever known, and Nick in his burgundy jacket was a constant feature outside this chamber. We farewelled Nick a number of years ago. His funeral was characterised by his love of *Star Trek*, and he was farewelled with the soundtrack in the background. It was a sign of the magnitude of his contribution to this place that his memorial service was attended by dozens of members of Parliament and dozens of people from this institution. That speaks to the very nature of the connection that we forge here as MPs and that staff in this place forge in turn with us. We are exceptionally lucky to work alongside people like Nick, those people who make and keep us safe and those people who are in a position to solve our most complex cases or, in the case of people who are technologically illiterate, simple questions no matter what time of day or night it might be.

To everyone who has over the years assisted me with repeated resets of my password when I have forgotten, thank you. To everybody who has made sure that my belongings are not inadvertently thrown out because I have left them in the wrong place in my office, thank you. To everybody who has helped to activate my security pass, or an alternative, when I have left it in my office or locked myself out, thank you. To everybody who brings a measure of humour, of kindness, of wisdom and of expertise, thank you.

I look forward to the speedy passage of this bill, but I also know that there will be others who will want to speak about the importance of this place to the landscape of political and governmental decision-making. Here in the Council, perhaps more than across the way in the Assembly, we have opportunities to get to know each other. We are at close proximity to each other. We do not sit in a chamber which might otherwise compare to the inside of an A380. We are proximate, and to that end we have the benefit and the opportunity to get to know each other and to share the circumstance, the magnitude and the gravitas of this place in ways which I suspect those in the Assembly might never understand.

So in commending the parliamentary appropriation bill I commend everybody who is involved in the work that goes on and will go on as a consequence of this bill. I also want to again perhaps underscore the importance of what happens here by referring to a couple of the attendants by name. Greg Mills, Chris, Jim, Philip and others, thank you for all that you do. Thank you for the very warm, accessible, inclusive and supportive workplace environment in which we find ourselves. I warmly commend, and commend with thanks to all staff in this precinct, this bill.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:12): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023, and I am going to begin by being bipartisan about this and make some comments agreeing with Ms Shing on the work of the staff of the Parliament and the contribution that so many of them make. Barry Cull was singled out for his long contribution, but that is typical of so many who put a lot of effort in and support all of us, whatever side of the house we are on, in a very constructive way, so I want to first place that on record.

This bill contains the funding for the Parliament and the Department of Parliamentary Services, the Assembly and the Council as breakouts. But it is very interesting to look at schedule 1 on page 4 of the bill. That provides you with a good understanding of what is actually happening with the funding, and it is clear from that that the Legislative Council funding has fallen. That, I might add, does concern me quite significantly. It is an indication that the government is seeking to keep some pressure on the Council, which is the chamber that has the most capacity to make the government feel uncomfortable or discomfited in some way through questioning, through investigatory work and so forth. In that sense I have got to say I am very much aware of the concerns that people have about that issue of funding to the Legislative Council. I know that some of our committees need more resources too, and I have spoken to the President about that, as have others. I know that the load of our committees is significant. I have great confidence that the staff can manage that, but nonetheless I also say that democracy does have a cost, and part of that cost is ensuring that the Legislative Council has the capacity to do the work that it needs to do.

But I think the stand-out thing when you look at the independent integrity agencies that are funded through the appropriation of Parliament bill – and indeed some are funded through the general Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 – is it is interesting to look at the expected outcome for funding. In the case of IBAC, \$62.9 million is the expected funding in 2022–23, and the planned funding falls to \$62.2 million.

The Parliamentary Budget Office's funding falls from \$3.9 million expected outcome to \$3.4 million. The Ombudsman's funding does increase by \$200,000.

**Sonja Terpstra:** On a point of order, Acting President, I just want to make sure that Mr Davis is speaking on the right bill. This is the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023. I just want to make sure that the contribution is about the appropriation for the Parliament generally. I just make that point to make sure that Mr Davis is on the right bill.

**David DAVIS:** Acting President, further to the point of order –

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** It is not a point of order. I direct Mr Davis to the bill.

**David DAVIS:** I am on the bill. I have actually gone to schedule –

**Harriet Shing:** He said there is no point of order.

**David DAVIS:** Yes, but I just thought I might, Acting President, for the benefit of the member, explain that I had singled out schedule 1. Schedule 1 lays out precisely the matters I was talking about, and you will see each of the independent agencies that are funded through the appropriation of Parliament bill. It is precisely what I was talking about, for the member's benefit. I am just trying to be helpful to the member, who clearly does not understand about the schedules at the back of the bill.

Either way, in the case of the Ombudsman there is a tiny increase. The Auditor-General's funding, from an expected outcome of \$33.7 million, falls to \$29.8 million. The Victorian Inspectorate falls from \$9 million to \$8.2 million. Only the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner – which, to pick up the member's earlier point, is actually not in this bill but is part of the integrity agency regime – is funded, as I alluded to earlier, in another bill, in the general appropriation bill. Its funding falls from \$21.1 million as an expected outcome in 2022–23 to \$20.1 million, so it is a \$1 million fall in the funding for OVIC from the expected outcome this year. If I bring all of those –

**Jaelyn Symes:** There are no cuts. I explained it all at PAEC.

**David DAVIS:** Yes, I know, and I might have even written some of the questions, Attorney, just for your interest. But let us be clear –

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** Proceed, Mr Davis.

**David DAVIS:** I am just waiting for the member to be silent. My point is that, with the sole exception of the Ombudsman, there will be less money this year coming than the expected outcomes in 2022–23. These cuts in funding to the independent agencies are a significant issue. I can see and understand why Daniel Andrews would want to cut and constrain the agencies – he wants to get them by the neck and squeeze them tight and ensure that they are starved or they cannot get the nutrition that they need to do the work that they need. The Premier, as we know, has been to IBAC four times. We have not heard whether he has been there as a person of specific and special interest or whether he has been there as a mere witness. In the case of the funding for these agencies, I can well understand why the Premier is so touchy, so temperamental and so determined to starve them of the funds that they need. I say that he should have properly funded them.

We have been very clear that there needs to be a better funding regime. We have been very clear that there needs to be a more independent funding regime for organisations like IBAC and the Ombudsman. I note that the announcements that were made by those organisations before the state election followed in fact our announcement that in government, if we were elected – we were not, but if we were we would have taken steps to put in place a more independent funding regime. We did look to New Zealand and see the model in New Zealand, and that is a better model than the model we have here. There are obviously differences in New Zealand – it is a unicameral system, we all understand that, and we are a bicameral system, so there are some differences – but nonetheless it is a fairer way of setting the funding and setting the resources for the independent agencies that are normally funded through precisely this bill, for the member’s benefit. Our agencies need clarity of funding. They need security of funding.

I for one was very concerned about the base review that was done by the Treasurer. Let us be clear that the government is under investigation on a number of fronts by IBAC, and the Treasurer then launches a base review on them. For those who are perhaps not aware of what a base review is, it is a thoroughgoing review of the funding and the spending and the arrangements inside a particular department or agency. The idea that you would actually be undertaking a base review whilst the government is under investigation is I think very concerning. Holding back on funding, holding back on appropriations that were from time to time required by IBAC, is I think reprehensible, and I think that both the Treasurer and the Premier have not covered themselves in glory in this – nor have some others in this chamber indeed as they have cut feed and other matters like that. But the point of the issue here is that these agencies are crucial to democracy. They are crucial for the future of the state.

We understand that not only is keeping corruption down actually the right thing to do and the best thing by our democracy, but it also cuts waste. It also ensures that there is less waste with procurement and contracting. There is less waste as the government goes about its natural and normal spending. We need to make sure that our agencies are in the position to provide the best possible outcome, and that means them being properly funded. At the moment the funding is not adequate, and it is clear that Daniel Andrews and his government have sought to starve these agencies. And they have sought to starve them for the specific purpose of keeping them on a very, very short leash. They do not want them having the capacity to launch more investigations. They do not want them having the capacity to scrutinise and to hold government to account. So I say: properly fund these agencies instead of starving them.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:22): I rise to make a contribution on the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023. It has been quite enlightening to listen to Mr Davis’s

contribution and others in the chamber today. I think I will take the high-road approach in my contribution today and acknowledge all of the wonderful people who work in this building. Of course this bill is about funding the staff and the activities in this very building in which we are all fortunate enough to be elected to work.

One of the things that I wanted to focus on today, particularly as the government chair of the Environment and Planning Committee, is the wonderful support and work of the very dedicated and hardworking committee staff that assist members when we are undertaking inquiries referred from this chamber. In the last term of Parliament there were a number of inquiries that our committee dealt with, and of course in this term we are dealing with the flood inquiry, and I am always impressed with the level of detail and support that members are provided with, sometimes in dealing with very complex and sensitive matters, and I am always and forever grateful for the assistance that the staff give us. No task is too big, any request is accommodated, and I think we are very fortunate to work with people who are consummate professionals in what they do. So I look forward to continuing the work that we have undertaken on the flood inquiry and of course producing a report. Of course the staff who work with us on these inquiries also travel to regional areas when they are required, so it is a big undertaking sometimes with inquiries. I know there is the duck inquiry that Mr Batchelor is heading up at the moment, which has also travelled to regional Victoria, and there is a large amount of submissions there, and of course there is a large amount with the flood inquiry, so it is a privilege and a pleasure to work alongside such dedicated committee staff.

Particularly in this chamber I want to give a bit of a shout-out to the President and his office as well. Although the President of course comes from the government benches, his office is assisted ably by his staff, and he meets regularly with the clerks and others in this building to make sure that this place functions efficiently and effectively and ensures that our democracy keeps ticking over here in Victoria. I am forever impressed with the level of dedication and professionalism shown in support of the President's office and his role and also some of the other functions that have been mentioned as well. We have got the papers office out there, which is staffed by parliamentary staff as well. We have got the budget office – all manner of things that have been mentioned.

I just might, for the sake of the exercise as well, respond to a few of the things that Mr Davis talked about, because I cannot not give a contribution without responding to some of the things that have been previously put in such a negative light. As I said at the beginning of the contribution –

**David Davis:** You didn't even know what bill they were in.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** I will take up that interjection, Mr Davis. I knew, but I do not think you knew. I think there were a few slip-ups in your words and I thought you did need redirecting, because I was paying very close attention. I just made sure that you were quite on the money there because there was a point where I thought, 'No, maybe you're not, Mr Davis,' and I thought perhaps you might need some redirecting. It was just making sure that you were on the ball there. As I said earlier, I am going to take the high road with this rather than the negative low road, accusing the government over here of all manner of things – scrimping and all the rest of it, which is ridiculous.

As I said at the beginning, the bill is about funding what happens here in Parliament. Mr Davis did mention a number of offices: the parliamentary investigatory committees, the Auditor-General, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Ombudsman. IBAC received \$32 million in the last budget, which provided funding certainty and an increase to its base operational capacity. I know Mr Davis likes to talk about cuts and all the rest of it, but that is simply not the case. The government benches, on this side, when any agency or in particular IBAC has asked for additional funding that has been granted. I think with Mr Davis sitting over there and really being a little bit cute with all of this, the bottom line is that we on the government benches know how important it is to ensure that our integrity agencies are well funded.

We know what would happen if those opposite were in government, because those opposite believe in small government. They are all about cuts to services. I know because in previous lives, when those on the opposition benches have been in government, they have made cuts to services. They have made cuts to our hospitals, they have made cuts to our schools and they have made cuts to our ambulance services. They were at war with the ambulance services.

**David Davis:** It's not true.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** It is all true. Those opposite really enjoy small government because what those opposite are about is free market, let it rip and 'We don't want any constraints on it.' We always hear things like, 'We don't want any red tape. We don't want any regulations.' We know that if we look at the track record. We know that Labor are better economic managers. This budget is incredibly responsible. We are funding our very important government services because we know those opposite would not fund them. They believe in small government, and they believe in cuts and slashing services. We on the government benches know how important it is to make sure that we have well-funded services. That is why we are building hospitals. That is why we are building more schools and all those sorts of things. I know this bill is not about those sorts of things.

**David Davis:** Point of order.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Hang on: I know that this bill is not about those sorts of things.

**Matthew Bach:** On a point of order, Acting President, we have had a lengthy dissertation from the member about alleged cuts to a whole range of services dating back at least to the 1990s. We hear this sort of thing often from Ms Terpstra. However, we have heard this now for some time. The Chair has ruled on a number of occasions obviously that debates like this are not opportunities to attack the opposition. But, more pertinently, what Ms Terpstra has been saying now for some time bears no relation whatsoever to the bill before the house.

**Harriet Shing:** On the point of order, Acting President, it would escape nobody's attention that throughout the course of I would say at least 80 per cent of Ms Terpstra's contribution we have heard a series of caterwauls from across the way. Mr Davis has been up and about contributing his views through unparliamentary interjections for many minutes now. Dr Bach, I feel sorry for you because you are sitting next to him and I across the way can hear just about everything that he is saying. Perhaps it might be that the member can be heard in silence in order for this contribution to be made in a way that does not offend your delicate sensibilities, Dr Bach, as far as they relate to the point of relevance.

**Matthew Bach:** On the point of order, Acting President, I am not entirely sure how the unfounded accusation that there were undue interjections from this side of the house has any relationship to the content of Ms Terpstra's speech, which of course was utterly irrelevant to the bill.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** I think I have heard enough. Whilst it has been entertaining to some degree, I would refer the member back to the bill.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** I note that those points of order took quite an amount of time away from me. I know that is really what they want to do, which is to make sure that I cannot get these very important matters on the record recorded by Hansard, because we know what they really do not want me to talk about is the reality of what is going on here. In the context of my comments, just to take up Dr Bach's point of order – and I know, Acting President, you have ruled on these things – what I was talking about –

**David Davis** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** I can say what I like in my contribution, thanks, Mr Davis. I note for the record it seems that I have got under the skin of those opposite, which was my goal today – to finish on a strong note on the last sitting day of this week. I got under his skin. I told you I was going to take the high road today, and that is exactly what I have done.

Again, as I said, those of us on the government benches know how important it is to fund our parliamentary activities, and on how much is appropriated under the bill, it is a 3.4 per cent increase on the 2022–23 amount of \$268,739,000. We know that this is an increase. So those opposite can say all they like – that we are cutting and constraining and starving and all the rest of it, painting a whole picture of doom and gloom – but the reality is, as I said, we here on the government benches know how important it is to ensure that our Parliament is funded appropriately, like our Auditor-General, who does great work, I might add. I love seeing what the Auditor-General reports on and investigates. He is fantastic. They do a great job over there.

Also we have IBAC and the Victorian Ombudsman. I will reiterate that IBAC received \$32 million in the last budget, which provided funding certainty and an increase to its base operational capacity. Again those opposite are just heckling me from across the aisle no end, because what they know is that I am speaking the truth when I say we are funding them appropriately. I know the Premier has said on a number of occasions in this term, and probably even in the last term as well, that when IBAC has asked for more money, it has been given to them for them to undertake their important work. Again, I will say that IBAC received \$32 million in the last budget, providing funding certainty and an increase to its base operational capacity.

These are all very important functions, and as I said before, if those opposite were in government, we know they would make cuts to a whole range of services and particularly in this building. I note Mr Davis's contribution earlier touched on committee secretariat staff. He would like to see some more funding for those. But he did note that they ably undertake their functions, and I actually agree with that. Nevertheless I shudder to think what it would look like if those opposite were in government. I am sure that those line items would be cut back quite considerably and that our committee staff would be under even more pressure than they are now. I think it is very hollow rhetoric from those opposite on this bill, but we have come to expect that, and that is okay.

Importantly – and this is why we are better economic managers than those opposite – consistent with previous years Parliament received an exemption from the general efficiency dividend, as the savings imposed are modest when viewed in relation to the state's final budget. This is what is important. I think we passed a bill this week on payroll tax, for example, and I know those opposite hate anything like that. The reality is – and this is often lost on other people – the bottom line is we have got to make sure that we fund things properly, but this is also about repaying the debt that was generated during COVID.

