

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

THURSDAY, 18 MARCH 2021

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

The Honourable LINDA DESSAU, AC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable KEN LAY, AO, APM

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Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Minister for Mental Health	The Hon. JA Merlino, MP
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Minister for Public Transport and Minister for Roads and Road Safety . .	The Hon. BA Carroll, MP
Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and Minister for Solar Homes	The Hon. L D'Ambrosio, MP
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Minister for Water and Minister for Police and Emergency Services	The Hon. LM Neville, MP
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Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services and Minister for Creative Industries	The Hon. DJ Pearson, MP
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Minister for Workplace Safety and Minister for Early Childhood	The Hon. I Stitt, MLC
Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Regional Development	The Hon. M Thomas, MP
Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs	The Hon. G Williams, MP
Minister for Planning and Minister for Housing	The Hon. RW Wynne, MP
Cabinet Secretary	Ms S Kilkenny, MP

OFFICE-HOLDERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION

Speaker

The Hon. CW BROOKS

Deputy Speaker

Ms JM EDWARDS

Acting Speakers

Ms Blandthorn, Mr J Bull, Mr Carbines, Ms Connolly, Ms Couzens, Ms Crugnale, Mr Dimopoulos, Mr Edbrooke, Ms Halfpenny, Ms Kilkenny, Mr McGuire, Ms Richards, Mr Richardson, Ms Settle, Ms Suleyman, Mr Taylor and Ms Ward

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

The Hon. DM ANDREWS

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

The Hon. JA MERLINO

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

The Hon. MA O'BRIEN

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party

The Hon. LG McLEISH

Leader of The Nationals and Deputy Leader of the Opposition

The Hon. PL WALSH

Deputy Leader of The Nationals

Ms SM RYAN

Leader of the House

Ms JM ALLAN

Manager of Opposition Business

Mr KA WELLS

Heads of parliamentary departments

Assembly: Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Ms B Noonan

Council: Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr A Young

Parliamentary Services: Secretary: Mr P Lochert

MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Ms Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Maas, Mr Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Allan, Ms Jacinta Marie	Bendigo East	ALP	McCurdy, Mr Timothy Logan	Ovens Valley	Nats
Andrews, Mr Daniel Michael	Mulgrave	ALP	McGhie, Mr Stephen John	Melton	ALP
Angus, Mr Neil Andrew Warwick	Forest Hill	LP	McGuire, Mr Frank	Broadmeadows	ALP
Battin, Mr Bradley William	Gembrook	LP	McLeish, Ms Lucinda Gaye	Eildon	LP
Blackwood, Mr Gary John	Narracan	LP	Merlino, Mr James Anthony	Monbulk	ALP
Blandthorn, Ms Elizabeth Anne	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Morris, Mr David Charles	Mornington	LP
Brayne, Mr Chris	Nepean	ALP	Neville, Ms Lisa Mary	Bellarine	ALP
Britnell, Ms Roma	South-West Coast	LP	Newbury, Mr James	Brighton	LP
Brooks, Mr Colin William	Bundoora	ALP	Northe, Mr Russell John	Morwell	Ind
Bull, Mr Joshua Michael	Sunbury	ALP	O'Brien, Mr Daniel David	Gippsland South	Nats
Bull, Mr Timothy Owen	Gippsland East	Nats	O'Brien, Mr Michael Anthony	Malvern	LP
Burgess, Mr Neale Ronald	Hastings	LP	Pakula, Mr Martin Philip	Keysborough	ALP
Carbines, Mr Anthony Richard	Ivanhoe	ALP	Pallas, Mr Timothy Hugh	Werribee	ALP
Carroll, Mr Benjamin Alan	Niddrie	ALP	Pearson, Mr Daniel James	Essendon	ALP
Cheeseman, Mr Darren Leicester	South Barwon	ALP	Read, Dr Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Connolly, Ms Sarah	Tarneit	ALP	Richards, Ms Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Couzens, Ms Christine Anne	Geelong	ALP	Richardson, Mr Timothy Noel	Mordialloc	ALP
Crugnale, Ms Jordan Alessandra	Bass	ALP	Riordan, Mr Richard Vincent	Polwarth	LP
Cupper, Ms Ali	Mildura	Ind	Rowswell, Mr Brad	Sandringham	LP
D'Ambrosio, Ms Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Ryan, Stephanie Maureen	Euroa	Nats
Dimopoulos, Mr Stephen	Oakleigh	ALP	Sandell, Ms Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Donnellan, Mr Luke Anthony	Narre Warren North	ALP	Scott, Mr Robin David	Preston	ALP
Edbrooke, Mr Paul Andrew	Frankston	ALP	Settle, Ms Michaela	Buninyong	ALP
Edwards, Ms Janice Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Sheed, Ms Suzanna	Shepparton	Ind
Eren, Mr John Hamdi	Lara	ALP	Smith, Mr Ryan	Warrandyte	LP
Foley, Mr Martin Peter	Albert Park	ALP	Smith, Mr Timothy Colin	Kew	LP
Fowles, Mr Will	Burwood	ALP	Southwick, Mr David James	Caulfield	LP
Fregon, Mr Matt	Mount Waverley	ALP	Spence, Ms Rosalind Louise	Yuroke	ALP
Green, Ms Danielle Louise	Yan Yean	ALP	Staikos, Mr Nicholas	Bentleigh	ALP
Guy, Mr Matthew Jason	Bulleen	LP	Staley, Ms Louise Eileen	Ripon	LP
Halfpenny, Ms Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Suleyman, Ms Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Hall, Ms Katie	Footscray	ALP	Tak, Mr Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
Halse, Mr Dustin	Ringwood	ALP	Taylor, Mr Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Hamer, Mr Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Theophanous, Ms Katerina	Northcote	ALP
Hennessy, Ms Jill	Altona	ALP	Thomas, Ms Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Hibbins, Mr Samuel Peter	Prahran	Greens	Tilley, Mr William John	Benambra	LP
Hodgett, Mr David John	Croydon	LP	Vallence, Ms Bridget	Evelyn	LP
Home, Ms Melissa Margaret	Williamstown	ALP	Wakeling, Mr Nicholas	Ferntree Gully	LP
Hutchins, Ms Natalie Maree Sykes	Sydenham	ALP	Walsh, Mr Peter Lindsay	Murray Plains	Nats
Kairouz, Ms Marlene	Kororoit	ALP	Ward, Ms Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Kealy, Ms Emma Jayne	Lowan	Nats	Wells, Mr Kimberley Arthur	Rowville	LP
Kennedy, Mr John Ormond	Hawthorn	ALP	Williams, Ms Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Ms Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wynne, Mr Richard William	Richmond	ALP

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

ALP—Labor Party; Greens—The Greens;
Ind—Independent; LP—Liberal Party; Nats—The Nationals.

Legislative Assembly committees

Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee

Ms Addison, Mr Blackwood, Ms Couzens, Mr Eren, Ms Ryan, Ms Theophanous and Mr Wakeling.

Environment and Planning Standing Committee

Ms Connolly, Mr Fowles, Ms Green, Mr Hamer, Mr McCurdy, Mr Morris and Ms Vallenge.

Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee

Mr Battin, Ms Couzens, Ms Kealy, Ms Settle, Mr Southwick, Ms Suleyman and Mr Tak.

Privileges Committee

Ms Allan, Mr Carroll, Mr Guy, Ms Hennessy, Mr McGuire, Mr Morris, Mr Pakula, Ms Ryan and Mr Wells.