We are not the only state jurisdiction in Australia that has accumulated debt as a result of the pandemic. So going back to the point about Labor being better economic managers than those opposite, there are lots of things I could talk about, but I am wanting to make sure I stay relevant to the bill, because clearly Mr Davis's contribution was highly irrelevant and low road, which is what we have come to expect from Mr Davis. People have confidence in us. That is why we got returned with a bigger majority, Ms Shing. I mean, wow, who would have thought, if we were such a poor government, that we would have got returned with a bigger majority.

We deliver a budget every year, and we need to make sure we pass appropriation bills in this house, and here we are today in fact doing that. I just want to commend this bill to the house. I know I have got a minute and a bit left, but I just want to commend this bill to the house, and in so doing I do want to thank all of the staff who work here. I did touch on the committee staff, but I also thank everyone who works down in security, in our dining rooms, in the cafeterias, in our papers office, in the tables office, in Hansard, in broadcasting – there you go, a little shout-out to Hansard and broadcasting over there – and the many, many other staff. I know Ms Shing mentioned the attendants earlier, and they do a great job for us and help us. And of course there are the clerks here as well, who keep a very keen eye on procedure in this chamber. I just want to thank all of them for their hard work and dedication in keeping the seat of democracy ticking over in Victoria. I will leave my contribution there. I commend this bill to the house.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (15:37): I really hope my show is not going to be like the previous one. I am just going to thank the staff, and I am going to start with Hansard. The previous effort is probably a good reason why we really do need to thank Hansard, because they have to sit through all that and say nothing. It does not matter which side it comes from, sometimes this place is just a mess. Who knows what the people that have to listen to it that are not us think about it. Anyway, thank you to Hansard. Thank you to the chamber staff and attendants; the Clerk and table officers; and the committee staff, and particularly I look at the waterfowl committee, and with 10,300 or so submissions they are working flat out and it is tough; our electorate officers and advisers, particularly mine, who have to put up with me; the serving staff; and the security and the PSO staff as well. I have probably forgotten a whole lot of people, but it is these times I remind myself that we are members of Parliament and we are here and we do what we do, but we cannot do it without the staff to help us. We are all part of the same function; we are just doing a different part of that function. The same job is to keep democracy going – and give Mr Davis something to interject about.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:38): I am pleased to join the debate on –

**Harriet Shing**: It is not a debate.

**Ryan BATCHELOR**: What is it?

**Harriet Shing**: It is a song of collective goodwill.

**Ryan BATCHELOR**: A song of collective goodwill.

**David Davis**: No, we are grieving about the cuts.

**Ryan BATCHELOR**: Whether they are songs of joy or grief, we are here to talk about the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023, which obviously is one of the budget bills that Parliament must pass before the end of the session in order to ensure its continued operation. I am sure that all members are going to do our job and make sure that the fine people who keep this place going have the money to enable it to continue beyond the end of the current financial year.

It has been just over six months since we were sworn into this chamber, and it is in contributing on this appropriation bill an opportunity to thank everyone in and around the Parliament – the departmental staff, those who work to support the chamber and particularly, as Mr Bourman said, those who have been supporting us in the committee work, and I will come to that in great detail in a moment – who have done a remarkable job at facilitating the entry into this particular chamber so many new members. I know, Acting President Berger, you are, as I am, a new member into this chamber. The support that we have received from the Department of Parliamentary Services, from the staff, from member services and right across the board has been outstanding.

I can only imagine what it has been like having to put up with so many of us who had no idea what we were doing at the time and who slowly have been learning. Now we may have some idea about what we are doing. But out of the many things that we are full of, we are always full of questions.

**Harriet Shing**: Hope.

**Ryan BATCHELOR**: Yes, we are full of hope as well, but more so at the moment in the first six months we have really been full of questions about how things work – about, quite frankly, which way is up in this building; how we get from point A to point B; how we help, as I discovered today, get a desk fixed at short notice so that it does not startle the life out of the Leader of the Government. Every time we have asked a question, every time we have sought advice, we have been both treated with respect, even when some of those questions were particularly silly, and also promptly dealt with and given as much support as we could all possibly need to make our transition into this Parliament and into this Legislative Council as smooth as it possibly could be. I know that all of the members that I speak to – I speak to my colleagues, particularly our new colleagues, the new cohort, a lot – have really appreciated just how willing everyone in this Parliament has been to help us along the journey. It has

not always been easy. I am sure we will get better, and please do not stop telling us when we are doing the wrong thing. Some of us might get better.

**Harriet Shing:** You aspire to get better.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** I aspire to get better. I absolutely aspire to get better. Definitely what I am discovering in this place is the aspiration to do better is clearly a universally held motive.

One of the great things that, having come into this place, I have been quite clearly blessed with is a lot of work to do on various parliamentary committees. I have had the great honour of being made a member of three of the standing committees of this Parliament, and I have also had the absolute honour thrust upon me of chairing a select committee, very early in my time here, into the recreational hunting of native birds. It is clearly a topic, as we have discovered, that generates an exceptional amount of interest from the Victorian community. As Mr Bourman made mention of in his last contribution and as we discussed in a committee meeting last night, that parliamentary committee has received now close to 10,500 submissions from members of the Victorian community. It is the most submissions to a parliamentary inquiry that this place has ever seen – 10,500 we have had. It has certainly been a task, digesting and processing those submissions at a scale that no-one has ever experienced before and I do not think anyone really expected we would receive when this was established a short time ago. It might have been February. It might have been March. I cannot remember. It feels like only yesterday that we started this journey.

But I would like to place on record on behalf of all members of the committee that all committee members do appreciate the work the secretariat has been doing in the job of ingesting those submissions. There are those who wanted to have their names, details and stance made public and very clear, and there are others who wanted to make submissions to us and have some of their personal and contact information redacted and withheld. Given the sensitive nature of some of the material that is being presented to us, we have had to do that carefully, and the committee secretariat has been doing an exceptional job of processing those submissions. As I said, we have had about 10,500. The first few thousand have been published on the website so far. The committee has accepted I think all or most of the remaining submissions now, and the remainder of those submissions are going to be thrown up on the website in the next couple of weeks.

It has been interesting to think about what the future holds for our parliamentary committee process. Certainly this committee is one of those events where circumstances force a bit of change in the way that institutions who have been used to doing things a particular way for a long period of time have to confront the reality of needing to do things a little bit differently, and that is what we have experienced in this select committee inquiry into the recreational hunting of native birds. We have had to come up with ways to process submissions faster and to analyse them in a way that we are not used to. It is a very different task trying to get through 50 or even 500 submissions than it is 10,500. The secretariat has been doing an exceptional job. They have also done a very good job at managing the vast array of stakeholders and interest groups who have been seeking to make appearances at our public hearings. It is not always easy to schedule public hearings in a way where as many people as possible are able to give evidence. We have not yet been able to accommodate everyone who has been wanting to make their voices heard in hearings, but we have obviously received and accepted all of those submissions.

The committee has also been mindful – and this is something that has been greatly and well facilitated by the Parliament's staff – of not just doing hearings here in the parliamentary precinct but getting out and about beyond the confines of this building and the building across the road. I was very grateful that the committee was able to organise our visit on the opening day of this year's duck-hunting season down to the Connewarre wetlands, where we had several hours walking around in the mud having a look firsthand at the conditions on the game reserve, which is just out the back of Geelong on the Bellarine Peninsula between Barwon Heads and Leopold. The committee is also facilitating a full regional hearing of the committee next Monday in Sale, where again we will be able to get out and see for ourselves and hear firsthand the views of regional Victorians on this topic. It has not been an

easy task pulling all those things together and getting out and about and taking the committee out to parts of regional Victoria, and we really do appreciate the support and the work that has gone into that.

I should mention just briefly that although native birds and the native bird inquiry take up a lot of my time, they do not take up all of my heart; I still have room in my heart for the other parliamentary committees that I am a member of.

**Sheena Watt:** And quails.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** And I should not forget the quails; I should not forget the stubble quails. It is not just the ducks, it is also the stubble quails.

There is the work I have been doing as a member of the Integrity and Oversight Committee. There has been a lot of complexity in that committee, which as a new member of Parliament and a new member of that committee I have had to get across in a short period of time, and the committee secretariat there has done a remarkably good job of shepherding our new members through the complex world of Victoria's integrity system and the Parliament's role in oversighting those agencies, who are full of complex issues where we have to obviously always tread very carefully.

Also, along with my colleague across the chamber, I am serving on the Legal and Social Issues Committee, and we have got two inquiries now to deal with: one on the state education system, which should be quite interesting, I should say, over the course of the next year I think that one is for; and obviously a shorter inquiry into renting. I am sure those two inquiries –

**A member:** And the hemp one? Do we have that?

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** No, we do not have that one. Those two inquiries will certainly be of interest, and I look forward to working with the other committee members and the secretariat on those reports.

The other committee I have the pleasure of being on is the Environment and Planning Committee, and we have a very big inquiry underway into the flooding events from October 2022 and the impact on communities. There is a series of regional hearings for that committee on that topic due in September and October, and I look forward to the ongoing support that the secretariat for those committees is going to be providing, particularly as we get out and about and talk about the flooding events in particular in regional communities.

I am sure we will get those other committees, particularly for the education inquiry, out talking in other parts of Victoria and across regional Victoria as well. There is a lot of value in the hard work that the Parliament does in ensuring that we, outside of the time we spend in this chamber, do inquire into and report on issues that are of considerable interest to the public and assist the public in contributing to those inquiries.

I think one of the things that has been really gratifying is the way in the floods inquiry the parliamentary staff have been out hosting workshops with members of the public, giving them assistance in how to make their submissions to us, so that it is not just us as a Parliament passively sitting and waiting for people to express their views but we as the Parliament, and particularly the parliamentary staff and the committee staff, spending time and effort in supporting the members of the public to have their say and to make sure that their voices can be heard. I think that gives a little insight into and a good example of the quality and the character of the staff who are working for the Parliament and the way in which they view the important role that this institution plays in Victoria's system of government, in our democracy, but also in making sure that the lines of inquiry that we make through the various committees that we are on are informed and thoughtful and gather the best evidence that they possibly can so that in the deliberations we make we can make sure that that inquiry leads to some good policy recommendations, because fundamentally that is what all of that effort is about. It is about making sure that we are making the best sorts of policy recommendations to hopefully change both the policy

and practice but also at times the law so that we can improve the way various parts of Victoria are governed and the quality of the laws and the quality of the services that exist.

As a new member of Parliament, I do want to take this opportunity to thank all of those who have made the transition possible and who have given us the support, and in particular, as someone who is never afraid to spend hours sitting in a committee meeting, the committee secretariat staff from across the Parliament.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (15:53): I would also like to speak on this bill and also use the opportunity to thank many of the staff who assist all of us in our work and assist me as well. I think, having only been here for six months, this term of Parliament must have been quite different for them given that it is somewhat of a record that over half of the Parliament are new members. That is over half of the Parliament they have had to equip and teach to learn the ropes. I was definitely one of them. I am always very quick with questions for staff, who are always very, very helpful in providing answers to them.

I would like to thank all staff but thank a few people who have assisted me greatly: Anne Sargent, Robert McDonald, Sally West, Spencer King from the property team has been excellent, and Grace Bakopoulos as well. All those staff members have been great to me, particularly after I was thrust into the position of Opposition Whip. All of the team have been quite helpful in helping me into this role and with learning the ropes. I am really enjoying it, and working with the President and working with Mr Tarlamis as well has been quite enjoyable for me as somewhat of a fan of parliamentary procedure and parliamentary process. So I have really, really enjoyed that.

Thanks as well to the Hansard team. They do great work in this Parliament, and I have got to say they are always very complimentary of me for writing back promptly with different names of people I have said in the Parliament, which leads me to believe that some members might not be as enthusiastic in responding to their requests for names and corrections and what people have said in the Parliament. So I would like to thank the Hansard team for that and echo Mr Batchelor's comments particularly on the parliamentary committees. I sit on three different parliamentary committees, one of them being the native bird hunting inquiry going on at the moment, and the secretariat have done a great job. I would like to thank Matt Newington as well. We went to Lake Connewarre, so they have done a great job getting the committee on the road as well and supporting the committee members. I am looking forward to our trip to Sale on Sunday and Monday – looking forward to having a pie and a pint. Perhaps Mr Batchelor can join me, as well as Mr Galea. I am looking forward to visiting Sale and seeing the wetlands there but also hearing from different participants. I am personally looking forward to hearing from the CFMEU and workers at the CFMEU on their opinion on native bird hunting. As someone who has come onto this native bird hunting committee not knowing much about duck hunting – it is probably the last thing I would actually participate in – it has been quite informative learning about it and informing myself about it so I am better equipped. I actually was at a listening post last weekend in Greenvale and two big, burly blokes came up to me and said, 'We want to chat to you about duck hunting.' I was like, 'I'm actually on the committee.' They happened to be quite against a ban on duck hunting, and I promptly advised them to speak to their local Labor members.

Other parliamentary committees I am on include the Electoral Matters Committee, of which I am quite fortunate to be the deputy chair. At the moment we are going into a process of reviewing the 2022 election and the conduct of the Victorian Electoral Commission and how things can be improved. They have done extraordinary work, not only in organising for people to submit to the committee but in reaching out to different communities. They held a CALD round table in Footscray a couple of weeks ago and are really reaching out, because one of the major themes in the committee submissions is the participation rate and the informal vote among areas with a high amount of CALD communities, so that is something we are really looking into. I would like to thank Dr Christopher Gribbin and the secretariat of the Electoral Matters Committee for the work that they do, and I am looking forward to continuing to review the 2022 election. Also a quite welcome change is that the terms of reference have finally included changes to group voting tickets, which the government have been reluctant to

include the last couple of elections but now have, and I think that is a welcome step forward so we can make sure people that are elected to this place are properly elected by the Victorian people and the will of the Victorian people is followed.

I am also on the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, where we are currently undertaking an inquiry into stamp duty. It has been really good to hear from different expert groups around the state, from the Real Estate Institute of Victoria to the Urban Development Institute of Australia and the Centre for Independent Studies and other groups – all of whom oppose a rent cap, so there is a warning for the government that maybe that policy should not be followed. It is one of the Greens policies they can probably leave to gather dust. That has been a very good committee, and I would like to thank Michael Baker from the Economy and Infrastructure Committee secretariat for the work of the secretariat in facilitating that committee and that inquiry. I know we have got a couple of other inquiries in the pipeline. This chamber seems to love sending inquiries to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

I think we are looking into industrial hemp, we are looking into the arts sector and we are also looking into local government. That is one that I supported. All I hear from my local governments is how this government is cost shifting to them and making them pay for everything from kinder to maternal and child health to the Commonwealth Games – you name it. So it will be really good to hear from every single council around the state about their issues and about how they are being let down by the state government, because that is all they seem to be telling me. I know at the Northern Councils Alliance, which I was at with my colleague Mr McGowan, every single council in that alliance – and we also had Liberal leader John Pesutto join us there – raised their concerns about cost shifting. It was only a week after John Pesutto went to the Northern Councils Alliance that they received a long-awaited reply from the Deputy Premier saying she would attend. It is funny how these things work. But we are doing some important work with the NCA, and I am looking forward to their submission to the local government inquiry as well.

I want to echo the thoughts and contribution of my colleague Mr Davis in regard to committee funding. I know he has spoken to the President about additional resources for committees, which are quite strained. We see with the addition of the native bird hunting inquiry, which is a select committee, that having an additional committee has really stretched the resources of other committees. I think my colleagues will attest that it is plain to see in the committee process, so additional resources for those committees are needed. We are seeing with the duck-hunting inquiry over 10,000 submissions. That is an enormous body of work for anyone to get through and for secretariats to process, so I would like to see those committees better equipped. I know the government is always kind of hesitant because a lot of those committees tend to be quite critical of the government.