Standing Orders Committee

The Speaker, Ms Allan, Mr Cheeseman, Ms Edwards, Mr Fregon, Ms McLeish, Ms Sheed, Ms Staley and Mr Walsh.

Joint committees

Dispute Resolution Committee

Assembly: Ms Allan, Ms Hennessy, Mr Merlino, Mr Pakula, Mr R Smith, Mr Walsh and Mr Wells.

Council: Mr Bourman, Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Ms Mikakos, Ms Symes and Ms Wooldridge.

Electoral Matters Committee

Assembly: Mr Guy, Ms Hall and Dr Read.

Council: Mr Erdogan, Mrs McArthur, Mr Meddick, Mr Melhem, Ms Lovell, Mr Quilty and Mr Tarlamis.

House Committee

Assembly: The Speaker (*ex officio*), Mr T Bull, Ms Crugnale, Ms Edwards, Mr Fregon, Ms Sandell and Ms Staley.

Council: The President (*ex officio*), Mr Bourman, Mr Davis, Mr Leane, Ms Lovell and Ms Stitt.

Integrity and Oversight Committee

Assembly: Mr Halse, Ms Hennessy, Mr Rowswell, Mr Taylor and Mr Wells.

Council: Mr Grimley and Ms Shing.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Assembly: Ms Blandthorn, Mr Hibbins, Mr Maas, Mr Newbury, Mr D O'Brien, Ms Richards, Mr Richardson and Mr Riordan.

Council: Mr Limbrick and Ms Taylor.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Assembly: Mr Burgess, Ms Connolly and Mr R Smith.

Council: Mr Gepp, Ms Patten and Ms Watt.

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Thursday, 18 March 2021

The SPEAKER (Hon. Colin Brooks) took the chair at 9.31 am and read the prayer.

Announcements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The SPEAKER (09:32): We acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future, and elders from other communities who may be here today.

Business of the house

NOTICES OF MOTION

The SPEAKER (09:33): I advise the house that general business, notices of motion 39 to 41, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2.00 pm today.

Documents

RAIL PROJECTS VICTORIA

Tunnel and Stations Public Private Partnership: Project Summary Addendum

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (09:33): I table, by leave, the Metro Tunnel *Tunnel and Stations Public Private Partnership: Project Summary Addendum*.

SUPREME COURT OF VICTORIA

Report 2019–20

The Clerk: I have received the Supreme Court of Victoria report 2019–20 for presentation by command of the Governor.

Tabled.

DOCUMENTS

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENT TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT—The Clerk tabled the following documents under Acts of Parliament:

Auditor-General:

Reducing the Harm Caused by Gambling—Ordered to be published

Service Victoria—Digital Delivery of Government Services—Ordered to be published

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005—Child Information Sharing Scheme Two Year Review under s 41ZN

Drinking Water Quality in Victoria Report 2019–20

Financial Management Act 1994:

Reports from the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change that she had received the reports 2019–20 of the:

Grampians Central West Waste and Resource Recovery Group

Gunaikurnai Traditional Owner Land Management Board

Trust for Nature Report 2019–20

Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978—Register of Interests—Returns submitted by Members of the Legislative Assembly—Ordinary Returns 28 February 2021 (two volumes)—Ordered to be published

National Environment Protection Council—Report 2018–19

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994—Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rule 14.

Committees

PRIVILEGES COMMITTEE

Membership

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (09:35): I move, by leave:

That Ms Neville be discharged from the Privileges Committee and that Mr Carroll be a member in her place.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

ADJOURNMENT

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (09:35): I move:

That:

- (1) the house, at its rising, adjourns until Tuesday, 4 May 2021, or an earlier day and hour to be fixed by the Speaker;
- (2) if, in the opinion of the Speaker, the next scheduled sitting or a rescheduled sitting should not proceed on the basis of health advice, the Speaker will consult with the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business to delay the next meeting and set a future day and hour to meet;
- (3) the Speaker will notify members of any changes to the next sitting date.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

MANNACARE

Mr GUY (Bulleen) (09:36): Today I would like to raise in my members statement a matter that I am hoping the Minister for Health can solve regarding MannaCare, Manningham's aged-care service provider. MannaCare is a not-for-profit charitable association which provides a range of support services for older people living in Manningham. It provides some disability services under the national disability insurance scheme and the home and community care program for younger people, services that are department funded. Home maintenance, rehab, community respite, in-home support, home care packages and residential aged-care facilities are all offered, with the residential facilities being home to 150 places. MannaCare operates on subleased land from the Manningham council, which is actually owned by the Department of Health, at 371 Manningham Road in Doncaster.

There is no doubt this pandemic we are going through has hit every sector of the economy hard. All of MannaCare's services have been impacted over the last year because of transmission rates and the susceptibility of visitors. All onsite community programs to groups as well as day-night overnight respite programs have obviously had to be suspended. The council has sought to help MannaCare seek rent relief from the landlord, which is the state government. It is a worthy and sincere cause because the council, seeking to pursue this in order to help save this community's social asset, is trying its hardest. Sadly, despite months of contact, there has been nothing from the department—not a single return email, no return phone call and no return letter, which is frankly outrageous. So in this members statement I simply highlight to the health minister the importance of MannaCare and the need for some contact on this issue from the department. Surely return contact is possible, is polite and should be expected since contact was first made in September last year. I hope the health minister hears this plea

and at minimum seeks that his department first do the right thing and have a discussion with Manningham council and MannaCare about this most pressing issue.

WERRIBEE ELECTORATE TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (09:38): I was recently joined by the Acting Premier and the Minister for Transport Infrastructure at the new Tarneit Road bridge in Werribee. This outstanding new bridge removes the dangerous and congested Cherry Street level crossing by providing motorists with a new route to travel around the Werribee CBD. A new pedestrian and cycling underpass is currently under construction, and I thank the Werribee community for their continued patience as essential roadworks progress to get the job done. The Andrews Labor government is committed to removing 75 level crossings before 2025. Works are progressing rapidly, and the Cherry Street crossing, being the 46th level crossing on this list, is now gone. It was removed almost a year ahead of schedule and just weeks after the removal of the Werribee Street level crossing down the track, and with works well underway at Old Geelong Road, Hoppers Crossing, Werribee CBD will soon be level crossing free.

But rail is not the only transport upgrade in Werribee, with the western roads upgrade now complete. The \$1.8 billion investment provided for the upgrade of eight key arterial roads, including the Duncans Road interchange in Werribee, and it guarantees the ongoing maintenance of 260 kilometres of road from Footscray to Werribee. With these important investments in our level crossings and roads, the Andrews Labor government continues to deliver for Werribee and Melbourne's west, easing congestion on our roads and providing safer, easier and more reliable travel.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Mr T BULL (Gippsland East) (09:39): The Legislative Council's Economy and Infrastructure Committee's examination of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Victoria's tourism and events sector must conduct one of its hearings in East Gippsland. Our local tourism industry suffered the dual impact of the summer fires followed by COVID, and the business operators must be given the opportunity to explain their unique predicament in person. Many have not qualified for any of the government supports due to the criteria being too narrow. It is something that I have raised in this chamber on many, many occasions. So I call on the Minister for Tourism and Major Events to very strongly push for the committee to travel to East Gippsland for a hearing to be held in my electorate.