That also includes our integrity agencies as well. I wish there was a separate process where it was not me or the government deciding the funding for our integrity agencies, with those to be managed independently in a similar vein to what Robert Redlich called for in how IBAC is funded. I still wonder whether the Premier has read his letter, which was widely publicised. But he would like to see the way IBAC is funded change. I think that is a good idea. It should not really be up to the government of the day. There is an inherent conflict in the government deciding how much a corruption body gets funded, and we see that despite calls for more funding for IBAC, that is not being overly forthcoming. So we would like to see, on this side of the house certainly, that happen. With the Auditor-General as well, who we have seen moved on, I think it is really important that the Victorian Auditor-General's Office is funded, and it probably should be increased, and of course the Parliamentary Budget Office's funding as well.

I would like to again thank all the Parliament staff for their assistance. For me as a new member it has been a whirlwind experience, and they have always been very helpful. Everyone from IT to Hansard to the clerks of the Parliament have all been very helpful in getting me on my feet, getting my feet under the desk in my office. I am soon moving to another office, so they have been very helpful in that

as well, which of course helps me have a base to be able to get out and about in the forgotten northern suburbs of Melbourne, which have been so neglected by this government.

That of course allows me to get out and about in the community. The staff have been very helpful in assisting with motions and with all sorts of things. As Ms Shing said, when I forget a password, they are always very, very helpful, at all hours. Even when I have come into Parliament and left my parliamentary pass at home, they are always very helpful in providing me with a temporary parliamentary pass. I do not think there is a single person in this chamber that that has not happened to. They have gone to get their swipe card, and it is not there. The parliamentary staff are always very, very helpful with that. I would like to conclude my contribution.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (16:06): I speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023. I would like to first acknowledge the contributions of others on this bill in this chamber. It has been fantastic to hear the varied appreciation of the Department of Parliamentary Services and about all of the different teams involved in supporting MPs and the work of the Parliament in this place. I am quite amazed that I have not yet left my pass behind. I fully expected that that would happen, and it has not. It probably will happen now that I have said it; I should touch wood.

I acknowledge the work of the attendants, who in the first week of Parliament sitting in February were completely run off their feet by the fact that I did not really know what to bring to this chamber. I did not know when I was going to be doing a speech in the first week either. Certainly the attendants not only provided me with those materials from my staff member but also helped my staff member, who got lost several times running from my parliamentary office to this chamber. It seems that in only six months so many things are feeling so much more familiar and even a little bit comfortable. Of course we have much to thank the Department of Parliamentary Services for that. I appreciate the contribution from Mr Batchelor on the work of the committees as well.

My particular contribution today is going to be from the perspective of a new MP, and I intend to express my appreciation to all of the teams involved in supporting my transition from not being an MP to being a member of Parliament and things working as they should. I want to thank each of the teams that I did not know even existed prior to me becoming an MP that have helped me in the steps along the way.

One of those was the fleet management team. As an outer regional MP I really appreciated that they were able to find me a vehicle quickly so that I was able to travel to and from Parliament easily, based on just how far I have to travel. Also the payroll team and Amanda Barfoot – we did have a little error and things took a while to get started in that space, but Amanda Barfoot and her team were fantastic at fixing those things. Computer set-up – Chris Prasad not only assisted me here at Parliament but also travelled to Warrnambool to set up my temporary office, including the server and all of the computers and the devices that we need. And then again, having listened to other contributions on this bill, a number of people have forgotten their passwords. But even for just learning how to log in and create a newly acceptable password and all of the security that you need, Chris and his team – Imran – have been fantastic in that space.

Regarding the temporary office set-up in Warrnambool, from my perspective I am establishing the first Labor MP's office in Warrnambool since 1955, according to the parliamentary library. Yes, I am currently still in two tiny temporary rooms, but I would like to thank Brian O'Neill from property services for his support in helping get set up in the little bunker that we are in but also for his search around the city to find an acceptable building for me and my team to settle in permanently.

The security team is another team that I would like to express my appreciation for. When I came along and did the onboarding I appreciated the advice that they gave on how to conduct ourselves entering and leaving the property here in the parliamentary precinct. I also appreciate that Chris Pace, who looks after the south-west region – all of the MPs in that area – came down to Warrnambool on the

day that my office was being set up as well. I appreciate anybody that comes to Warrnambool, because often it seems like it is further from Melbourne to Warrnambool than it is from Warrnambool to Melbourne.

The financial management team – just getting all of the financial set-up and then to actually try and practise correctly and then realise that you actually know how to do it is not an easy thing. In fact it was quite daunting, so I really appreciate the work and effort of Rachel, who came down to Warrnambool as well and explained to us the electorate office and communications budget.

In particular I want to talk about the HR team as well today because I found that the people and capability team provided me with one of the most valuable services that I have experienced in my transition phase to becoming an MP. I chose to use the full HR electorate office appointment process during the period that I was searching for staff. In particular I want to express my appreciation to Danielle Blanco and Maddy Curtis from the Department of Parliamentary Services people and capability team. They assisted me in developing, right from the start, the position description and making sure that that was all correct. Then they worked with me to develop the job advertisements. Then in the next step they took me through where I wanted to be advertising, which was of course all the way through the Western Victoria Region. Then they actually put the advertisements in the paper, and all applications were received by Maddy and Danielle's team, so I did not have to administrate that myself, which was fantastic. We used online job advertisement sites as well as local newspapers, and that was all seamlessly done by the Maddy and Danielle's team. Then when it came to short-listing, they provided me with their experience and guidance on discussing short-listing, which was fantastic. When it came to the interview process, Danielle came all the way to Warrnambool and joined us on the interview panel so that we could run the process according to due process and in an appropriate manner.

She helped us ensure that we had a uniform set of questions for each applicant and that we had a uniform rating system for each of the applicants after each interview. Most significantly, Danielle provided some gems of wisdom for making those final decisions about who would be on my team and who I would offer those roles to. I must say that everything has landed beautifully for me, and I am absolutely thrilled with my electorate office team, which includes three very, very talented people. All three of them have skill sets that are diverse and different to mine and diverse and different to each other's. They include Kylie Gaston, Kelly Wortley and Matt Pitkin. One of the skills that they have that I really particularly appreciate is the joy and laughter when we learn something new. They really have been a pleasure to work with. Finally, the HR team assisted me in making sure that I was able to inform the unsuccessful applicants effectively and appropriately and to navigate the new staff members through their onboarding process for themselves.

I understand that this was the first time that a full HR appointment process was offered for MPs to use, should they choose to use it. There are three ways to appoint: one is to choose and advise HR, then there are steps along the way and then you appoint; the second one is to run the advertisement yourself as an MP in your own local community; and the third way, which I chose, was to run a full independent process, which I found to be fantastic. What I think is particularly positive and reflective of the kind of support that the Department of Parliamentary Services provides is that MPs can choose how they do that. There was not any prescription as to which is the right way. You had your three options, and you could do whichever one was right for you.

I would like to thank the Department of Parliamentary Services for the last six months for the experience that I have had in being onboarded in all the different categories that I have experienced, including my time on the Economy and Infrastructure Committee. I have been fascinated to learn the processes involved in being on a parliamentary committee and to understand the depth of information that you have exposure to when you are participating in a committee and, again, the academic level of capability that the researchers have who are supporting these committees. I really enjoyed research studies when I was at university, and I also taught a little bit of research at South West TAFE in a

community services course. It really quite fascinates me, the level of research framework, in a sense, that is used in these committee inquiries.

I think the last area that I would appreciate is the annexe out the back of this Hogwarts-style building here, which is stunning and beautiful. There is such a contrast between this very ancient – perhaps not ancient, but very old looking – building and then walking out to our offices at the back, which are state of the art, other than a few minor issues that are being addressed currently, with plenty of good facilities and space for running exactly the kinds of activity that we do during a sitting week.

I would appreciate if the weather was a bit better whilst we were running between the two buildings, but Minister Shing said she is not going to take control of the weather. She cannot do that. The Department of Parliamentary Services have looked after so many things, but they cannot look after the weather for us in that space. I do heartily support this bill and endorse the work of the Department of Parliamentary Services and all of those that look after this place.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (16:20): Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak in the chamber here today on the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023. There is so much that I was thinking upon when reflecting on the Parliament and the staff and the team that make days like this a success. I want to firstly reflect on the current staff, and that includes – well, they are all over the place. Let me begin with the attendants – the attendants that look after us here in the mornings from the very beginning. I pay due credit to those attendants just out the back that keep us quiet so that when we enter the chamber to begin our proceedings we are not speaking too loudly, if at all, over the Lord's prayer. You know who you are, and I am very grateful to you, and also for those that make sure we have all the information that we need when we might be running a little bit later than expected on the printing out of various papers and contributions. Attendants, thanks for doing what you are doing.

Sometimes if you are in here after hours what you might see is not the attendants but a range of hosts touring young folks from our community, community groups, international visitors and others, letting them know a little bit about what it is that we do here in our Parliament, what are the ancient traditions, customs and protocols that make our Victorian Parliament so unique. Having stumbled upon from time to time various different tour groups here in our Parliament, can I just say, the looks of awe and inspiration that come particularly from our school students as they learn about the history and the decisions that have been made in this room throughout the years – it is a pretty special opportunity. To those that remember the deep and historic traditions of our Parliament, to those that remember the quirky little facts, like the chain above that was supposed to be – what is it, broken but somebody decided to in fact fix it up because they thought it was broken and needed fixing? That is one of the good ones that I remember, but there are plenty of others that have been shared by our beautiful and really, really special hosts, so thank you to them for the work that they do.

Ever present in our time here in the chamber is the Hansard team, not just here but offsite as well. To those in Hansard, can I say a big thankyou. I know that I do from time to time put some very tricky words into *Hansard*, words that have not been in the proceedings of our Parliament before – words that should have been uttered in this chamber for a very long time, but nonetheless I am very proud indeed to be someone that has introduced Aboriginal words into the *Hansard* of our state. It does not go unnoticed by Aboriginal communities just what a difference it makes to see their words, their language and their culture represented in the history of the decisions that are made for the governing of our state. To the Hansard team, I know that is something that you have reached out to me about a couple of times: 'How do I spell these words?' I will just mention a couple. One that I spoke last sitting week was *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir*, which is an Aboriginal children's strategy that I was involved in, or Bubup Wilam, the Aboriginal children's centre in my electorate of Northern Metropolitan Region, or others like Barengi Gadjin, the traditional owners in Ms Ermacora's part of the world.

It is a very special thing to have these words introduced into our Parliament and that record captured by our Hansard team. I noticed actually in the recently launched reconciliation action plan of the

Parliament of Victoria that that work is actually identified as a special piece, enhancing and contributing our efforts as a Parliament towards reconciliation. So thank you to the Hansard team for the part you play in doing that; it is really very special.

Further to that work in reconciliation here, I was really proud to get my copy from Anne Sargent – and a big thankyou, Anne, for all that you do and the kindness and the patience that you show so very many of us. But receiving that reconciliation action plan that I know many, many folks in the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) have worked on is a really proud achievement for our Parliament. It is the first time we have had a reconciliation action plan that talks to all the things that we are doing as a department.

I am really excited about some of the steps, including embedding Aboriginal history and Aboriginal stories much more into our tours that I just spoke about. What is really striking and very special is the artwork commissioned by the Department of Parliamentary Services that sits in the hallway. It is a work done by Tom Day – the third, I believe – that talks to his connection to country, kin and culture. He is connected culturally and ancestrally through much of Victoria. That work featured on the reconciliation action plan and really is the first major commission of Aboriginal artwork for the Parliament. It sits in such a prominent place. So whilst I have from time to time taken young folks around this Parliament and talked them through, you know, why this place is red and why some of the carpet is red and some green, I find it really exciting to see some Aboriginal stories captured here in this place so that Aboriginal young people can feel more welcomed and more reflected in this building by the commissioning of that work by the Department of Parliamentary Services only so recently. Can I say thank you to you for what you do.

Complementary to that is the work of our library team. They have made available to all of us from time to time various resources that mean that we can do our jobs effectively. I personally have come to the library team with various silly questions, silly inquiries and hard-to-find asks, and I do very, very much appreciate you for what you do, even when you turn your beautiful library into a photo studio and a make-up centre for those of us getting our happy snaps for the parliamentary photo book. That was very good of you, library team. Thank you very much. I am sorry if you had to hear many, many members talking that day a little loudly about, I do not know, hairs being out of place and outfits being not quite right. It was good. That was not indeed the last time I was in the library but is one that kind of comes to my memory, I have got to say.

I will also just say on a very serious note that our security team deserve some recognition for the work that they do. There have been very troubling experiences for a range of members, with some very tough public debates playing out in this place leading to some increased security concerns for members both here in this place but also in the work that we do outside. Security have always conducted themselves with such compassion and professionalism. It is worth that being acknowledged, and I hope that we do that with the passage of the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill.

I also know that, even though I have spoken a little bit about those members of the DPS team that we see most frequently, there are of course folks over there at 55 St Andrews Place and elsewhere that do work that we might never really know about, but it just makes the place run a little bit smoother and it ensures that our democracy is ever so much stronger. Particularly, I have got to say to the team behind our community work: there is such an extraordinary amount that you do. I say that as somebody who is currently involved in a committee that has received over 10,000 submissions and who has been involved in the great number of submissions that have been received not only for this inquiry into our native duck hunting arrangements but for previous ones – I am thinking of the one into the pandemic bill and others. So it is quite extraordinary, the work of our committee staff.

Of course I too join Ms Ermacora in acknowledging the enormously steep learning curve coming in as a new member. I know for me, it only having been 2½ years ago, I still remember it like it was yesterday. I am glad to hear that that consistent high level of service and support, encouragement and patience are enjoyed by our newest members, those elected in November. It continues; that is a good

thing. It was not just for those of us that were lucky enough to come in at a different time to everybody else, members like Dr Bach, like me, like Mr Erdogan and like Mr McIntosh. Some of us have had the somewhat special ability to have all that assistance when we needed it for just our good selves, and others have come in as part of a cohort, which is, I suspect, perhaps a little bit easier.

I am going to round out my remarks by acknowledging Barry Cull. I did not have a chance to put on the record my deep appreciation and thanks for Barry Cull and for all that he did in his service to Parliament and the Department of Parliamentary Services over, I believe, 23 years – I will seek some guidance on that, but I think that sounds about right. Somebody can, I am sure, clarify that with me later if I am in fact off the mark. But Barry Cull, the manager of member services – very long serving and a support for all of us here in this place – was there to answer all the silliest of silly questions with a real patience, kindness and an ever-flowing cup of chocolates for just when you thought that it could not get any worse. Sometimes he ran out of my favourite, Picnics, but nonetheless he learned very quickly that they were my faves and always made sure to fill up. So, Barry, I never got to say that to you before you departed on your whirlwind farewell tour, but to you, thank you very, very much for your very long and esteemed service to our Parliament and to our members, new and long serving alike. It was a generosity and a kindness that will not be soon forgotten by anybody in here.

To whoever the new Barry Cull is, I am really sorry to report that you will probably be known as the new Barry Cull for a little while, and that is okay. Please wear it as a very profound badge of honour, because you know what? That is a good title to have and one that you should wear with great pride, because to follow in his footsteps is an extraordinary thing.

I know that there are other things and other folks that make this place work, but I will finish up with the President and the Deputy President and the team that goes around them that make sure that we do the job that we were elected to do. To the teams supporting our President and Deputy President and the clerks and others: thank you. Thanks for being here for the long hours. Can I just say to you all: it is much, much appreciated and truly very, very valued, and I look forward to another opportunity to get up in this place and speak to your contributions to our Parliament and our democracy.

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:35): I also rise to speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023. I will take this opportunity to acknowledge and talk about the wonderful staff, and I will endeavour not to forget people, because there are so many people that do important work to facilitate us fulfilling our obligations as members of Parliament and our service to the community. I will do my best not to forget anyone. In saying that, it is probably a good segue for me to address the elephant in the room, which was Ms Shing running out of time before she could actually acknowledge Richard Willis for all the work he does and the support that he provides. I take this opportunity, on behalf of Ms Shing, to thank Richard Willis for all that he does and all the support that he provides. Having addressed this oversight in the way that I have, it has probably drawn more attention to it. Now that I have acquitted that –

**Harriet Shing:** On a point of order, Deputy President, I was just wondering, because I found it difficult to hear, if Mr Tarlamis could just repeat what he said about Richard Willis, about his contribution, just out of an abundance of caution to make sure that it is properly reflected in *Hansard*.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** I am quite sure Hansard caught it, but if Mr Tarlamis would like to repeat it, that would be fine.

**Lee TARLAMIS:** I will, for the benefit of Ms Shing, who did not quite hear what I said. I was putting on the record her oversight in not acknowledging Richard Willis. I have now acknowledged Richard Willis for his contribution. Having acquitted that on several or even more occasions, I shall now move on.

I have been around this place in one way or another, in one role or another, since around 1996, so I have seen a lot of staff come and go. I like to think that is not because of anything that I have done, because I have always had a very good relationship with all of the staff. In addition to the current staff

that are here that I want to thank, I also want to thank all those past staff members who contributed over many, many years and who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to make this place function. It is not something that gets noticed by those from outside, but everyone plays an enormous role. This place is – there are many ways you could describe it. You could describe it as a dysfunctional family maybe, but we all have important roles and parts to play and they all work together to support one another. I thank all the past staff as I go through this, and I also acknowledge the current staff.

That goes for the clerks – we see firsthand the work that they do, day in and day out, supporting us – as well as the attendants. Nothing is ever too challenging in terms of the support. Sometimes, I am sure, they get a little bit frustrated with some of the questions we ask, and some of the questions we ask them several times – the same question – maybe even more than several times we ask them the same question, but they are always there to support us. That extends to the Hansard team, the library, the catering and kitchen staff, the broadcast staff, the committee staff and the security and PSOs. As I said, they all have integral parts and roles to play in helping us do the work that we do. On the hours that they have to keep because of the work that we do here, sometimes they do not know how long we are going to be sitting or that we are going to be sitting later, and they have to adjust to the schedules that we set. The fact that they do that and you do not hear them complaining about it is testament to their commitment to this place, so for that we are extremely appreciative.

I want to thank my parliamentary colleagues on all sides of the chamber – and even in that place over the other side there. We will extend it to them as well. I think this Parliament has shown how we can work together, get through the business that we need to get through and work cooperatively on many occasions. I thank those that work with me as the Government Whip to help facilitate the smooth running of this place, and I hope that that can continue in that way going forward for the remainder of the term. Maybe some others can learn from the way in which we conduct ourselves in this place.

I want to acknowledge also the President for the role that he plays not just in this chamber but throughout the whole organisation. The President is quite passionate about enabling members of Parliament to do the work that they do and ensuring that they have what they need to do that, but he also is a fierce advocate for the staff of this place and is always working to ensure that they have what they need to do the job that they do, and that is extremely welcomed. But there are the Deputy President and the acting presidents as well. I will start with the Deputy President, who spends a lot of time in committee, particularly in this chamber. That can be a challenging time, a challenging task, but that should also be acknowledged. And to the acting presidents, who step up to fill in chairing this place, thank you.

Having been a new member, although it was some time ago and things were very different back then, it is quite a daunting place. I had been around the movement for some time before I came into Parliament. When you come in, people make assumptions that because you have been around the movement a while you know exactly how Parliament works, and nothing could be further from the truth. It is a very different place, and there are a lot of practices, procedures and things that you need to get your head around. I think the way in which the members have banded together and shown that camaraderie, again across the chamber, to basically support the newer members and help them find their feet has been good to see occurring, so I thank everyone who has been involved in doing that as well. Certainly when I came in I had members that had been here a lot longer than me step up and help me find my footing so that I could navigate this place.

I should also thank the handful of people that regularly and eagerly tune into this place remotely. I am probably understating it. I know that there are many, many people. It does not factor into the ratings system, but it probably should, the people that tune in here and listen to us legislators making the decisions that we do. I thank those dedicated people who tune in regularly to listen to what we are doing in this place. Thank you for your dedication and appreciating the work that we do.

I want to also acknowledge the Victorian Parliament Former Members Association. It is not an organisation that gets a lot of recognition, although we have dealt with some matters in recent times

that have acknowledged the work that they do. But they do provide a critical role in supporting former members of Parliament.

I want to mention the fact that they did commission a report with Deakin University, which has been getting a lot of international recognition. It is a very good piece of work, and I encourage people to look it up and read it. I think there is more work to do in that space. But I think we should thank the Victorian Parliamentary Former Members Association for the work that they do. Again, it is one of those things that a lot of people do not really recognise or see, but they are working very hard behind the scenes. They are reaching out to former members, ringing them, making sure they are okay and travelling well and those sorts of things. It is a very good organisation, and I think any support we can give them is welcomed. I have had the opportunity to work with them both in this place as a member but also as an adviser in my previous role. Using their pool of knowledge and consulting with them when there are changes that impact them is really good to get an insight into what is happening in that space.

The committee staff have been talked about quite a bit in the contributions here today, but we should appreciate the work that they do. For those who are not aware, the committee process is a really interesting process. Some people may go into some of the inquiries with preconceived ideas and things like that. But having been on a number of committees over many years and chaired the Electoral Matters Committee, I have been there with colleagues when they have actually heard various submissions and testimonies in public hearings from people, and you can see the look on their face when they are surprised by what has come out. So it really is an educative and invaluable process for us to be able to go out there into the community and talk to people and hear firsthand what is happening to them and how things are impacting them and be able to reflect that in the recommendations of the reports. The committee staff do an amazing job supporting members. It is not always an easy task. Some of the inquiries are quite challenging in the topics and everything as well. But they are there living and breathing it every day. Even when we as committee members finish our public hearings and go off and do other things, they are still there ensuring that everything is functioning and doing all of that hard work behind the scenes. So it is important to acknowledge them as well for that role that they play. For all those many, many, many people listening at home, I would encourage you to look up the committee webpage and look at some of the past reports and current reports that have been produced. There is some really interesting stuff there, and I think it is quite educative.

I want to thank the parliamentary staff who play that educative role in terms of the school tours. We see many schools touring through this place, and it is really important that they have the opportunity at that young age to be able to come in and learn about what happens here, talk about community engagement and about civics and being active in their community and how they can make a difference if they step up, and to basically welcome them into what is the people's house and let them know that they can aspire to serve in this place too. It is not beyond the reach of anybody. Anyone can do it. So it is wonderful to see that.

I also love it when this place is opened up for functions. Just recently we had the function for the 30th anniversary of the Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre, acknowledging the important work that they do and continue to do. But also other different multicultural and multifaith organisations come in here and celebrate from time to time. There are various exhibitions that we see, like the Brotherhood of St Laurence, who are in here this week showcasing all the amazing work that they do. We should be doing more of that and encouraging more of that, to basically open this place up for the public, the community organisations and those who are out there serving the community each and every day to inform us about the important things they are doing and the important outcomes they are ensuring because of the important work that they are doing. We should be facilitating that as much as possible and doing that a lot more. As I said, it is the people's Parliament, and we should be bringing the community and people in here as often as possible.

I have been really privileged to serve in this place for as long as I have and to fight for outcomes for the community that I represent and for greater Victoria. It is something that I hold dear, and it is

something that I am very appreciative of, because not everyone gets the opportunity to make that contribution or to perform this role. So I am very grateful for that, and it would not be possible without all the staff and everyone that makes this place function. I would like to do a wide shout-out to everybody for the roles that they do and for making it possible to do the work that we do.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

*Third reading*

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (16:51): I move, by leave:

That the bill be now read a third time.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Pursuant to standing order 14.28, the bill will be returned to the Assembly with a message informing them that the Council have agreed to the bill without amendment.

*Business of the house*

**Orders of the day**

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:51): I move, by leave:

That the resolution of the house of 20 June 2023 be suspended to the extent necessary to allow further debate on the budget papers 2023–24 to be taken forthwith.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Motions*

**Budget papers 2023–24**

**Debate resumed on motion of Jaclyn Symes:**

That the Council take note of the budget papers 2023–24.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (16:52): I rise to speak on the motion about last month's state budget that is delivering a stronger, fairer and more compassionate Victoria than ever. The Andrews Labor government is delivering on our election promises and doing what matters to make Victoria a better place. Nearly 30 years ago the Liberals sold off our electricity assets to foreign transnational corporations. We can do better. The Andrews Labor government is putting energy back in the people's hands. We have promised to bring back the SEC, and in this budget we are kickstarting that with an initial investment of \$1 billion. We are replacing unreliable and privately owned coal –

**Harriet Shing:** A billion dollars.

**Sheena WATT:** That is right. It bears repeating, the significance of it: \$1 billion. We are replacing unreliable and privately owned coal with cleaner and cheaper renewable energy. We know how important it is to protect the SEC for future generations, so we will enshrine the SEC in Victoria's constitution to make sure it is not sold off by future Liberal governments. The SEC cannot work without the renewable energy workers of the future, so this budget will kickstart funding for the SEC centre of training excellence to train up our next generation. Funding is also provided for new VET certificates and other qualifications focused on renewable energy and achieving the Victorian energy jobs plan.

I am proud to be a part of a government that is delivering real action on climate. I have fought for climate action my whole life, like my counterpart in the Northern Metropolitan Region – who is not

here to hear me give him this shout-out – Comrade Mulholland, as he would like to, I suspect, be known. I was a bit of an activist in my student days, and I helped to do a range of different things to push for climate action, including negotiating – as one of, I do not know, more than 100,000 people – the global agreement on climate change, which is why I am so proud that we are leading the world in reducing emissions and that this jurisdiction is decarbonising faster than anywhere else in the world. We are leading the nation in renewables investment, which will create Victorian jobs and replace coal. As part of this renewables investment, in this budget we are funding two worker training centres for the emerging offshore and onshore wind industry. From global leadership to local action, the Andrews Labor government is investing in real action on climate. This budget will build 100 community batteries throughout Victoria, including in my community of Merri-bek. These batteries, delivered in partnership with local organisations and communities, will benefit consumers, communities and the electricity grid. Victoria is leading the way in battery storage, and this government will triple the number of Victorian homes that have access to crucial extra energy. I am simply buzzing at this news; it is absolutely electrifying.

Labor's action on climate change means leaving no-one behind, and public housing residents have told me how tough their bills are in the heat of summer and the chills of winter, with inefficient cooling and heating. We have also provided cost-of-living relief with the popular \$250 power saving bonus, which helps Victorians find a better deal on their power bills. In this budget we are going even further by providing funding of \$141.4 million to install air conditioners in high-rise public housing towers. We are making life more comfortable and improving the health and wellbeing of over 13,000 Victorians across more than 40 towers. I accompanied the former Minister for Housing Danny Pearson to announce this commitment during last year's state election. This funding is truly a significant win for public housing residents.

In the 2023–24 state budget we announced that native timber logging in Victorian forests will end from 1 January 2024. This decision will deliver certainty for the future for timber workers and sawmill operators and their communities. Increasingly severe bushfires and prolonged legal action have left forestry workers in limbo and unable to work or put food on the table, and this uncertainty has absolutely taken its toll on these workers and their families and communities. Something had to change. That is why we brought forward the end of native forest harvesting. For workers, their families and their communities this is difficult news, so our top priority is supporting each and every worker in the forestry industry to transition out of logging. Our expanded support package, bolstered by an additional \$200 million in assistance for workers and their families, will do just that. Our funding will retrain and upskill workers to transition to secure jobs and provide workers and their families with the financial and mental health support they need. We will also help hardwood-reliant businesses keep the doors open while they move on to other opportunities and deliver the largest expansion to our public forests in our state's history. With this announcement we are stepping up to give timber workers the job security and comprehensive support they deserve. We are also protecting our beautiful forests and creating more green space for all Victorians to enjoy for generations to come.

The state budget had plenty of wins for my community in the Northern Metropolitan Region, and I was so, so very, very excited to visit CERES environmental park on budget day last month to share the news with the team that the state budget will deliver \$1 million over two years for their community environmental enterprise precinct plan. I know that is a mouthful, and it is not the first time in fact that I have spoken of CERES. I have put into *Hansard* my support for the plan, and I have met many times with the CEO Cinnamon Evans as well as the chair of the board Andrew Hewett to discuss their plans. I am proud to champion their cause with ministers and in this Parliament, some of whom are here today celebrating this with me. I just want it declared that Labor has taken real action in the community by delivering this funding. CERES makes a big impact, not just locally but across the whole of our state. It is an iconic place to so many people from all over. Indeed it was funded by local legends in the Labor movement. Any day of the week you can see bright young faces learning about sustainability and taking on their role as the next generation of sustainability champions to make the globe a better

place. This win in the budget should be celebrated, and I am absolutely excited to work with CERES to make their precinct plan a reality.

It was indeed a very busy, busy budget day, and I am pleased to report that our commitment to fund an \$8.4 million upgrade to Carlton North Primary School starts with this budget funding a kickstart to the planning process. I visited the school to share the great news with principal Rachel and two of the prep students, Winnie and Lucas, who will benefit from the new teaching and learning spaces. This upgrade is part of the Andrews Labor government's plan to ensure that every young Victorian is able to count on a great education in the best facilities for our youngest learners.

This budget is also providing a multifaith workers memorial at Trades Hall. I have spoken many times on workplace safety. It is an issue dear to my heart and one that I know is dear to so many from our side of the chamber. It is one that I have proudly championed in government, in business, in industry and in unions. Every worker – every single worker – has the right to return home safe from work, and no family should have to live with the horror of a loved one not coming home. This government has a track record of delivering on workplace safety. Workplace manslaughter is now a crime because of the Andrews Labor government, and for every worker that never came home they will now have a place where we can honour and reflect on their enormous sacrifice.

The Andrews Labor government will always back our multicultural communities, because we know our cultural diversity is one of Victoria's greatest strengths. For more than 30 years the Australian Muslim Social Services Agency centre in North Melbourne has been a cultural and spiritual hub for the inner north's Muslim community. Thanks to the funding announced in the state budget, AMSSA will be able to undertake key upgrades to their facilities, ensuring that they can continue to fulfil their essential role in our community for many, many years to come. Our support for multicultural communities does not stop there. This budget provides funding to 3ZZZ radio, a multicultural radio station in the northern suburbs which gives a voice to communities in their own languages.

This budget is doing what matters for all Victorians. I have taken time to highlight just a few of the key announcements, but there is so much more that I look forward to sharing with the chamber over the coming months ahead. It is worth noting that it is a budget that delivers new schools and strengthens communities. It delivers on fairness and it delivers on climate action. The Andrews Labor government is getting on with the job of delivering for all Victorians.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:03): I am very pleased to rise to join the debate taking note of the state budget, because it is a very good state budget, quite frankly. There are not many other ways to describe the first budget of this third term of the Andrews Labor government than a very, very good budget indeed. Fundamentally what this budget does – and it addresses something that many electors over a period of time have grown frustrated with politics for – and what this government has been able to demonstrate again and again and again is that it delivers on its commitments. It is something that the public knows about the Andrews Labor government: that we deliver on our commitments. The commitments that we took to the state election just six months ago are being delivered by the budget in full – lots of schools, lots of roads, lots of rail, lots of hospitals and health services. It is a level of investment that Victoria needs for today but also to service our growing state for the next 10, 20 or 30 years. It is the kind of investment that we need in the Victorian economy to help keep doing that economic fundamental, which is creating jobs. Fundamentally the budget is all about ensuring that the record jobs growth that we have seen here in Victoria continues by investing in the sort of productivity-enhancing infrastructure that you see right across metropolitan and regional Victoria.