ANZAC DAY

Mr T BULL: Despite yesterday's bizarre and disrespectful outburst in the Legislative Council by the Minister for Veterans, RSL sub-branches remain in the dark on what requirements local Anzac Day services will have to meet. Many country communities often have well over 1000 people attend their various ceremonies, whether that be the marches, whether that be the breakfasts or whether that be the services themselves, and they must be given a very clear way forward. Direction is needed on crowd limits, the management of these ceremonies, the requirements for masks and social distancing, and other matters. With less than five weeks until Anzac Day, the minister is asleep at the wheel. The time has passed to keep saying you are in discussions. It is time to get it sorted.

MARIA KARVELAS

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (09:41): I rise to pay tribute to the life of Maria Karvelas, someone who made a great impact on her community and her state through her tireless work and advocacy in public service in the areas of disability and housing and in the wider health and community services area. She was foremost a loved member of her family and community and someone who will be deeply missed by all who knew her.

Maria started her public service career in 2001 and worked in public health initially. She made major contributions to the development of programs to improve the testing and treatment of prisoners with respect to blood-borne viruses and sexually transmitted infections. She also contributed at state and

national levels to hepatitis B and C policy and program development. In 2010 she joined the disability division of the department as an executive officer, a position which saw her plan, project manage and develop policy, particularly in the areas of the quality and effectiveness of disability services in Victoria. Maria made a major contribution to preparation for the national disability insurance scheme and project management to support the closure of Victoria's last two disability institutions, Sandhurst and Colanda. She also made an outstanding contribution to social housing programs and laid the work for the big build project that the Minister for Housing is now delivering through Homes Victoria. Most recently Maria worked in the specialist housing for disability team in Homes Victoria. Her deep knowledge and extensive skills will be sadly missed. Vale, Maria Karvelas—a life well lived.

EVELYN ELECTORATE SCHOOLS

Ms VALLENCE (Evelyn) (09:42): The Andrews Labor government, in their 2020–21 state budget last year, massively failed local primary schools in the Evelyn electorate. Despite my raising question after question here in Parliament, they failed, with not one new project and not one new dollar. Many local primary schools have completely missed out on new COVID funding and minor capital works grants despite meeting all the criteria. The Department of Education and Training has given them the excuse that funding decisions are not based on need but on politics. It is shameful. In any case, I will keep fighting for the local primary schools in my community. The students, their families and the teachers deserve no less.

Again I call on the government in the upcoming state budget to commit funding for Seville Primary School's overhead court covers and classroom facility upgrades for which the school so far has been ignored; for Birmingham Primary School, a new gym stadium to provide enough space for undercover sports programs, assemblies and emergency shelter; for Manchester Primary School, much-needed classroom and administration wing upgrades; for Bimbadeen Heights Primary, resurface the oval, including a watering system and drainage, as it is uneven, degraded and presents an OH&S risk for nearly 500 students; for Wandin North Primary, replace some of the portable classrooms with permanent buildings for STEM and the arts with proper disability access and replace the block B student toilets, which are still riddled with asbestos.

MARCH 4 JUSTICE

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (09:44): I rise to reflect on the March 4 Justice march and rally held on Monday of this week in Melbourne and right across the nation. Can I first acknowledge how difficult it has been for victim-survivors over the past few weeks. I understand that it is never easy, that the battle to overcome past trauma is continuous and the fight against discrimination and gendered violence can be overwhelming. We are clearly now in the middle of a great social reckoning, and it is long overdue.

As I joined my parliamentary colleagues on the steps of Parliament on Monday and watched the thousands of women and allies gather, I was overcome with a clarity of purpose. As men we must do better. We must educate ourselves, our peers, our sons and our grandsons, educate them on respect, on consent, on tolerance and on awareness, because our society is not doing it for us. It is riddled with systemic violence against women. I have three sons, three young men who are growing up in a country where on average one woman a week is killed by her intimate male partner. I have a responsibility to raise my sons to be good men, to be men who treat women with respect and do so without needing to think of their younger sister or mother in order to see women as worthy and as equal.

Now, I have been far from perfect on this. Too often I have walked past poor behaviour, and as we know, the standard you walk past is the standard you accept. I had two goals on Monday: to show up and to listen. I have got a new goal now: to call out toxic masculinity whenever and wherever I see it or hear it, whether it is on Twitter, on the floor of this chamber or in the community. I commend the goals of the March 4 Justice to this place.

KEPPEL PRINCE

Ms BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (09:45): Yesterday we heard the shocking news that Keppel Prince in Portland is putting off 40 workers. This was foreshadowed weeks ago to the state government if the company could not secure government contracts for their wind tower manufacturing firm. Many industries are at risk in and around Portland because of the state government's lack of interest in the regions. Alcoa faces ongoing challenges with power security, but nothing is on offer from the state government in the way of ensuring the industry has secure, affordable power. Power prices have increased not by 85 cents as stated by the minister three years ago, but by 85 per cent under this state government. And now we are seeing imported wind towers passing by the gate of Keppel Prince as they come through the port of Portland. What is the government doing to deliver on its promise that every job is worth fighting for?

WARRNAMBOOL PRIMARY SCHOOL

Ms BRITNELL: I ask: what is the Minister for Police and Emergency Services thinking by selling off government land on a corner block of a school that is landlocked and in the centre of Warrnambool? Blind Freddy can see that the Jamieson Street school is the obvious recipient for this publicly owned land. Surely the minister should have talked to his colleague the Minister for Education and said, 'I'd better give this to your department'. Can these guys not work between their silos? The school is growing. Warrnambool is growing. The land which the old fire station was on is now for sale instead of taking the obvious action of letting the school have the missing corner of the block they are on. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I beg the government to use common sense. This would never happen in Richmond or anywhere in Melbourne.

MILL PARK ALL-ABILITIES PLAY SPACE

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (09:47): I rise to inform the house of the great celebration held last week for the official opening of the all-abilities play space in my electorate of Mill Park. This space was delivered in partnership with the City of Whittlesea, and our government contributed \$1 million from our Growing Suburbs Fund. I am pleased to have joined Lydia Wilson, chair of the panel of administrators at the City of Whittlesea, to officially open this amazing space and to see for myself the multitude of physical, social, creative and cognitive experiences it provides for children and families of all ages and abilities. This space is at the heart and came from the heart of our local community.

From its inception until its delivery, the input of the community, including the Whittlesea Disability Network, was vital in the development of this space. The play space is equipped with a vast range of play equipment for all abilities and ages—shaded play structures with different levels and challenges, walking links and loops for children's riding and skating, a hard court for multiple sports, a large picnic shelter with barbecue, an open space area for events and many more amenities. I want to especially thank former councillor Sam Alessi, who played an important role in instigating this proposal. Also special thanks to the City of Whittlesea senior parks project manager Katelin Smith, who looked after this amazing space. The all-abilities play space is now the happiest place in Mill Park. It would not have been possible without partnership between our government and the City of Whittlesea. Since 2015 we have provided through the Growing Suburbs program \$33.5 million to deliver 29 projects in partnership with the City of Whittlesea, and I want to thank the Minister for Suburban Development for his support.

MINISTERIAL CONDUCT

Mr T SMITH (Kew) (09:48): Yesterday in the other place the Minister for Veterans said this:

...when you push the war widows and when you the push the veterans out of your way, when you get there first, you will get your chance ...

That was in response to a question from the opposition about what the Minister for Veterans is doing to prepare for Anzac Day. I met with the Kew RSL last Friday. They are very concerned that there

will not be an ability for them to have a dawn service or indeed our annual march the week before Anzac Day, because the Minister for Veterans is too interested in ridiculous and pathetic insults being lobbed at the opposition. He is a hopeless minister—

The SPEAKER: Order! I warn against reflections on ministers in the other place—

Mr T SMITH: Well, Speaker, this man is a grub. He ought to resign for what he said about the opposition members in the upper house—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Kew will resume his seat. It is in order for the member to raise concerns with the actions and comments of the minister, but I ask the member not to reflect directly on the minister in the other place.

Mr T SMITH: It is very difficult not to reflect on the Minister for Veterans. He should resign from that post, because what he said yesterday was beyond the pale. It was beyond the pale for any fair-minded Victorian to insult the opposition in such a way, and indeed any member of Parliament. No-one goes to Anzac Day ceremonies to make a political point; we go there to remember the 60 000 Australians that died in World War I.

MARCH 4 JUSTICE

Ms KILKENNY (Carrum) (09:50): This week we saw what may have been the biggest uprising by women for women this country has ever seen. This was not the start of any social movement; no, that happened many years ago. Our sisters from generations before us started this work: equal rights for men and women. But that work is not finished, and this week's calls for justice are a call to arms to finish the work started by our sisters generations ago. It starts with acknowledging the injustice—the injustice that is gendered violence, discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, sexual assault—in our homes, on our streets, on our public transport, in our media, in our political and educational institutions, and in our workplaces for women from all backgrounds across all cultures in every single suburb across this land. This must end and it must end now.

But Scott Morrison cannot do it. Neither can Christian Porter, Linda Reynolds, Marise Payne, Peter Dutton or Josh Frydenberg—the list goes on. For as long as those same men and women are in power, the same men and women who by their actions or indeed by their silence have shown such apathy, disinterest, indifference and disdain to the health and safety of and respect for all Australian women, there is not going to be meaningful and real change. This is not going away. But it is time for Scott Morrison and his mates to go. It is time for change and it is time for action. It is time for justice. I commend everyone who marched on Monday, who were there and in support.

ANZAC DAY

Mr McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:51): Can I encourage everyone to get along to their local RSL sub-branch Anzac Day service, support those who have given so much so that we can enjoy the benefits we have today. Although I was appalled by the Minister for Veterans' politicisation of this event, we should ignore this distraction and turn up in our thousands to support our wonderful returned and current service men and women.

COUNTRY SPORT CROWD LIMITS

Mr McCURDY: I am delighted that the Victorian government has listened to my nagging for some common sense for crowd numbers at country footy. Myrtleford, Yarrawonga, the Wangaratta Rovers and the Wang Magpies gave a collective sigh of relief when the rules were changed. The Minister for Community Sport has listened to our communities and has acted, and I thank her for that.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Mr McCURDY: I wish to thank the CWA branches in both Yarrawonga and Cobram who hosted separate International Women's Day events recently. I attended them both and they were a wonderful

reminder of the power and the strength that the women in our communities have been and will be into the future.

CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA DAY

Mr McCURDY: Well done to all who participated in Clean Up Australia Day efforts in the Ovens Valley, including the Yarrunga scout group who cleaned up along One Mile Creek in Wangaratta and the Cobram cub scouts who collected litter at Scotts Beach. Teaching our younger generations to keep our environment clean and rubbish free sets a great standard moving forward.

GAPSTED RURAL FIRE BRIGADE

Mr McCURDY: Congratulations to the Gapsted fire brigade teams who competed at the first event on the CFA championships calendar in Rutherglen. After having no teams for many years, Gapsted is going strong with senior and junior teams learning firefighting skills while keeping fit, having fun together, socialising and competing. Well done, Gapsted.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr TAYLOR (Bayswater) (09:53): Mental health issues impact all of us. In our lifetimes mental illness will personally affect half the people we know, and this year alone mental health issues will affect over 1 million Victorians. This government at the end of 2019, when we released the interim report of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, said that for too long we have not taken this issue seriously and enough is enough. We said that we are going to get serious about it and it is going to save lives. With the final report of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System being handed down recently, this sets the path for the complete transformation of our system from the ground up so we can get it right, so we can fix our broken system, save lives and support Victorians when they need it most, because they deserve nothing less.

The report and our commitment are about putting community at the heart of the mental health system and providing the tailored services that Victorians need close to home when they need them, and only doing that will do justice to the more than 12 500 Victorians and organisations who contributed to the report. And we will implement every recommendation, every single one, because it is the right thing to do. Of course we know it will not be easy, but we will get on with this critical work and deliver the world-class mental health system that Victorians deserve.

CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA DAY

Mr TAYLOR: Very quickly, it was great to be out with First Friends of Dandenong Creek a couple of weekends back, co-hosting my Clean Up Australia Day event, with Fletcher Guinea, Meadow Guinea, Marten Pearce, Taylor Cameron, Julie Guinea, Ruben Smolenaers, Shirley Dean and Chris Cameron from 3rd Heathmont Scouts and also representatives from 1st Wantirna Heights Brownies and 2nd Wantirna Heights Guides, represented by Rhea and Aruma. We picked up less rubbish than the year before, so we are clearly going places.

EVENTS INDUSTRY

Mr SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:54): Prior to entering Parliament, for 20-plus years I was involved in the events industry, and I am very proud to say that I put a smile on so many people's faces, whether it was at a wedding, a bar mitzvah, a milestone event or a corporate event. Unfortunately there are no smiles on many people's faces from the events industry right now. They have been left high and dry by the Andrews Labor government. Today as I stand in Parliament, there are people in 40-plus trucks from the events industry circling Parliament asking for action, asking for the Premier and for the minister to meet with them to give them some certainty about their industry going forward. They represent mums and dads and families that have been let down by the Andrews Labor government. These people do not get a handout. These people do not get help. These people are struggling to provide food for their family.

Damian from Action Events, which runs events for the fetes industry—carnival rides, jumping castles—cannot get in and run a fete. Those fetes provide lots of fundraising for the schools and for the kids. Those fetes have not been able to run because the Andrews Labor government have left the events industry high and dry and those families high and dry who cannot raise valuable money for their families. I ask the government to meet with the events industry and those people that put the smiles on all of our faces to keep us happy. There has been no joy with lockdown. There has been no joy in this state, the way the government has treated individuals. It is time that the events industry got a voice.

FOOTSCRAY COMMUNITY ARTS FUNDING

Ms HALL (Footscray) (09:56): I was thrilled this week to visit the Footscray Community Arts Centre, which many people would know is one of Australia's leading community arts centres, to announce funding for Henderson House, the historic building—once a piggery—that was saved by the former Meat Workers Union for the purpose of providing arts to the people of Footscray and Melbourne's western suburbs. The historic Henderson House will be revitalised with new creative spaces, helping to connect the west's diverse communities through art and performance as part of the West Gate Tunnel community partnerships grant round, which I was thrilled to announce there.

They are not the only group that will be benefiting. There are 16 projects across the inner west, including \$500 000 for the 100 Story Building, supporting young people to develop through creative writing, and that is right in the heart of Footscray. They are going to have a new podcast studio and new writing spaces. I was also pleased to announce funding for Cinespace, which is also based at the Footscray Community Arts Centre and which is going to be a multicultural screen arts project. This is fantastic news for our arts community in Melbourne's inner west that I am very proud to support.

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Dr READ (Brunswick) (09:57): Thank you to Refugee Voices, who on Saturday night held a fundraising and welcome dinner for refugees recently released from detention in Melbourne. In particular I thank organiser Ahmad Hakim and Kurdish refugee Esmat Ansari, who cooked for us in the Coburg town hall, and Hazara refugee Talib Hussain, who played a traditional instrument, the tanpura. Talib now works in construction to support his family, who are still in Pakistan. He has no idea when he will ever get to see them. We also heard great music from Aboriginal artist Anna Liebrezeit and speeches from Mohammad Daghagheleh and from recently released refugee Mohammed Imran.