It is about investing in the skills of Victorians by ensuring that TAFE is both accessible and, in priority courses, free so that more young Victorians can get the skills they need to make sure that they are getting the jobs that are driving the economy of the future. And key to that future, as we have spoken about in this chamber this week, are our plans for cheaper, cleaner renewable energy led by the State

Electricity Commission. Those are the key commitments that we took to the last election, and they are the commitments that are being delivered by the budget.

I thought it would be particularly useful to just do a bit of an overview of how strong the Victorian economy is and how the recent state budget supports that degree of economic growth. The unemployment rate here in Victoria is of course well below 4 per cent, and it has been for the better part of the last year. That is an economic fact that we have not seen in this state for the last 50 years. Since September 2020 the labour market here in Victoria has added almost 440,000 jobs, and critically, when we look at job creation, what we always strive for is ensuring that the jobs that are being created are full-time jobs. Four out of five of these 440,000 jobs that have been created here in the state of Victoria since September 2020 are full-time positions, which has helped to push the unemployment rate to a 20-year low. Economic growth is strong in Victoria and higher than the national average, and the forecasts for economic growth that underpin our state budget show strong growth continuing over the budget forward estimates. What that tells all members is that obviously we are well and truly recovering from the challenges that Victoria and the Victorian economy faced during the pandemic.

We are obviously facing different sets of economic conditions, and the state government is dealing with those. We have taken difficult but necessary decisions in relation to repaying our COVID debt so that we do not leave the COVID debt bill for our children to pay, and we had a long debate in the chamber earlier this week about the necessary legislation to enact that COVID debt recovery plan. The alternative to paying that COVID debt back through the measures that we have introduced is obviously either to leave it for the future or to massively cut our government services, which I suspect is what those opposite would prefer to do. At some point in the next three years they are going to have to be honest with the Victorian people about their plans to cut back on government services, because that is what they do.

I do not want to spend too much time talking about those opposite because quite frankly they do not deserve it. They do not contribute enough to the debates, to the ideas and to the plans for this state to warrant much consideration. Instead what we see is that this government is very much doing what we said we were going to do. I want to go through in some detail precisely how parts of the Southern Metropolitan Region have been benefiting from this budget and from the investments that we have been making, particularly in things like schools, in things like hospitals and in things like our community services and infrastructure. We are investing in our local communities and making them better and doing the things that are absolutely what our local communities want us to do.

I had the great privilege on budget day to spend most of the day in fact in and around local communities talking with schools principally about the exciting times that are ahead. First up I went to Hampton Primary School and spoke with the principal and the school council there about the plans that they have to upgrade their school. There was funding allocated in the budget for that planning to commence, and obviously we all know that you have got to make good plans before the rest of the building can commence. At Hampton Primary School they are particularly excited about the planning that they are about to do for future capital upgrades.

I went up to Gardenvale Primary School to have a similar conversation with them across their two campuses, the junior and the senior campuses, to look at what the funding that we have allocated in this budget to support the planning of their school upgrades will achieve. Whilst I was there we ran into a school tour for prospective parents who were checking out the school to see whether it is the place they want to be sending their kids next year or the year after, and they were pretty excited when they heard – I did give a bit of a sneak preview, I have got to say; do not tell the Treasurer, but I gave them a little bit of a sneak preview – that there was funding in the budget to be handed down later on that day for the planning of upgrade works at Gardenvale Primary School. They were pretty excited because they heard from the staff about how wonderful the programs were that were being delivered at Gardenvale, and they could see that the investment that we are making in planning through this state budget will help deliver even better and more improved facilities for that school.

I also had a conversation the following day with the principal at Caulfield South Primary School, who has only just arrived at the school in fact and who had previously been overseeing a very significant capital upgrade at the Port Melbourne Primary School – the principal has moved from Port Melbourne down to Caulfield South. He is especially excited about the work that they are about to do – starting that whole process again. He has just finished it at his previous primary school, and he is moving on to another primary school that is going to start planning another upgrade. At Caulfield South Primary they are particularly excited as well.

I also had the opportunity later in the week to visit Sacred Heart Parish School in Sandringham on Fernhill Road, where the state budget, through the funding we give through the Non-Government Schools Capital Fund, is providing funding to support the upgrades to the Sacred Heart Parish School. That school in particular is a smallish school but a growing school, and local parents are clearly excited by the opportunities that exist at the school. But clearly the condition of the school is such that they could do with some support to upgrade their facilities to meet the needs of their growing school population, and that is exactly what the state budget is going to deliver for them.

It was also a delight, I have got to say, later in the day to be down at the Caulfield Park Bowling Club to see their great plans for an upgrade to their facilities at the bowling club. They are going to have a covered area on one of their bowling greens to ensure that they can bowl rain, hail or shine. The enthusiastic members of the bowling club did take me out on the green and test out my skills. I have got to say they are somewhat lacking, my bowling skills, but when we return to the Caulfield Park Bowling Club once their upgrade works are complete I hope my bowling skills will be better than they were on budget day.

I also had the opportunity later in the day to talk with some local dog owners who are excited about the upgrades that are coming to the gloriously named Pawfield Park in Caulfield, which will be the recipient of funds as we work with the local council and members of the local community to upgrade the facility at Pawfield Park so that local dog owners have exceptional new facilities to take them through.

I mentioned earlier today the support that the budget and the government gave to the Jewish community, principally in and around the electorate of Caulfield but more broadly as well. Several organisations based there received support in the budget. There was obviously an affirmation of our commitment to the Jewish Arts Quarter – an additional \$2 million in this budget, bringing the state's total contribution to that project to \$7 million to build a new Jewish Arts Quarter on Selwyn Street in Elsternwick. But in addition to that, there is the \$3 million from the budget for the anti-Semitism campaign to reaffirm that bigotry has no place in Victoria. There was some additional funding for the Community Security Group, which supports that group to undertake important security works in and around facilities within the Jewish community, and there was a range of other support being provided to various community groups in and around the local Jewish community.

The other thing that I was particularly excited about – I went with my colleague and friend the member for Albert Park down to the Alfred hospital, which will be the recipient of a new women's health clinic as part of the \$58 million that is being delivered in the budget to deliver on our commitments to create new women's health clinics across Victoria. It was very well received by the community, as are most of the other parts of the budget. I am very pleased to speak today to take note of it, and the members of the community that I am speaking with are really excited about the commitments that we are delivering on.

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:17): I move:

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

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

*Bills***Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023***Introduction and first reading*

**The PRESIDENT** (17:17): I have a message from the Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly presents for the agreement of the Legislative Council 'A Bill for an Act to make minor amendments to the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022**, to make consequential amendments to the **Judicial Proceedings Reports Act 1958** and for other purposes'.

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:17): I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read first time.**

**Ingrid STITT**: I move, by leave:

That the second reading be taken forthwith.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Statement of compatibility*

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:18): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

**Opening paragraphs**

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023.

In my opinion, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

**Overview**

The Bill contains a number of definitional and consequential amendments that do not engage human rights protected by the Charter.

It also contains provisions to ensure that requirements to implement more significant reforms are in keeping with the operational, resourcing and training capacity of the workforce. Specifically, the provision related to mental health crises in the community will be amended to allow a more flexible approach for the gradual roll out of a health-led response. While this amendment will temporarily reduce the size of the health workforce available to exercise care and control powers in responding to a mental health crisis in the community, this will not detract from principles and fundamental responsibilities will still need to be observed by police, protective services officers and members of relevantly prescribed classes of persons in taking a person into care and control under the Act. In other words, upon commencement of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 on 1 September 2023, members of the community experiencing mental health crisis will still be responded to in accordance with the mental health principles and the least restrictive way possible, and with primacy given to the expertise of health professionals to the extent reasonably practicable.

Additionally, clarification is being made to provisions around the review of use of intensive monitored supervision under the Act. Section 590 provides that as soon as practicable after an intensive monitored supervision order ends, the intensive monitored supervision clinical committee referred to in section 586 must conduct a review. The committee must ensure that particular persons are notified and invited to make submissions and provide information to the review. This Bill clarifies that it is not sufficient to notify and invite a mental health advocate, but that the mental health advocate notified and invited must be acting in accordance with any instructions given to the advocate by the relevant patient. This will increase the quality of participation in reviews, and promote patients' autonomy and self-determination.

Relevantly for the purposes of this statement, the Bill amends the Judicial Proceedings Reports Act 1958 (JPR Act) to provide that sections 3 and 4(1)(A) of that Act, or a victim privacy order or interim victim privacy order under Part 3 of the JPR Act do not prevent the disclosure of information (including identifying information) by the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission to the Health Complaints Commissioner or the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency. I consider that the right to privacy is relevant to this amendment.

Additionally, the Bill clarifies the existence of powers held by an Authorised psychiatrist to arrange for a forensic or security patient who is absent without leave to be transported to a designated mental health service. I consider that the right to equality, the right to freedom of movement and the right to liberty are relevant to these clauses.

### **Human Rights Issues**

#### **Human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill**

The Bill engages a number of rights which are protected and promoted by the Charter.

#### *Right to recognition and equality before the law*

Section 8 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to recognition as a person before the law, and every person has the right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination.

This right will be engaged because the powers in clause 23 and 25 of the Bill allow for an authorised psychiatrist to require that a security patient or a forensic patient who is absent without leave be taken into care and control and transported to a designated mental health service.

Arguably, expansion of the transport powers may amount to increased scope for direct discrimination on the basis of disability in that these provisions treat people with mental illness differently to other members of the community, on the basis of their mental illness. However, as the relevant provisions will apply to security patients and forensic patients who are absent without leave from a designated mental health service, the limitations on their freedom will necessarily be underpinned by operation of legislative provisions other than those contained in the Bill. Notably, security patients and forensic patients are subject to orders made by courts (such as a Court Secure Treatment Order under the *Sentencing Act 1991* or a relevant order under the *Crimes (Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried) Act 1997*). Therefore, their treatment or confinement within a designated mental health service is outside the remit of this Bill or its principal Act. The powers to arrange transport that are contained in the Bill will enable those court orders to be given effect, but will not create additional limits on the right to equality. This right will therefore not be limited by the Bill.

#### *Freedom of movement*

The right to Freedom of Movement is found in section 12, and applies to a person's movement into, out of and within Victoria. Relevantly, the right will be engaged when a person is required to move to or from a particular place. However, the right is intended to apply to restrictions that fall short of physical detention that would come within the right to liberty under section 21 (*Kracke v Mental Health Review Board* (2009) 29 VAR 1, [588]). While the powers to require the transport of security patients and forensic patients who are absent without leave may appear to engage the right to freedom of movement (in that they will limit people's freedom to move around and require them to move to a particular place), the requirement to detain and transport is more likely to limit the right to liberty under section 21. This aspect of the limitation on rights will be considered in relation to section 21.

#### *Right to liberty and security of persons*

Relevantly, section 21 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to liberty and security, that a person must not be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention, and that a person must not be deprived of their liberty except on grounds, and in accordance with procedures, established by law. This right is engaged because the powers in clause 23 and 25 of the Bill allow for an authorised psychiatrist to arrange for a security patient or a forensic patient who is absent without leave to be taken into care and control and transported to a designated mental health service. This may involve a form of detention, and will therefore involve an element of deprivation of liberty, which engages this right.

However, as discussed in relation to the right to equality, the relevant provisions will apply to security patients and forensic patients who are absent without leave from a designated mental health service. Any limitations on their freedom will necessarily be created by court orders (including under the *Sentencing Act 1991* or the *Crimes (Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried) Act 1997*). The powers contained in the Bill will enable the enforcement of those orders, but will not create additional limits on freedom of movement. This right will therefore not be limited by the Bill.

#### *Right to privacy*

Section 13 of the Charter provides, relevantly, that a person has the right not to have their privacy unlawfully interfered with. However, the section contains internal qualifications that the right will only be limited if

interferences are unlawful or arbitrary. An interference will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is clear, precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought. This requires a broad and general assessment of whether any interference on a person's privacy extends beyond what is reasonably necessary to achieve the lawful purpose being pursued (*Thompson v Minogue* [2021] VSCA 358, [55], [56]).

This right is relevant to the Bill due to the increased scope for publication of sensitive personal information created by the amendments to the *Judicial Proceedings Reports Act*. However, in my view this right is not limited by the Bill as any interference with privacy created by the amendments will be lawful and not arbitrary. The provisions that engage the right to privacy are clear, precise and appropriately circumscribed, and are reasonable and necessary to permit the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission to perform its functions without risk of contravention of the JPR Act. The right to privacy is not limited by the Bill.

Are the relevant Charter rights actually limited by the Bill?

While several Charter rights are engaged, I consider that none are actually limited by the Bill.

**The Hon. Jaclyn Symes**  
**Attorney-General**  
**Minister for Emergency Services**

### *Second reading*

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:18): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

### **Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*:**

When introducing the Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill 2022 last year, my predecessor acknowledged the challenging timeframe for new legislation that had been set by the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health Service System.

The Royal Commission had rightly seen it as imperative that new mental health legislation be passed in 2022 to establish the necessary system architecture to guide the 10-year mental health reform program.

As a government we agreed that no time could be wasted. We are proud to have delivered an ambitious new Act that establishes key entities such as the new Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission and Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Victoria, as well as a framework – underpinned by right-based principles and objectives – for service system redesign and development.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the valuable contribution, commitment and engagement of many of our key sector partners in achieving that important milestone in our reform journey. It was wonderful to see members of the lived experience community, service providers and workforce representatives supporting the new legislation as an important first step, while continuing to remind government that there is much more to be done. I would also like to acknowledge the collaboration and support shown by members across both Houses which saw timely passage of this vital legislation.

As we have continued to progress reforms, and focus has shifted to the important task of implementing the legislation, it has become apparent that some amendments are required to ensure the Act operates as intended when it comes into effect. This reflects the pace at which the Act was developed, to meet the Royal Commission's timeframes, and the fact that this work necessarily fell ahead of some key service design decisions.

The Bill we are considering today will amend the Act to address some identified issues.

Many of these amendments are minor or technical in nature, correcting errors or providing clarity. It is, nonetheless, important that these changes are made before commencement of the Act on 1 September 2023.

For example, due to the approach taken to structuring provisions in the course of drafting that relate to patients who are absent without leave from a designated mental health service, it is not clear that powers of apprehension and transport are available under the Act in the case of security and forensic patients who are absent without leave. These are powers that exist under the current Mental Health Act. Clarity that these powers will continue to be available when the new Act commences is important to protect the safety of these patients and the broader community. The amendments contained in the Bill will put this beyond doubt.

Other amendments within the Bill are necessary to respond to changing circumstances in the evolving service system since the Act's passage.

For instance, I am very proud to say that the first six Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals opened late last year, and that the call for submissions for providers to deliver the next round of seven new Local services

closed recently. One of the flagship reforms of the Royal Commission that will see services open in up to 60 locations across Victoria, Locals provide access to mental health and wellbeing treatment and care close to home. To support the aim of providing integrated treatment, care and support, the service model allows for consortium, partnership or sub-contracting arrangements between multiple service providers. The amendments in the Bill will provide clarity that organisations that receive funding through these types of arrangements will be mental health and wellbeing service providers under the Act and so subject to the same statutory oversight mechanisms and obligations as all other providers.

I am also very proud that the inaugural Board of the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing commenced in September last year. The Centre, which was a recommendation of the Royal Commission, will bring together lived experience leadership, innovative service delivery and cutting-edge mental health research to drive system transformation and improve outcomes across Victoria. Since the Board commenced, work has progressed to further develop the service model for the Centre and to recruit to key positions within the organisation. This has led to a recognition of some necessary amendments to ensure the Act reflects the work of the Centre and to remove overly restrictive requirements that make it difficult to identify appropriately skilled and qualified individuals for appointment to key leadership roles within the organisation.

The Bill will also make amendments in recognition that statutory obligations must not come into force before the system's readiness to meet them.

The Act establishes a framework to move from a law enforcement approach to mental health crises in the community to a health led response. This is an important reform to which Government is deeply committed. However, as we know, rising demands and the ongoing impact of the pandemic have put great pressure on the health system and, in particular, on our ambulance services. It would be irresponsible to proceed with introducing new crisis response powers for paramedics without first being sure that the necessary service supports are in place for the safety of our health care workers and the community. Amendments in the Bill provide the flexibility required to match system readiness to the new health led response by allowing registered paramedics and other health professionals to be prescribed by regulation to exercise these crisis response powers. This will be at a time when they are appropriately supported by the necessary system reforms.

Similarly, the Bill will delay the latest date for commencement of statutory Regional Boards by one year. This change will ensure that the interim regional bodies, that have been fully established since February this year, have time to build trusted relationships with community and stakeholders within their regions and establish strong community participation processes. This is an important first step on the path to regional service commissioning and will mean that when the interim regional bodies ultimately transition to Statutory Regional Boards they are well placed to fulfil their legislated responsibilities – including the provision of informed advice to government on service planning, funding and monitoring.

Before closing I would also like to provide the House with a brief update on activities underway to support transition to the new Mental Health and Wellbeing Act. As many members pointed out during debate on the Bill last year, many of the failings of the 2014 Mental Health Act stemmed not from the legislation itself, but from failures to effectively implement its reforms.

We have learned from this and so have invested \$47.8 million in this year's budget to support the establishment and readiness of entities with important oversight roles under the Act, as well as preparing the sector and community for the Act's commencement. This funding is in addition to the \$29.3 million allocated through the 2022–23 budget to support the Act's implementation.

To date this funding has enabled the appointment of local Act Implementation Leads across all area mental health services, supported by a centrally led community of practice.

My department is establishing resources to ensure that all Victorians can find the information they need about the Act.

These resources are also supporting the development and roll out of a suite of training modules to ensure the workforce understands and can fulfill obligations under the Act from 1 September 2023; and the development of resources to ensure consumers, carers, families and supporters are supported to understand the new legislation and are aware of, and able to, exercise their rights.

The further funding recently announced will support the entities established by the Act to carry out their important statutory functions when the Act commences.

I am also grateful for the work of many of our sector partners who are developing resources, materials and skills to be able to inform members of the community about the reforms, including: Victoria Legal Aid, Mental Health Victoria, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, the Mental Health Legal Centre, and the peak consumer and carer bodies – Tandem and the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council.

I am looking forward to once again working in a strong bi-partnership spirit to ensure that the best possible statutory framework is in place to support the reforms called for by the Royal Commission and to achieve the best possible outcomes for the Victorian community.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:18): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for one week.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for one week.**

**Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Bill 2023**

*Introduction and first reading*

**The PRESIDENT** (17:18): I have a message from the Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly presents for the agreement of the Legislative Council 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981** in relation to the supply, dispensing, administration, use and sale of Schedule 4 poisons by pharmacists without a prescription and for other purposes'.

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:19): I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read first time.**

**Ingrid STITT**: I move, by leave:

That the second reading be taken forthwith.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Statement of compatibility*

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:19): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

**Opening paragraphs**

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Bill 2023.

In my opinion, the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Bill 2023, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

**Overview**

The Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Bill 2023 (the Bill) amends the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act (the Act) to enable the Victorian Government to make regulations to authorise pharmacists to initiate the supply of Schedule 4 medicines without a prescription or direction from a prescriber.

Clause 3 of the Bill inserts the new regulation making powers in section 129 of the Act, expressly allowing regulations to be made authorising pharmacists to supply, dispense, administer, use or sell Schedule 4 poisons in specified circumstances and subject to conditions, for specified activities, or in accordance with the approval of the Secretary to the Department of Health – without a prescription or other instruction or authorisation from a prescriber.

These new regulation making powers are needed to deliver a 12-month pilot, trialling an expanded role for pharmacists. The aim of the pilot is to simplify and improve access to high volume/low risk primary care, and to reduce the burden of this work on general practitioners, allowing them to focus on providing more complex care.

The majority of the Charter impacts will be assessed when regulations are made under the new powers.

#### **Human Rights Issues**

The Bill itself will not engage the Charter rights of individuals. However, regulations made under the new powers may have an effect on Charter rights. The impact that any regulations made under the new powers might have on the rights of individuals will be considered when a human rights certificate is developed, as required by the Subordinate Legislation Act 1994.

Where the Bill may have the potential to impact on Charter rights through regulations made subsequently, an overview is provided below.

#### **Human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill**

The amendments in the Bill may, through expanded regulation making powers, engage the right to life. Section 9 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to life and has the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of life.

Schedule 4 poisons are prescription only medicines, such as antibiotics and strong analgesics, and do not include Schedule 8 poisons (which are controlled drugs with strict legislative controls). Except for some limited exceptions, Schedule 4 poisons must be prescribed by an authorised healthcare professional such as a registered medical practitioner, nurse practitioner or dentist, and can then be dispensed by a pharmacist.

The pilot is anticipated to allow supply without a prescription in strictly defined circumstances, for example continued supply of the oral contraception pill, treatments for some mild skin conditions and antibiotics for uncomplicated urinary tract infections, in accordance with established protocols. These protocols will be designed to ensure consumer safety and quality care.

The amendments in the Bill are necessary to support the pilot, which is intended to increase access to safe and timely treatment for common health conditions, supporting community health and wellbeing and easing the burden of disease associated with these conditions.

While the new regulation making powers are not limited to the pilot, Charter impacts would have to be assessed before any regulations authorising pharmacists are made. The Bill allows for regulations to be made that authorise pharmacists to supply, dispense, administer, use or sell Schedule 4 poisons in specified circumstances and subject to conditions, for specified activities, or in accordance with the approval of the Secretary to the Department of Health. This will ensure that any future regulations made will have appropriate safeguards in place to protect consumer health and safety.

Therefore, the amendments in the Bill do not limit the right to life.

**The Hon. Jaclyn Symes**  
**Attorney-General**  
**Minister for Emergency Services**

#### *Second reading*

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:19): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

#### **Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*:**

The Bill will create a mechanism for pharmacists to be legally authorised to supply certain prescription medicines without a prescription to enable the Community Pharmacist Statewide Pilot.

The 12-month Pilot expands the role of community pharmacists and will make it easier and cheaper for Victorians to get the healthcare they need. It will help improve access to primary healthcare, particularly for women, and help ease pressure on GPs and hospitals, particularly in regional areas.

The Bill will make a minor amendment to the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981*, creating a power to make regulations that authorise pharmacists to supply specified Schedule 4 medications without a prescription.

This is the first step in creating the legal and regulatory framework for pharmacists to supply medications under the Pilot. Following passage of the Bill, it is intended to make amendments to the *Drugs Poisons and Controlled Substances Regulations 2017*, which will create a mechanism for the Secretary to the Department

of Health to issue an authorisation for pharmacists to supply specified Schedule 4 medications without a prescription, subject to certain conditions outlined in the authorisation.

Under the Pilot, participating community pharmacists will supply relevant specified medicine directly to consumers, without a prescription or direction from another prescribing health practitioner but according to established protocols for the identified health condition groups. This approach – known as structured prescribing under the national Health Professionals Prescribing Pathway framework – is consistent with the New South Wales clinical trial and Queensland urinary tract infection pilot.

The authorisations under the Act and Regulations will aim to reflect and achieve the key objectives of the Pilot – providing Victorians with improved access to timely primary health care and effective treatments for select health conditions, while ensuring that care is provided by an appropriately authorised and trained community pharmacist, following suitable clinical protocols.

The Pilot will provide the community access to treatment for three select health condition groups:

- Continued supply of the oral contraceptive pill for women without a prescription.
- Treatments for some mild skin conditions; and
- Antibiotics for uncomplicated urinary tract infections in women.

Pharmacist immunisers participating in the Pilot will also be authorised to administer select travel vaccines following the completion of additional training.

Implementing this Pilot will make it easier for Victorians to access the primary health care services they need in their communities. This includes easier access to oral contraception and rapid treatment for uncomplicated urinary tract infections – a condition that affects more women than men, with nearly one in three women requiring treatment before the age of 24.

While general practice continues to be the cornerstone of the primary healthcare system, pharmacists are an accessible and trusted health professional in the community. They have a wealth of experience and are highly trained healthcare professionals who already manage a range of health conditions and refer customers to a doctor when required.

The Pilot is consistent with other reforms being considered or progressed nationally across other Australian jurisdictions. Following a successful pilot, pharmacists in Queensland are now permanently able to supply medicines for uncomplicated urinary tract infections through structured prescribing. A statewide clinical trial is also taking place in NSW, for appropriately trained pharmacists to supply certain treatments for uncomplicated urinary tract infections and continue a prescription for the resupply of a low-risk oral contraceptive pill for women under structured prescribing protocols.

To ensure there is no financial barrier for Victorians to access services under the Pilot, consumers receiving an approved service from a pharmacist will pay no more than if they had visited a bulk-billing GP.

Strong clinical governance will be in place to ensure patient safety and quality of care is at the centre of the Pilot. Community pharmacists will be required to complete additional training to participate in the Pilot and will need to follow clear structured protocols and guidelines for prescribing the medicines. This will ensure pharmacists can provide safe clinical care, are familiar with the latest evidence or recommendations and comply with relevant legislation.

The Department of Health will engage with Victoria's key primary care partners including pharmacy, general practice, clinicians, and consumer groups throughout the Pilot, to inform the Pilot design and implementation, and to ensure patient safety.

By enabling the Bill, the Victorian Government through this Pilot will continue to build on our positive plan to improve access to primary healthcare for all Victorians, closer to home.

Victoria needs to commence the Pilot so that the evaluation findings from this trial can inform the future policy settings on the role of pharmacists and pharmacies that will improve Victorians' access to safe primary health care, when and where they need it.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:19):** I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for one week.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for one week.**

*Adjournment*

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:20): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

**Family violence services**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:20): (309) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence in the other place, Minister Spence. In making this adjournment I rise to speak on the horrendous crime of family violence, and particularly I want to talk about the blight of family violence in my community of Southern Metro, a blight on our state that no-one should ever experience. Domestic violence sends a painful ripple through society and affects not only those who are the victims of it but also the children, friends and loved ones. Nearly one woman is killed every week across Australia due to family violence. It is often a key factor in child protection cases and is a leading cause for homelessness for women and children. These heartbreaking statistics show how vital it is for the Victorian government to do everything it can to combat family violence.

In 2016 the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence unveiled the tragic prevalence of family violence, and it set out over 200 recommendations into how the family violence system should be reformed to better address the needs of survivors. The Victorian government recently announced that it has completed implementing all of the 227 recommendations. This is an outstanding achievement. Actions like this ensure that all Victorians have access to life-saving services if they experience family violence, such as emergency accommodation and specialist family violence courts. Everyone deserves to live safely without fear of violence, especially within the home.

The Andrews Labor government has an ongoing commitment to combating family violence and has been a world leader in doing so. The introduction of paid family violence leave is an important step in meeting our commitments to protecting and supporting survivors of family violence. We take family violence very seriously. By investing \$3.7 billion into preventing and responding to family violence, the Andrews Labor government has shown its commitment to protecting and supporting all women and children. The establishment of the Orange Door network in 2018 has provided support and guidance to more than 200,000 people, including over 100,000 children. On top of this, the Andrews Labor government has funded refuges for family violence, which provide critical accommodation for those escaping family violence.

Fighting family violence is a big deal to me, and I am sure that all Victorians feel the same way. While family violence primarily affects women and children, it is important to also protect male victims of family violence, who are much less likely to come forward. When we act against family violence, it needs to be for all people. That is why the action I seek from Minister Spence is further information on what initiatives the government is implementing to achieve the ultimate objective of a Victoria free from violence.

**Fitzroy Street, St Kilda, community safety**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:22): (310) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Education, and it is regarding St Kilda Park Primary School. Stella, who is a parent and has children who attend St Kilda Park Primary School, located in Fitzroy Street, St Kilda, which is in my electorate of Southern Metro, has contacted me and has raised a number of concerns about the proposal by the City of Port Phillip to install a public toilet in Fitzroy Street around 100 metres from the main entrance of the primary school. She is very concerned that this public toilet is so close to the primary school. As Fitzroy Street has been known in recent times to have a large degree of antisocial behaviour and crime, there is real concern from residents and traders around what is happening in Fitzroy Street. I have been down to Fitzroy Street on many occasions, and I have spoken to traders and residents over the last 12 months who are talking about an increase in this antisocial behaviour and crime.

Just a couple of weeks ago I attended a crime forum in the St Kilda town hall, which was put together by the police – the local inspectors down there, the crime inspectors – and a range of people who were talking about the crime issues in and around the area and invited the community to come and provide their feedback. It was very well attended, and I want to place on record my thanks to the police for doing that but also to those traders and residents who also came along and shared their stories. It is very necessary that the local police and, further afield, the crimes unit also understand exactly what is going on. Nevertheless, this issue around this new toilet that is going to be situated 100 metres from this primary school is causing some concern for the school community. Their concern is not that a public toilet is not needed, it is just about its proximity to the school. They think that because of what is going on on the streets around Fitzroy Street it should not be so close to the entrance to the school.

They have approached the City of Port Phillip to seek an alternative location for the toilet, but that has not led to an outcome that Stella believes is satisfactory. Stella has said that the school has been involved and has seen too many antisocial behaviour incidents that have been in close proximity, and she thinks the children need a safe environment. The action I seek is for the minister to address this issue raised by the families at St Kilda Park Primary School and work with them to advocate to Port Phillip council to resolve this matter.

### Justice system

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:25): (311) My adjournment this evening is for the Attorney-General. The courts system can be a daunting one. We have professionals who train for years and pass multiple exams in order to understand and practise law, and even then, speaking from my time as a lawyer, it is always still incredibly daunting to step into court. Given this level of preparation and the training needed to understand the law and how to navigate the court system, it seems absurd to expect unrepresented people to successfully navigate our legal system themselves, yet this is the situation that we have in Victoria.

The Productivity Commission found in their *Access to Justice Arrangements* report that there is a justice gap in Victoria. This gap happens when people who do not qualify for legal aid but also do not have the resources to instruct a lawyer privately come into contact with our justice system. People with disabilities, people who work part time, members of the LGBTQI+ community and people fleeing family violence are more likely than others to fall within this gap. This lack of access to justice means that people are more likely to plead guilty than face the financial barrier of instructing a lawyer.

It is also unreasonable to expect accused people to make their own defence case. When fighting a criminal charge, the accused faces a wealth of evidence, time, money and experience from the prosecution. Advocating for yourself in these circumstances is not feasible for many people, and there is a reason that we have legal professionals. It is reasonable and just that we give state support to people who come into contact with the system in these circumstances in order to ensure a fair and democratic process. We know that helping people to resolve their legal problems early and effectively means they are more likely to move on with their lives productively rather than stay or become entrenched in the system.

One thing which sticks out to me is that on the Victoria Legal Aid website it also states that funding is dependent on whether or not a court proceeding is likely to end well for you and whether it is in the interests of justice that a grant is provided. Frankly, it is always in the interests of justice that people have access to adequate legal representation. Adequately funded and readily available legal aid is fundamental to a functioning democratic legal system. Equity before the law is a guiding principle of the rule of law, and frankly representation also means that cases proceed more smoothly and ensures that our courts get less bogged down. Given the backlog across most courts, this is no small consideration at this time. On this basis I direct my adjournment to the Attorney-General and ask that the Attorney identify this justice gap, the missing middle which sees people left without legal representation, and act to ensure that funding is increased to rectify it.