After too many years in detention, most of the men flown to Melbourne under the medevac law and then detained, first at the Mantra hotel and then the Park Hotel—some of them for up to two years—have been released. There are still some there, and I look forward to their release soon. They have no support from the federal government, but community members are giving them a place to stay and helping them get on their feet. I want to thank and acknowledge the many Melbourne community members who are showing way more heart than our federal government, which is providing very little support. And on that note, I urge our state government to offer more support to this cohort and to other refugees living in Victoria and unable to work. I hope these releases are another step towards the end of our inhumane policies towards asylum seekers, which have long been one of our nation's greatest causes of shame.

ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr EDBROOKE (Frankston) (09:59): Alarming, one in five Australians will grapple with addiction in their lifetime, with an estimated 500 000 Australians unable to access the help they need to overcome addiction because the services are either not available or unaffordable or the waiting lists are too long. I am incredibly proud that the Andrews Labor government has more than doubled the number of residential rehabilitation beds, and it will continue to work hard to address the shortfall, particularly in light of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. This is an issue that affects everyone. It is one that I am particularly passionate about, and that

is why I am supporting an innovative partnership opportunity being proposed by the Victorian branch of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Health and Community Services Union.

In collaboration with not-for-profits and service providers, these unions are working towards offering specialist drug, alcohol and gambling services for working Victorians, modelled on the successful Foundation House service in New South Wales. As well as being financially responsible, with every dollar invested in this sector saving the community the equivalent of \$7, this model will allow Victorians to receive life-changing retreatment, retain connection to their employment and help to provide industry-specific support to help with the cycle of addiction. As former Foundation House graduate Sally says, 'I owe my life to Foundation House', and Sally's kids also say, 'Thank you, Foundation House, for giving us our mummy back'. We need innovative, sophisticated, out-of-the-box answers to complex issues such as addiction, and I believe that this is a great opportunity to save careers, to save families and to save lives.

MELAKE-MIHIRET ABA WOLDE GIORGIS AYELE

Ms KAIROUZ (Kororoit) (10:00): The Ethiopian Orthodox community in Australia and New Zealand were shocked by the passing of Melake-Mihiret Aba Wolde Giorgis Ayele, also known as Father George, head of the St Michael Ethiopian church in Ravenhall, on 4 March 2021. He was born in Ethiopia in a place called Mirt-Amanuel in 1975 and underwent his theological education at Sarat Monastery. Serving in a wide variety of positions from administration to head priest for many years, he played a pivotal role in evangelical services through the development of spiritual services. Father George also played a significant role in the establishment of local churches, such as St Michael church in Ravenhall, and facilitated several other local development activities such as the construction and completion of local cathedrals. Having provided exceptional service for nine years as administrator for Melbourne Debre Genet St Michael church in Ravenhall, he became widely loved by all Ethiopians, not only in Australia but also in New Zealand.

Father George is remembered as a father to those in need of help, aiding them to persevere through their trials and tribulations and to love their church through their faith and never lose hope over trivial matters. He created role models for young people so that they may look at their elders and feel that their desired outcomes were achievable. He was a loved figure for the Ethiopian-Australian community, who had visions to achieve the best for their people in this country. I extend my heartfelt condolences to the entire Ethiopian community.

EASTWOOD PRIMARY SCHOOL AND DEAF FACILITY

Mr HALSE (Ringwood) (10:02): This week I want to give a shout-out to the exceptionally well-informed and civic-minded students at Eastwood Primary School and deaf facility, a wonderful inclusive school which is doing some fantastic work in my electorate. Last week I had the pleasure of visiting Eastwood and explaining to the students there a bit about the workings of democracy and answering some of the toughest questions I have been asked since being elected to this place. I had questions from Harry, Bella, Ethan, Charlotte, Lauren, Billy, Mila, Holly and others—questions like: what are our rights and what happens if the election is a tie? There were also questions about Aboriginal affairs, about treaty and about our recently announced truth and justice commission.

I have also been asked to have a word with the Minister for Education and Acting Premier about a question on which there was a consensus from the students—shorter school days—so I will raise that with him at some point. But it was a delight to be there, it was a delight to talk to those really well informed and civic-minded students. I would like to thank the principal, Rukshana; Brendan; and all the teaching team for the work they are doing at this wonderful facility, and I look forward to being there soon.

VICTORIAN MOSQUE OPEN DAY

Ms COUZENS (Geelong) (10:03): Last weekend I had the pleasure to attend the Geelong mosque open day held by the Islamic Society of Geelong. The open day enabled the broader community to

experience intercultural understanding, the spirit of friendship and a better understanding of culture, beliefs, practices and history. I want to congratulate the Islamic Society of Geelong and thank them for promoting understanding and friendship across the Geelong community.

MARCH 4 JUSTICE

Ms COUZENS: On Monday women across this country gave their voices to the March 4 Justice and said enough is enough. Women demand a change at the highest level of government, the federal government, which is deliberately failing women and girls. I was very proud to march with the hundreds of Geelong women at the March 4 Justice rally on Monday, led by the Geelong Trades Hall Council women unionists network. I want to acknowledge and thank Adele Welsh, convener of the Geelong Women Unionists Network and proud ASU delegate, for her work in organising this rally. I want to congratulate the women of Geelong for coming out to raise their voices against violence against women and to demand change. The message was clear: no more excuses, no more blaming women and no more cover-ups. Every woman and girl has a right to feel safe on the street, at home, in the workplace or within their political party. Sexual assault and violence against women and girls must stop. All of us deserve to feel safe, respected and valued. Survivors must be heard and believed. I am proud of the Andrews Labor government's record in setting up a task force on sexual harassment in the workplace.

JOHN FORBES

Mr PEARSON (Essendon—Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services, Minister for Creative Industries) (10:05): I rise to honour the life and community service of John Allan Clarke Forbes. John Forbes was a founding member of the organisation known since 1998 as the Victoria Police Blue Ribbon Foundation. Following the 1988 murders of Steven Tynan and Damian Eyre in South Yarra, John mobilised a group to create an event to support the Tynan and Eyre families. With John's sporting connections at the fore, a basketball spectacular was played before a packed crowd at the Glasshouse in Melbourne. The event raised \$80 000, and funds were set aside to create the Tynan-Eyre scholarship fund. In 1998 the Victoria Police Blue Ribbon Foundation was formed to honour all members of Victoria Police who have died in the line of duty. From this early work came Blue Ribbon Day. Study scholarships for police members and more than 60 new or improved emergency facilities in Victoria's public hospitals are named in the memory of fallen officers. John Forbes served as foundation chairman for 21 years, later receiving life membership and a Medal of the Order of Australia in 2001 for his role in working to honour those police members killed on duty.

Admired across business and sporting fields for his long-held role as national promotions manager at Puma, John leaves a huge legacy in sport in Victoria too. The Rochester Sports Museum opened in 2019 and came to life with his donation of a vast collection of memorabilia. The great Muhammad Ali said, 'Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth', and while I did not have the privilege of ever meeting John Forbes, it is clear to me that he paid the rent for many, many rooms here in Victoria. Thank you, John. I offer my sincere condolences to John's wife, Fay; their sons, David and Peter; and their six grandchildren.

Bills

ZERO AND LOW EMISSION VEHICLE DISTANCE-BASED CHARGE BILL 2021

Statement of compatibility

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (10:07): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Zero and Low Emission Vehicle Distance-based Charge Bill 2021:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (**Charter**), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Zero and Low Emission Vehicle Distance-Based Charge Bill 2021 (**Bill**).

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

Overview

The main purposes of the Bill are to:

- implement a distance-based charge which reflects the usage of roads by zero and low-emission vehicles (**ZLEVs**); and
- make related and consequential amendments to other Acts.

Human Rights Issues

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

The human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are:

- the right to privacy, as protected under section 13 of the Charter;
- the right to freedom of expression, as protected under section 15 of the Charter;
- property rights, as protected under section 20 of the Charter;
- the right to a fair hearing, as protected under section 24 of the Charter; and
- the right to a presumption of innocence, as protected under section 25 of the Charter.

For the reasons outlined below, in my opinion, the Bill is compatible with each of these rights and, therefore, the Charter.

Section 13—Privacy and reputation

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. An interference with privacy will not be ‘unlawful’ where it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed.

Interferences with privacy will not be ‘arbitrary’ provided they are reasonable in the particular circumstances, and just and proportionate to the legitimate end they seek to achieve.

The rights in section 13 may be engaged by a number of clauses of the Bill:

Requirements to provide information to the Secretary or present a vehicle for inspection

Clause [212] requires a registered operator to lodge an initial declaration with the Secretary to the Department of Transport (**Secretary**) in relation to the first declaration period (defined in clause [211]) for the ZLEV within 14 days after the beginning of that period. Clause [214] provides that the registered operator of a ZLEV must lodge a declaration for each declaration period in respect of the ZLEV if the Secretary gives the registered owner a notice under clause [213] or within 14 days after the end day of the declaration period. The declaration must set out the odometer readings of the ZLEV or total distance travelled by the ZLEV, as well as any other information required by the Secretary. The Secretary also has the power, under clause [222], to request any further information and evidence that the Secretary reasonably requires to determine the amount of ZLEV charge payable by the registered operator.

Division 2 of Part 5 of the Bill permits the Secretary to appoint authorised officers to undertake inspections of a ZLEV for the purposes of verifying and confirming the odometer reading and identity of the relevant vehicle.

These provisions may interfere with the right to privacy. However, the powers are only exercisable for a limited purpose, namely, to enable the Secretary to determine the amount of ZLEV charge payable by the registered operator. Registered operators would expect that such information may be required, and it is reasonable for the Secretary to request information that goes directly to the use of the vehicle and the calculation of the charge or to inspect a vehicle in order to obtain such information. The provisions are for the important purpose of enabling the Secretary to administer the charge, and in turn improve the financial sustainability of Victoria’s road network. Further, the provisions are subject to appropriate notification requirements. Clause [213(1)] requires the Secretary to give the registered operator written notice of the requirement to lodge declarations subsequent to the initial declaration (in circumstances where the requirement is not arising as a result of the end of a declaration period) and clause [512(1)] requires that the Secretary give the registered operator written notice of the requirement to present the vehicle for inspection. Further, other safeguards on the exercise of the powers are in place. Clause [215] provides the Secretary with a power to, if the Secretary considers it appropriate to do so in all of the circumstances, waive the requirement

to submit a declaration. Clause [512(2)] provides that a person given a notice under clause [512(1)] may request the Secretary to change the time or place of inspection.

To the extent that the above provisions will interfere with the right to privacy by requiring disclosure of personal information or submitting a vehicle for inspection, any such interference will be lawful and not arbitrary.

Use and disclosure of information obtained by the Secretary or a relevant person

Part 6 of the Bill provides for the Secretary (or a relevant person as defined in clause [601]) to disclose 'relevant information', such information being defined as information that is collected or received by the Secretary in relation to the ZLEV charge and identifies an individual or from which an individual's identity can be reasonably ascertained (clause [601]). The information may be disclosed for a number of purposes outlined in clause [602] including: the administration of the Act or regulations; research, or the compilation or analysis of statistics, conducted in the public interest; the exercise of a power or the performance of a function under transport legislation; certain legal proceedings; and certain functions and activities when undertaken by or on behalf of a law enforcement agency.

By authorising the Secretary or a relevant person (defined as an employee in the Department of Transport, a person who is a delegate or sub-delegate of the Secretary, or a person engaged to provide services for the Secretary) to disclose personal information that is collected or received by the Secretary in relation to the ZLEV charge, these clauses of the Bill may interfere with the right to privacy in section 13 of the Charter. However, any such interferences will not be arbitrary or unlawful and will therefore be compatible with the Charter.

Although information may be shared for a number of different purposes, the type of information that can be shared is limited in that it is confined to information collected or received by the Secretary in relation to the ZLEV charge. Further, clause [603] contains an important safeguard in that it requires the Secretary or a relevant person to enter into an information protection agreement with a relevant person or body prior to any disclosure. An information protection agreement is required to, among other things, set out how the information will be protected and procedures for managing breaches of privacy. There are also a number of offences where there is a breach of the privacy requirements imposed by the Bill in clause [605].

Accordingly, I consider the above provisions to be compatible with the right to privacy under section 13(a) of the Charter.

Section 15—Right to freedom of expression

Section 15 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to hold an opinion without interference and has the right to freedom of expression which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds. Section 15 also provides that lawful restrictions may be reasonably necessary to respect personal rights and reputations, or for the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morality.

Clause [523] provides that it is an offence to include any information in a record or evidence required to be kept under clause [521] (being records and evidence that are necessary to enable the ZLEV charges in respect of the ZLEV to be properly determined), or in any declaration or other document lodged with or given to the Secretary under the Act knowing that the information is false or misleading in a material particular, or being reckless as to whether the information is false or misleading in a material particular.

This provision may limit the right to freedom of expression by restricting the kind of information that a person may impart, including through providing documents. However, to the extent that the right is limited, any such limitation would be reasonably justified. The prohibition is necessary to ensure the accuracy of the information provided to the Secretary, and, in the case of false or misleading information, does not apply where the person believes on reasonable grounds that the information was true or that it was not misleading. Further, the restriction is critical to ensuring the ZLEV charge scheme can effectively support the transition of Victoria's vehicle fleet to ZLEVs, in order to improve the financial sustainability of Victoria's road network. By reducing the risk that the Secretary's decisions regarding the determination of ZLEV charges will be based on false or misleading information, or that a person will provide a misleading document or declaration, the provision reduces the risk that a ZLEV charge in respect of a ZLEV will be calculated inaccurately.

Accordingly, I consider this provision to be compatible with the right to freedom of expression under section 15 of the Charter.

Section 20—Property rights

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. The right requires that powers which authorise the deprivation of property are conferred by legislation or common law, are confined and structured rather than unclear, are accessible to the public and are formulated precisely.

Part 3 of the Bill provides for the suspension or cancellation of registration of a ZLEV where there is a failure to lodge a declaration within the required time, to pay an invoice by the due date or to present a vehicle for inspection (clauses [301] and [311]). These provisions may engage section 20 of the Charter as, although the registered operator will retain formal title to the ZLEV, they are in effect prevented from lawfully using it on a highway. However, statutory rights, such as those arising from registration of a vehicle, are inherently subject to change, and for this reason, are less likely to be found to be proprietary rights.