### Broadmeadows train station

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:28): (312) My adjournment tonight is seeking the action of the Minister for Public Transport, and the action I seek from the minister is a commitment for an upgrade of Broadmeadows railway station in line with the 2020 report from the Northern Councils Alliance. The report, called *Building Communities, Connecting People: Northern Horizons 2020*, outlined the need for a new commitment by 2024 for a serious overhaul of Broadmeadows station. It noted the rapidly expanding population of the northern suburbs, which is expected to have a 50 per cent increase by 2036 to 1.5 million, and it identified how the state government has been underfunding Melbourne's north since 2014. The report lists several infrastructure projects that require funding, including Broadmeadows train station. It has been rated the fifth-worst train station on the network by RACV. It is old. It is not fit for purpose and for current use.

We hear the state government plans to build a new Broadmeadows train station, which is great news for residents. It is something that many have been calling for. But currently it is only a press release, because they say they are going to upgrade Broadmeadows station as part of the Suburban Rail Loop North in 2053. The people of Broady have to wait about 30 years for that to happen.

Former mayor of Hume Carly Moore said it was unacceptable that the station had just 210 car parks given it is a key public transport connector between Melbourne Airport and the city. The former member for Broadmeadows Frank McGuire, who I am sure you all miss, has long campaigned for an upgrade, and in 2018 he said a solution was coming soon. Hopefully soon is not 2053. He also said in advocating for this project:

Such bias against Broadmeadows must change, especially given that it has the greatest need and would deliver higher value ...

Well, we see no such 'frank' criticism from the current member for Broadmeadows. He also then advised the council to upgrade the train station through the state government's own Growing Suburbs Fund. As the council and the *Leader* newspaper advised, that was not possible under the state government guidelines for that fund. They also helpfully advised the former member that this was a state government asset, not a council one.

I do not know whether the Minister for Public Transport has been to Broadmeadows train station recently, but I remind the minister that we do not need to wait until the 2050s to see upgrades that need to happen, because Broadmeadows train station is already a major transport hub in the north. It already takes V/Line passengers to and from Seymour, Shepparton and Albury. It takes passengers to and from Sydney. It is the main hub for no less than nine bus services from across the north of Melbourne. So I seek the action of the minister to get on board with building infrastructure in the north and commit to upgrading Broadmeadows train station – not in 30 years. I reckon we should get a commitment now.

### Building cladding

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:31): (313) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is a meeting with my office to discuss additional government support for Victorians still affected by our flammable cladding crisis. Thousands of homes have been audited by the Victorian Building Authority, and over 1500 have been rated as a fire risk due to dangerous cladding. For many of these households the dangerous cladding is just the start of an expensive and lengthy process of rectification works. Initial quotes for cladding rectification frequently reveal multiple building defects due to substandard building work. Most of these defects need to be repaired before cladding rectification works can even begin. Fixing building defects on top of initial inspection and legal fees plus the actual cladding works means that the full cost of cladding rectification runs into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, but only some households are eligible to receive financial assistance to cover these costs. The cladding audit gives each home a risk rating of

extreme, high, moderate or low. Only the extreme and high-risk categories are eligible to receive funding from Cladding Safety Victoria. Many owners are now being given building works notices from local councils but are struggling to comply due to a lack of financial support to cover the expense of the works.

These residents are in this situation through no fault of their own; instead this is the fault of a failure of government regulation and a lack of oversight. Government reforms that effectively privatise building surveyors by allowing developers to pick their own surveyor have meant developers can easily cut corners; build things on the cheap; and use dangerous but cheap materials, like flammable cladding, that should never have been approved. The government must step up to help all residents affected by cladding, not just the most serious cases. I ask to meet with you to discuss ways to increase funding for the cladding rectification programs so that all affected owners can access support.

### **Firefighters presumptive rights**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:33): (314) My adjournment is for the Minister for Emergency Services. The action I seek is for the minister to (a) provide all Victorian women who have worked or are working in career fire service roles, women who have worked or are working in voluntary firefighting roles and me with more clarity in the explanation of whether the additional presumptive cancers for firefighting women, including cervical, ovarian and uterine cancers, will be, like the other cancers, extended to cover women who have performed in roles as volunteers and in non-firefighting career roles for fire services, including vehicle and equipment maintenance roles; (b) include people who have been diagnosed since June 2016, as specified on the WorkSafe website, for current presumptive cancers; (c) explain why the additional female-specific conditions have taken so long to be recognised and added to the list; and (d) provide an explanation as to why Victoria is only expanding its number of cancers from 12 to 15, when Tasmania under a Liberal government have also expanded their list of cancers to 20 to include thyroid cancer, pancreatic cancer, penile cancer, lung cancer, skin cancer and malignant mesothelioma. This government only announced a couple of weeks ago that women's reproductive cancers, like cervical, ovarian and uterine cancers, would be added to the list of conditions that are automatically presumed to be caused by firefighting, taking the list from 12 presumptive cancers to 15 in Victoria.

Since the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Act 2019 Victorian men have received presumptive cover for testicular and prostate cancers. Our men and women volunteer firefighters want the same access and rights to presumptive cancer coverage, and women working and volunteering for firefighting services have waited far too long for this presumptive coverage for biological female specific cancer conditions.

Presumptive legislation presumes that a firefighter who has worked for a period of time and has been diagnosed with a specific cancer has contracted that cancer as a result of cumulative workplace exposures to hazardous materials; for example, when entering burning structures. Research suggests firefighters contract cancer at a higher rate than the general population because of the chemicals they are exposed to in structure fires – for example, house fires. Workers compensation claims rely on cause and effect. In other words, if you cannot see the fire hose through the smoke – which is the cause – which causes you to trip on the hose, you sprain your ankle, which is the effect. However, firefighters are often exposed to chemicals and toxins as part of their role to fight fires, making it difficult to pinpoint the day and time they were exposed to a cancer-causing agent and developed cancer. This is why the presumptive law exists.

### **Youth crime**

**Moira DEEMING** (Western Metropolitan) (17:36): (315) I am proud to announce that my work experience student Joshua wrote this adjournment debate for me. My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Youth Justice. What strategies does this government have in place to address the increasing rates of youth violence? In the last 12 months youth crime in Victoria involving individuals from the ages of 10 to 14 has increased by a staggering 44.6 per cent. Burglaries committed by the

same age group have increased by a staggering 86.7 per cent. In fact the demographic most likely to commit aggravated home robbery is minors aged 15 to 17. We need a comprehensive strategy to identify the reasons behind this shocking increase in youth crime and to find a way to successfully divert young people away from a pathway of crime. We need to identify these young people at risk of criminal involvement and help guide them back to focusing on a better future for themselves and our state, and that means getting them back to school to learn maths, science, English and all the other skills they will need to get good jobs. This government needs to get serious about helping young people to avoid crime and criminal gangs, and shutting down youth justice centres like Malmsbury is pointless without preventative actions. What will the minister do?

### Power saving bonus

**Joe McCRACKEN** (Western Victoria) (17:38): (316) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Energy and Resources, and it relates to the government's power saving bonus. The action that I seek is for the minister to release how much the program costs to run, including staff, digital advertising, workspace or any other expense required to run the program. This program has to be the biggest scam going around. We have got a system in Victoria where everyone pays tax and it goes into consolidated revenue. Money is then offered – not given – back to the taxpayer under this scheme. It is a scheme supposedly in place to make sure that you get the best power deal, but the scheme is so flawed that it is not funny. The problem is you do not even have to change power companies under the scheme. You do not even have to compare prices if you do not want to – you just literally click the 'close' button and it is gone.

Anyone wanting the bonus has to go online and apply for it via the government-owned website operated by government employees. Your application is then processed by government employees and the bonus dispersed by government employees. The government basically takes money from taxpayers through taxes on one hand – those buying houses, those in business or consumers – and then pays it back via government-paid employees, and that is only if you apply for it. This has to be the biggest exercise in waste. You take money from one hand and you give it back to the other, and we are expected to be thankful; we are expected to be happy. Does the government want a big round of applause for this? It is a complete disgrace and a total waste of time.

But I do not just come to this debate with criticism. I have got an idea that might actually help the government, and it is very simple one. Step one: find the total cost of the program. Step two: scrap it. Step three: reduce state taxes by that equivalent amount. Problem solved. What is better is that the cost-of-living relief is improved for those that you are trying to give it to, because you are cutting out the middleman. The government could, if they wanted to, just leave the money in the pockets of the taxpayer instead of taking it from them and then paying someone to give it back. I encourage the minister to be decent, to be kind, to show care for our taxpayers. Ditch the program, cut the waste and stop making Victorians apply to get their own money back.

### Police conduct

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:40): (317) My adjournment matter today is for the Minister for Police, and I quote from the *Victoria Police Drug Strategy* on page 18, where it says:

Victoria Police recognises that drug problems are first and foremost health issues. By taking a health-focused approach, police are empowered to respond to an individual's circumstances, environment and life stage. This enables policing approaches that reduce harm and keep the community safe.

It appears at the top of a report that has been released this week by the Fitzroy Legal Service into the police approach to the 420 cannabis event earlier this year. This report continues, quoting from the Victoria Police website:

Victoria Police will focus on the drugs causing the most harm within the community, arrest and prosecute drug dealers ...

I could continue, but I think you get the point. Victoria Police state that they will be approaching drug use in the community with a health focus, but as the Fitzroy Legal Service report highlights, this is not what happened at the 420 event. Policing was excessive, as it has been over the last several years. In what must be some kind of irony, just around the corner from this display of futile policing the secretary of the Police Association of Victoria Wayne Gatt was giving testimony to the federal joint committee on law enforcement. Despite what was happening in Flagstaff Gardens, Mr Gatt had the following to say:

Overwhelmingly, police in Victoria will focus on commercial trafficking, for example, and trafficking activities in general.

Mr Gatt continued:

... as a default, my members will focus on the criminality that causes the greatest amount of harm to the greatest amount of people. That is not drug users who are walking the streets.

I can confirm that some of the contents of the Fitzroy Legal Service report are accurate, because I saw it myself. People were handcuffed, despite offering no threat of violence or resistance. With many of the people there licensed medical cannabis users, there was also confusion in the approach of Victoria Police. Some people who produced a prescription were left alone and others were searched and had the contents of their bags tipped onto the ground.

My request for the minister is to provide the information that Fitzroy Legal Service has requested from Victoria Police, which includes: (1) the number of police officers and drug detection dogs deployed to the operation, the operational units involved and the number and purpose of the police vehicles allocated to the operation; (2) the total costs of the operation, including salary costs of the officers deployed; (3) the number of people at the 420 rally who were (a) searched, (b) arrested, (c) released without charge, (d) released on summons, (e) given a caution or (f) able to provide police with a medical cannabis prescription; and (4) whether the 420 rally was utilised as a training operation for newly recruited police officers.

### Australian Open

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (17:43): (318) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events and concerns the Australian Open, which has been so heavily supported by Victorian taxpayers through the \$1 billion spent on Melbourne Park since 2014 and the \$140 million government loan which salvaged the competition in 2021, amongst many other annual grants and in-kind support. Minister, Australian Open tournament director and Tennis Australia CEO Craig Tiley has made clear that he believes transgender athletes should be allowed to compete in the women's competition at the open. In fact he says his organisation is not just supportive of it but is 'trying to influence the decision' of the Women's Tennis Association and the International Tennis Federation. I personally cannot begin to accept this. Mr Tiley says:

... any decision made will need to be aligned with our core values.

But what are those core values? Surely women's sport is there precisely to allow fair and safe competition for female athletes. Isn't that a core value? Instead, Tennis Australia says anyone:

... should be able to nominate their gender identity at the time of nomination for any upcoming competition ...

or tournament. How have we got to this point? This is a sport where it is undeniable that male players have an enormous advantage over female players, even when they have reduced testosterone levels at the point of competition.

Tennis Australia obviously thinks it is far more important to talk about diversity and inclusion than to ensure fairness for female athletes. This is not a cultural event or a political think tank, it is a top-flight sporting event. Surely fairness in competition should be their overriding value. Other sporting bodies do appreciate this. It has been reassuring to note that world athletics, world rugby and world aquatics have all confirmed their support for the principle – not as reactionary outliers, but in defence of

fairness, and in line, I would argue, with the expectations of the community, who bear absolutely no ill will towards transgender people but recognise that sporting fairness and, in some cases, safety mean that distinctions must be retained in many sporting activities and competitions. So the action I seek, Minister, is a statement that you support the rights of female tennis players to compete fairly at the Australian Open, which we all, as Victorian taxpayers, so heavily subsidise.

### **Domestic rabbits**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:46): (319) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Agriculture, and the action I seek is for domestic rabbits to be properly protected under Victoria's new animal welfare legislation. To many Victorians, including my colleague Mr Limbrick, rabbits are companions, yet our animal protection laws fail them in almost every way. Rabbits are sociable and clever animals that quickly develop anxiety and psychological issues when confined to small spaces, which they usually are. With appropriate room and enrichment, rabbits are playful and can live up to 15 years, much like our cats and dogs. Yet unlike other companion animals, rabbits are offered no legal protection under the Domestic Animals Act 1994 and therefore councils do not include them in their domestic animal management plans. Welfare standards are voluntary, outdated and vague, leading to extreme cases of neglect. Despite advice from vets and welfare experts, anyone can breed and sell rabbits from their home without a permit or registration from the council.

In 2021 the RSPCA received over 200 reports of poor rabbit welfare. The level of cruelty is staggering. While cats and dogs are now no longer able to be sold in pet shops, rabbits remain at markets and pet stores across the entire state. Bunnies from stores are generally not vaccinated or desexed and are sold carelessly while promoting uncontrolled backyard breeding. They are continuously bred, sold and abandoned, and this government has no way of knowing how many exist here in Victoria. Dedicated rabbit shelters cannot accommodate the number of abandoned companion rabbits, resulting in high euthanasia rates. Rabbits who are turned away from shelters are often dumped in parks and wildlife reserves, where they interact with wild populations, causing devastating environmental harm, including the spread of disease. Rabbits as companion animals also suffer through exposure to myxomatosis, and whilst a vaccination exists, it is not available in Australia. Most rabbits die painfully of haemorrhage and/or seizures within 10 to 14 days.

In 2021 Animal Liberation New South Wales exposed the horrific treatment of rabbits raised for meat at some of the last remaining farms in Victoria. Despite hours of footage backed up by expert vets, the department cited an apparent lack of evidence of cruelty and claimed no breaches to the relevant code of practice. I have seen this footage myself, and no-one would want a rabbit or any animal to suffer in this way. This further demonstrates how many rabbits are not only disregarded and let down by policy and legislation here in Victoria but actively treated cruelly. My office receives a flood of requests for support for rabbits, and I hope that the minister will ensure that they are adequately protected under the new animal welfare legislation in Victoria.

### **Western Metropolitan Region police resources**

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (17:49): (320) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police. I implore the minister to assist the west with more police and provide the required number of police so that they can effectively operate local police stations and serve the community in the west. These additional police numbers will fill vacancies in police stations and increase the police presence. The west of Melbourne requires an immediate increase in police numbers to assist in the combating of increased crime in the area.

Crimes stats show that the west of Melbourne has a higher incidence of violent crimes, such as theft, assault and drug-related offences, than other regions. In stats for March 2023, Brimbank municipality had 12,463 reported incidents, an increase of 1.4 per cent from last year.

Wyndham Vale, one of the state's fastest growing municipalities, had 13,833 reported incidents, an increase of 14.9 per cent on the previous year. To combat these numbers we need sufficient police in

the PSA, the police service area. The records for April 2023 show that Werribee police have a number of core strength, which is the number of police needed to operate the station, of 92. The strength number designated to effectively operate this station is actually 64 – 33 per cent down from that needed to effectively deliver the service to the community. The police station at Sunshine requires a core strength of 100 to operate the police station but actually has a strength of 61 – 39 per cent down from what is required.