To the extent that these clauses could be considered to deprive a person of property, any such deprivation will be appropriately tailored and confined and in accordance with law. The suspension or cancellation of registration of a ZLEV will only arise in circumstances where the registered operator has failed to comply with their obligations under the Act, and there are safeguards built into the legislation around the exercise of this power—including the ability seek review and appeal a decision of the Secretary to suspend or cancel registration in Part 4 of the Bill. The Secretary is also required to lift suspension if non-compliance is rectified under clause [305] of the Bill.

Accordingly, the provisions conferring the power to suspend or cancel registration do not limit the right to property under section 20 of the Charter.

Section 24—Fair Hearing

Section 24(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence or a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the charge or proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing. The Charter right to a fair hearing is not limited to judicial proceedings and can include administrative proceedings. The fair hearing right encompasses the concept of procedural fairness, which includes the requirement that a party have a reasonable opportunity to put their case under conditions which do not place that party at a substantial disadvantage relative to their opponent.

The right to a fair hearing may be engaged by provisions in the Bill which provide for various presumptions to be made regarding the evidentiary value of certain documents and determinations made by the Secretary.

The following provisions provide for a presumption that a document, invoice or certificate issued by the Secretary is admissible in legal proceedings (both civil and criminal) under the Act and, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, are proof of certain matters:

- Clause [711] provides for a presumption that a document issued by the Secretary (or their delegate) is admissible in legal proceedings under the Act and, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, is proof that the document has been issued by the Secretary (or delegate) and all requirements for issuing of the document have been complied with.
- Clause [712] provides that production of an invoice is admissible in evidence in legal proceedings under the Act and, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, is proof of the due issuing of the invoice, that the person named in the invoice as the registered operator of the ZLEV to which the invoice relates is the registered operator of the vehicle and is liable to pay the ZLEV charge in the invoice, the ZLEV charge stated in the invoice has been determined correctly, and all other details in the invoice are correct.
- Clause [713] provides that a certificate signed by the Secretary that states any of a number of prescribed matters is admissible in legal proceedings under the Act, including the registered operator's liability and the calculation of the ZLEV charge or interest.

In respect of determinations made by the Secretary, clause [431] of the Bill provides that where a party objects to the Secretary's calculation of the charge or in respect of the suspension or cancellation of the registration of a ZLEV, the onus of proof rests on the objector. Clause [442] imposes the same onus on a liable person seeking review of the Secretary's determination (or non-determination) before VCAT.

These clauses are intended in part to streamline proceedings brought under the Act by providing prima facie proof of matters that are either unlikely to be controversial or would be unnecessarily onerous or burdensome to prove. The evidentiary presumptions apply to all legal proceedings under the Act, which include criminal proceedings for offences under the Act, review proceedings relating to calculation of the charge under the Act, and to civil debt recovery proceedings in the case of non-payment of the charge. The onus of proof in clauses [431] and [442] applies to objections and review proceedings.

In the specific context of court proceedings to recover unpaid amounts of the charge, clauses [712 and 713] also facilitate proof of matters that will or should have been determined within the applicable statutory process for calculation (including any objection and review process). The provisions allow the Secretary to prove, absent any contrary evidence from a defendant, that all elements of the statutory debt (created by clause [501]) are established. Many of the matters to be presumed or certified relate to evidence that ordinary processes for calculation have been followed, that amounts of liability are correctly stated, and that certain processes and systems involved are operating in the ordinary fashion.

Importantly, an objector can still lead evidence to the contrary challenging the evidence that is certified or the presumption in clauses [711 and 712]. Finally, the presumptions do not interfere with a court or tribunal's ability to conduct its proceedings as it sees fit, including the manner in which it evaluates competing evidence, or the way it affords procedural fairness.

In my view, the above provisions do not impose any unreasonable requirements on a registered operator in objecting to decisions or as a party to legal proceedings under the Act. As such, the right to fair hearing is not limited.

For the above reasons, I consider the Bill to be compatible with section 24 of the Charter.

Section 25(1)—Presumption of innocence

Section 25(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law. The right in section 25(1) is relevant where a statutory provision shifts the burden of proof onto an accused in a criminal proceeding, so that the accused is required to prove matters to establish, or raise evidence to suggest, that they are not guilty of an offence.

The Bill contains a number of provisions imposing an 'evidentiary burden':

- Clause [512(4)] of the Bill, which provides that it is an offence to fail to comply, without reasonable excuse, with a notice from the Secretary under clauses [512(1)] or [512(3)] requiring inspection of a ZLEV for the purposes of verifying odometer readings. Clause [512(5)] makes clear that a person does not commit an offence against clause [512(4)] if the person has a reasonable excuse for failing to comply with the notice.
- Clauses [521(1) and 522(2)] of the Bill, which provide that it is an offence to not retain all records and evidence that are necessary to enable the ZLEV charges to be properly determined for a period of 5 years after such record or evidence was made or obtained. Clauses [521(2) and 522(2)] provide that these offences do not apply if the registered operator has a reasonable excuse for non-compliance.
- Clauses [711, 712 and 713] of the Bill, which provide for a presumption that a document, invoice or certificate issued by the Secretary is admissible in legal proceedings under the Act and, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, is proof of certain matters. These provisions are discussed in more detail under the right to a fair hearing.

In my view, although these provisions require an accused to adduce certain evidence, they do not limit the right to be presumed innocent. The prosecution must still prove the essential elements of the relevance offences; an accused need not prove any matters in order to escape liability. Therefore, the right to be presumed innocent under s 25(1) of the Charter is not limited.

For the above reasons, I consider the Bill to be compatible with section 25(1) of the Charter.

Tim Pallas, MP
Treasurer

Second reading

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (10:08): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

Support for zero and low emission vehicles in transitioning to a low-carbon future

Zero and low emission vehicles (ZLEVs) are part of Victoria's transport future and will play a key role in Victoria's transition to a low-carbon economy.

The reforms in this Bill establish a fairer and more sustainable framework for road users to contribute to the maintenance and expansion of Victoria's road network. This Bill balances the need for all vehicles to make a fair contribution to our road network, while recognising the environmental and health benefits of ZLEVs.

The transport sector currently accounts for more than one-fifth of the State's greenhouse gas emissions. Decarbonising the transport sector is critical to meet Victoria's legislated Net Zero Emissions by 2050 Target and will require government intervention in the short term to promote the transition to a low-carbon future.

The Andrews Government is committed to accelerating the adoption of ZLEVs and is investing to address perceived barriers to uptake.

In the recent *2020–21 Budget*, we announced over \$45 million to support ZLEVs. This included:

- rolling out a fast-charging network for motorists across major highways and key tourist destinations in Victoria through targeted infrastructure grants;
- a State-wide trial to investigate solutions to achieve a zero-emission bus fleet and create a pipeline of local job opportunities;
- introducing electric vehicle-ready provisions in new buildings from 2022 to prepare for mainstream uptake of electric vehicles (EVs); and
- funding to develop a strategy to accelerate the take-up of ZLEVs in the Government's fleet.

We will have more to say on our ambitious plans to support ZLEVs through the upcoming release of Victoria's Zero Emission Vehicle Roadmap, as well as the Climate Change Strategy and transport sector pledge.

A fairer, more financially sustainable way to fund the road network

The Government is also investing at record levels to maintain and improve Victoria's road network—investment that is far in excess of the revenue raised from taxes and charges related to road usage. However, this scale of investment is becoming more challenging to sustain as state and territory revenue bases related to road use are being eroded while demand for investment in the road network continues to rise.

Most Australian drivers pay fuel excise when they fill up their vehicle with petrol, diesel or liquified petroleum gas (LPG). Fuel excise is an important source of revenue that contributes to building and maintaining our roads as the Commonwealth redistributes some of this revenue to state and territory governments as infrastructure grants.