This high rate of vacancy of police from these police stations is consistent throughout the west, for Williamstown, Altona and Footscray in the south to Keilor, Melton and Sunbury in the north. These numbers are shocking for our region. One could say it is ridiculous, especially when the region reportedly has a high number of reported crimes. The western suburbs face unique challenges, requiring police to service the area. These challenges are in relation to gang-related activity, home invasions, drug trafficking and specific cultural and social issues, so we do need that number of police to operate these police stations. At the moment all police stations in the outer west are down by between 8 per cent and 33 per cent on the numbers needed to actually operate the stations effectively. So I ask the minister: please, could you deploy more police to fill the vacancies in police stations so they can detect the crimes and improve safety and security for residents in the west?

#### **Kyneton water reclamation plant**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:52): (321) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Water, and it concerns the current operating infrastructure of the Kyneton water reclamation plant. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide appropriate funding to Coliban Water to complete a full upgrade of the Kyneton water reclamation plant so that the plant has the modern infrastructure needed to adequately cope with the current and future service demand of this growing township and region. The Kyneton reclamation plant is operated by Coliban Water and treats wastewater from approximately 3800 connections in Kyneton, Malmsbury, Trentham and Tylden. The plant collects wastewater from 13 pump stations and a sewer network comprising 80 kilometres of gravity mains and 11 kilometres of rising mains. The sewer network also collects wastewater from the Kyneton industrial estate, which includes a local abattoir and saleyards.

In 2019 Coliban Water was charged by the Environment Protection Authority Victoria with breaches stemming from the operation of the Kyneton water reclamation plant. The breaches involved the release of highly polluted wastewater into the Campaspe River, and upon conviction Coliban Water was ordered to pay \$150,000 for restoration work on the river. In the wake of the charges Coliban Water completed an upgrade to the plant to ensure such pollution of the Campaspe River and its tributaries is not repeated, but there is widespread concern in the community that the works will not prevent further pollution.

I was recently contacted by a member of the Keep Kyneton Country group, who stated that, despite the upgrade, the infrastructure at the Kyneton water reclamation plant remains antiquated and inadequate to deliver its core services. The above-average rainfall in the region means that the newly constructed storage ponds will be regularly at capacity, meaning more treated water will need to be released into the Campaspe River. It has been reported to me that in October 2022 sewage water came up through the street drains of Kyneton and Malmsbury, also because the storage ponds at the plant were at capacity. The Kyneton township is in a high-growth area, and the community is concerned the current infrastructure, even after the upgrade, will not cope with the growing service demand. The only action to ensure the health of the Campaspe River is to undergo a complete redevelopment of the Kyneton water reclamation plant, and I call on the minister to provide funding to support this action.

#### **Small business support**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:54): (322) My adjournment is for the Minister for Small Business, and the action that I seek is assurance that small and medium businesses will be supported and protected from rising energy costs. Energy prices are set to rise by 25 per cent when businesses are already struggling to keep the lights on.

Last week I visited a local farm in Gippsland that employs 50 people. The business owner spoke to me about his stresses and about there being no long-term support to keep power prices low. He fears that with his business they may have to resort to downsizing, changing staffing arrangements or worse. Victorians continue to learn of industries and businesses shutting down because of the overreach of this government. It goes without saying, but a good example of this is changes to the native timber industry, which are just trashing communities in my area and killing off many, many jobs. The *Herald Sun* today reported that one of Australia's oldest chocolate brands has fallen into administration. This week Ford announced that it is cutting hundreds of local jobs in Victoria. Main streets are full of empty stores that used to be home to vibrant businesses that have now had to close their doors, some due to COVID, from which they never recovered.

We are losing so much manufacturing and so many jobs because of the red tape from this Labor government. We have already had 50 new or increased taxes since the Labor Party came into power: payroll taxes, land taxes, higher WorkCover premiums – the list goes on. Every time things get too hard for businesses and industries to operate in this state, people simply move and take their profits to other states or other countries. Therefore I ask that the minister commits to supporting small and medium businesses so they can survive the upcoming energy price hikes.

### Caravan parks

**Gaëlle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (17:57): (323) My adjournment matter calls upon the Minister for Environment to renew the Crown leases of caravan parks in local government areas impacted by the 2022 Victorian floods. The flood submission by the Victorian Caravan Parks Association states that 30 caravan parks were directly impacted by the floods, causing \$45 million in damages to their park facilities and a further \$38 million in lost revenue from a decline in tourism. In Victoria caravan parks provide over 11,700 full-time jobs. Ninety-five per cent of these jobs are in regional Victoria. In the last financial year caravan parks contributed \$1.9 billion to our gross state product.

Like many other Victorians, I enjoyed family holidays at caravan parks growing up, and it is a tradition that we have continued with our family. Across northern Victoria caravan parks provide a great place for people to stay and enjoy the great outdoors. They are also an important asset to our state in times of natural disaster, and I want to thank caravan park owners and staff across the state who have helped our emergency response in times of floods and fires. Caravan parks should also be considered part of the solution at a time when Victoria is experiencing a housing crisis. They provide much-needed residential housing and in many regional areas provide short-term accommodation that is desperately needed for seasonal workers.

But right now our caravan parks are struggling. Many experienced direct flooding last year and are doing their best to survive during a very difficult economic environment. Recent natural disasters like the bushfires and floods are driving up insurance premiums and, for some, making it impossible to get any insurance cover at all. The small business flood recovery grants of up to \$50,000 were quickly exhausted by parks seeking to replace cabins destroyed by the floods that cost \$250,000 each, and caravan parks on Crown lease land are not eligible for the flood recovery concessional loans made available to small businesses.

I call on the minister to renew the 21-year Crown leases to caravan park owners in local government areas impacted by the 2022 Victorian floods, as this would be a significant help to the industry, and I would also appreciate the minister's advocacy for caravan parks struggling to get insurance and seeking to rebuild and recover following the floods.

**Lord's Prayer**

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) incorporated the following (324):

My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General and relates to the Lord's Prayer.

Back on 7 March 2023, I referred the Attorney to her undertaking in the last term of Parliament, on 4 August 2021, that:

'A Labor government, if re-elected, at the beginning of the next term and as part of the consideration of changes to standing and sessional orders will commit to workshopping a replacement model that is purpose-fit for Victoria.' And I asked whether that workshopping had occurred and whether a replacement model was imminent.

And Attorney-General, you were kind enough to answer, that:

'Indeed it was a commitment that I gave in the last government to workshop potential replacements for the Lord's Prayer. We know that it is a vastly different chamber and a vastly different community from a hundred years ago, when the Lord's Prayer was established ... I reiterate that commitment. It is something that has been raised with me from a number of members in this chamber from a variety of parties. I think it is not a matter for the government; it is not a matter for the executive. It is a matter for this chamber and a matter for the other chamber. I concur that consistency is appropriate, and I am sure many people in this chamber would have a view. I am certainly happy to collate that and come up with a proposal following those discussions and discussions across the way. It is a commitment that is not yet met, so I stand by that commitment.'

We at Legalise Cannabis Victoria were very grateful for that commitment and look forward to that progress.

With the passage of almost four months since that exchange, the action I seek is that the Attorney-General update the house on her progress in this regard and the shape of the proposal that she is collating.

**Responses**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:59): There were 15 adjournment matters to 14 separate ministers, and I will ensure that written responses are provided in accordance with the standing orders.

In relation to Mrs Broad's important matter about flood-affected caravan park operators, obviously there have been significant impacts on the Victorian public land estate as a result of the floods occurring in October 2022 and, subsequent to that, some other significant flooding events in parts of the state. More than 120,000 hectares of Parks Victoria public land estates have been impacted: more than 100,000 hectares of state forest and more than 167 Crown land reserves managed by committees of management containing important infrastructure for communities. There has been a power of work going on through my department and through Parks Victoria to deploy specialist assessment teams to identify and seek more details on what remediation is required. I can indicate in terms of recovery that so far a large amount of Parks Victoria managed land has been reopened and there are works to mitigate critical and immediate risks to aquatic threatened species.

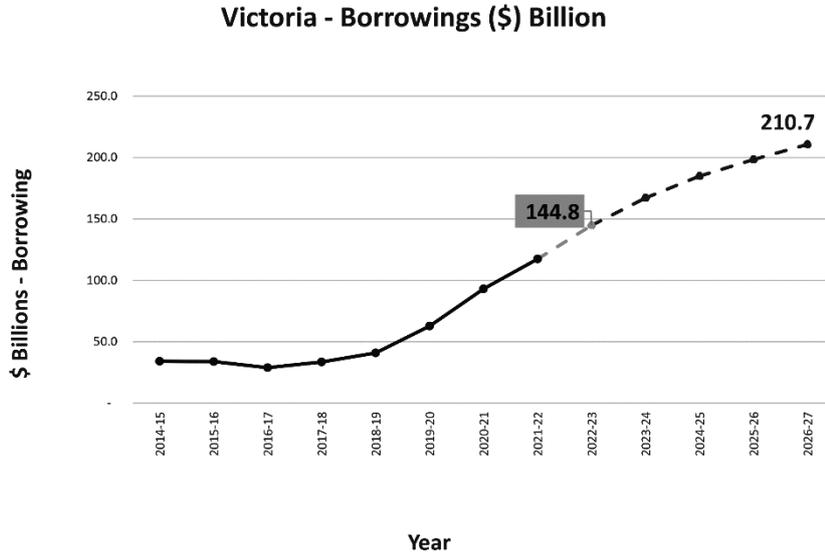
Volunteer committees of management have been significantly impacted, and there is support available for them. Public roads have been repaired and reopened, 143 visitor sites have been made safe and reopened and 39 agreements have been completed for the wildlife flood response grants. Of course we have had to ensure that we are working closely, with regard to Aboriginal heritage sites, with our traditional owner groups to make sure that they have flood recovery plans in place.

What I will undertake to do in respect to the specific question around those leases for caravan park operators is I will take that aspect of Mrs Broad's adjournment on notice and see what information I can get back to you via my department.

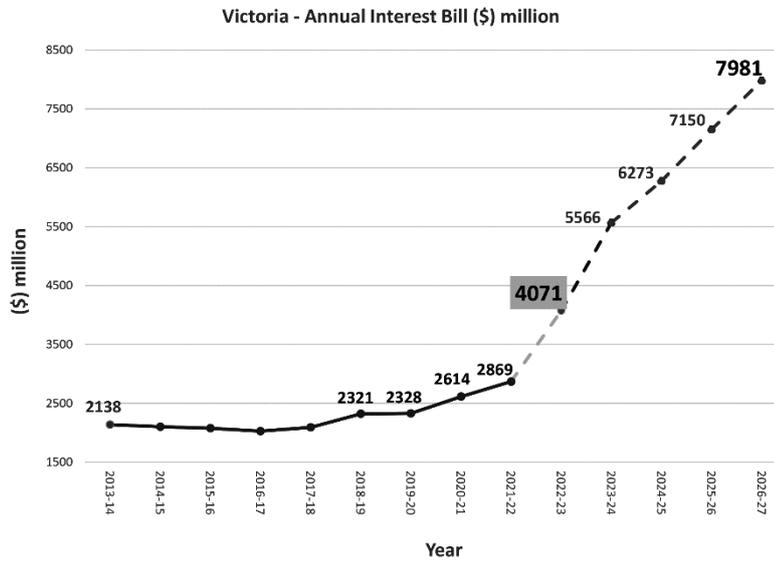
**The PRESIDENT:** Everyone stay well. The house is adjourned.

**House adjourned 6:02 pm.**

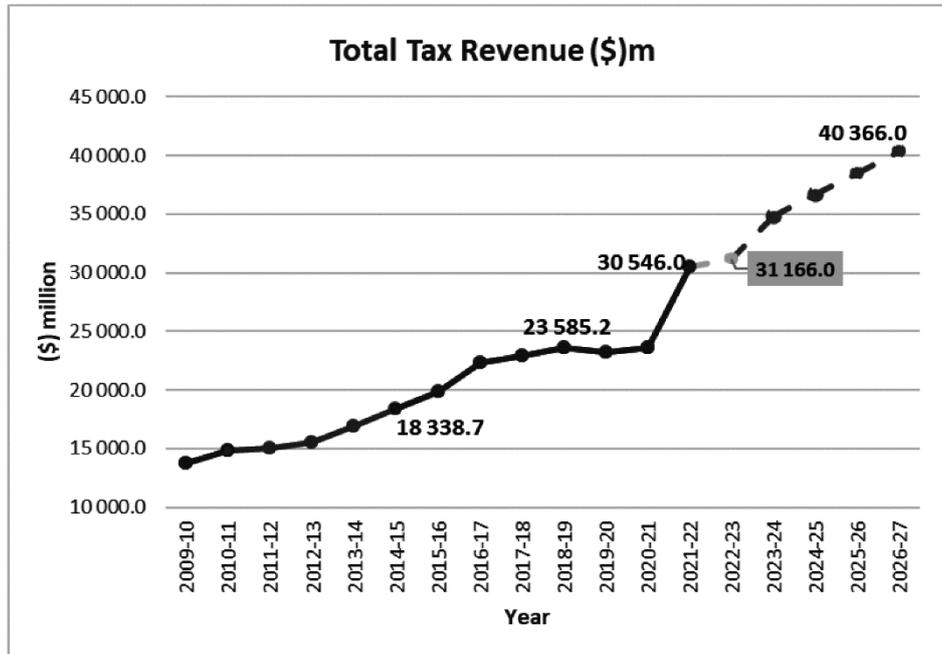
Following material incorporated by David Davis (see page 2104):



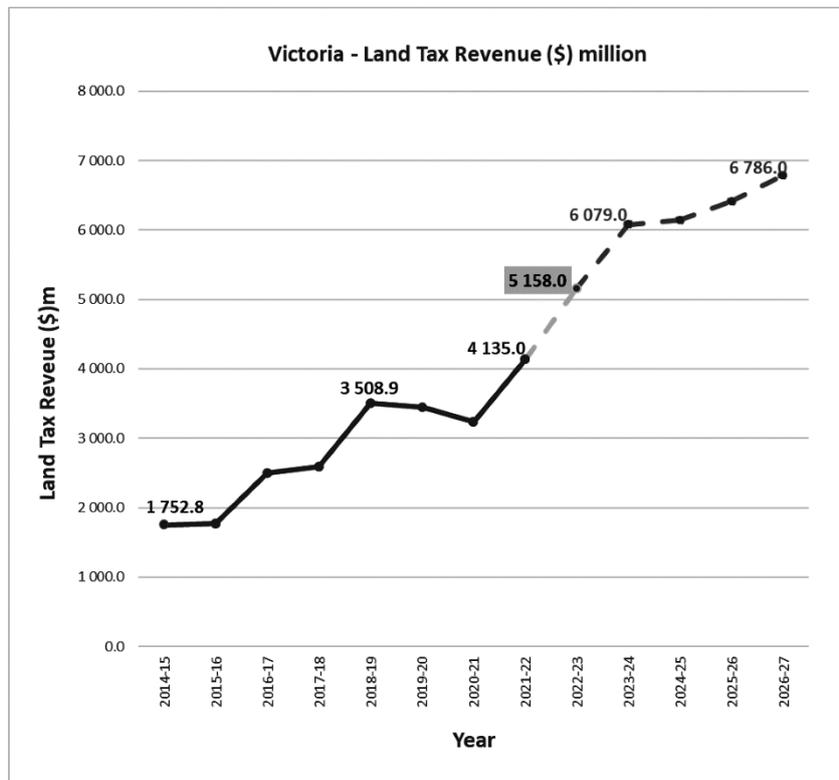
Source: Budget Papers



Source: Department of Treasury and Finance



Source DTF, 2023-24 Budget Papers



Source DTF, 2023-24 Budget Papers