In recent years, it has become clear that this funding mechanism is not financially sustainable in the long term. Commonwealth fuel excise revenue is in relative decline due to improvements in fuel efficiency of internal combustion engine vehicles (ICEVs) and the introduction and increasing uptake of alternative-powered vehicles, such as EVs, plug-in hybrid-electric vehicles (PHEVs), and hydrogen vehicles (HVs).

EVs, PHEVs and other alternative-powered vehicles currently face a lower tax burden relative to traditional ICEVs and do not contribute to the costs of road network provision commensurate with the costs they impose on the network. ZLEV owners pay little or no fuel excise but they still use the roads.

The reforms introduced in this Bill ensure all motorists contribute their fair share to the cost of funding Victorian roads and road-related infrastructure. It will support the financial sustainability of Victoria's road network and ensure we can continue to invest in our transport networks into the future.

While the number of ZLEVs in Australia is currently low, now is the right time to establish a framework that ensures all road users make a fair contribution to the Victorian Government's record investments in roads. Take-up of these vehicles is expected to increase in the next three to five years, as new ZLEV models enter the market, the purchase price of new ZLEVs falls and network infrastructure rolls out. EVs are destined to dominate our motorways in the future, given they'll always be more economical and environmentally friendly than petrol, diesel or LPG-powered vehicles.

Introducing a road usage charge for ZLEVs now, before take-up increases substantially, ensures a fair and sustainable revenue base to fund investments in the road network and provides increased certainty to all drivers.

The Government has been keen to lead vital reforms in this policy area ahead of other jurisdictions in Australia. We have been working with the other states and territories to ensure, to the extent possible, a nationally consistent framework for road-user charges for ZLEVs across jurisdictions that choose to adopt them. The Victorian and South Australian Governments join international jurisdictions, including California, Utah, Oregon and Washington states in the United States, in implementing or trialling road-user charging systems that incorporate ZLEVs.

A distance-based charge for ZLEVs

This Bill introduces a distance-based charge on the use of roads for Victorian-registered ZLEVs from 1 July 2021. These charges will apply to vehicles not predominantly powered by a fuel source that is subject to a Commonwealth Government fuel excise, such as petrol, diesel or LPG.

Under the Bill, from 1 July 2021, a 2.5 cent/km charge will apply to electric and other zero emission light vehicles, including hydrogen vehicles, and a 2.0 cent/km charge will apply to plug-in hybrid-electric light vehicles. Conventional hybrid light vehicles, which are predominantly powered by a petrol or diesel internal combustion engine, will not need to pay the new distanced-based charge.

Just like with fuel excise, a per-kilometre charge ensures vehicle owners who use the roads less pay less in distance-based charges. After all, ensuring motorists' contributions to our roads is proportional to how much they use the roads is only fair. On average, EV owners will pay an additional \$330 a year and PHEV owners will pay an additional \$260 a year, based on the average distance travelled for light passenger vehicles of around 13 100 km a year.

These new distance-based charging arrangements and other financial incentives recognise the environmental and health benefits of ZLEVs. Under the distance-based charge for ZLEVs registered in Victoria, ZLEV owners will continue to pay less in road-related taxes and charges than other drivers—around 40 to 50 per cent less than the per-kilometre equivalent that an average driver pays in fuel excise.

Existing incentives to promote the take-up of ZLEVs will continue, such as the motor vehicle stamp duty concession for all low emission passenger vehicles which produce 120 grams or less of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions per kilometre travelled announced in the *2019–20 Budget*.

On balance, the Government anticipates the introduction of the distance-based charge will have a negligible impact on electric vehicle uptake in Victoria, particularly as the Government is investing the revenue raised from the first few years of the distance-based charge in vehicle-charging infrastructure that will help address a significant barrier to ZLEV uptake.

The Government will continue to promote the take-up of ZLEVs by ensuring they pay less than conventional petrol and diesel vehicles. Indeed, we commit to review the per-kilometre rates periodically to ensure these more environmentally friendly vehicles continue to pay less in road-related taxes and charges than their fuel-based counterparts. More broadly, we will continue to evaluate zero and low emission transport policies to encourage take-up of zero and low emission technologies, and to ensure Victoria remains on track to meet its 2050 net zero emissions target.

Implementing the ZLEV distance-based charge

Part 2 of the Bill describes the light-touch, low-tech approach to implementing the distance-based charge. Owners of ZLEVs subject to the distance-based charge will need to report their odometer readings to the Secretary of the Department of Transport. They will then be invoiced in arrears based on the distance travelled during the declaration period.

In practice, owners can make the necessary declarations to allow the Secretary to calculate the charge when they pay their vehicle registration using the myVicRoads online portal. The portal will generate a bill based on the reported odometer readings. As with vehicle registration, registered operators can pay ZLEV distance-based charge quarterly, semi-annually or annually, based on what suits their circumstances.

Rules will also apply when the vehicle is transferred between registrations to ensure the registered operator of the ZLEV at the time the distances were travelled remains liable for those charges.

The Bill provides strong incentives to ensure compliance with reporting requirements and ensure registered operators pay their fair share for their use of the roads. Part 3 of the Bill allows the Secretary to suspend or a cancel a vehicle's registration for failing to adhere to reporting requirements or for failing to pay distance-based charges. Penalty interest may also be charged by the Secretary on the late payment of distance-based charges, with outstanding charges and any interest a debt payable to and recoverable by the Secretary.

ZLEV owners are also required to retain records to substantiate their declarations for five years and provide evidence of their claims upon request to ensure compliance with the scheme. Furthermore, vehicles may be subject to inspection by officers authorised by the Secretary.

The Bill also establishes new criminal offences if a registered operator fails to keep records, fails comply with a notice to inspect a vehicle subject to distance-based charges or knowingly or recklessly providing false or misleading information as part of a declaration to the Secretary.

Refocusing financial incentives on the most environmentally friendly vehicles

Separate from this Bill, light vehicle registration concessions will also be modified to ensure these financial incentives target vehicles powered by environmentally friendly alternatives to fuel. ZLEVs subject to distance-based charges will also continue to receive the \$100 registration concession on their annual Victorian registration.

Conventional hybrid vehicles will no longer receive this concession on their annual Victorian vehicle registration. These vehicles, unlike PHEVs, are powered predominantly by a petrol or diesel internal combustion engine. There are now many ICEVs without hybrid capabilities on the market that achieve similar fuel efficiency to conventional hybrid vehicles. It is not fair that, among vehicles with similar fuel efficiency ratings and environmental outcomes, some receive the registration concession while others do not.

The Minister for Roads and Road Safety will be making these changes through amending the Road Safety (Vehicles) Interim Regulations 2020 in due course.

The reforms in this Bill establish a fairer and more financially sustainable framework for road users to contribute to the maintenance and expansion of Victoria's road network. Critically, they will provide the resources for future governments to continue investing in our transport networks to enhance the State's productivity and meet the future transport needs of Victorians.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Mr WELLS (Rowville) (10:08): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Thursday, 1 April.

Motions

BUDGET PAPERS 2020–21

Debate resumed on motion of Mr PEARSON:

That this house takes note of the 2020–21 budget papers.

Ms SPENCE (Yuroke—Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Youth) (10:09): It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to speak on the 2020–21 state budget, which really does put people at its centre. It is fair to say that 2020 was a year like no other. Australia saw in that new decade engulfed in flames. This might feel like a long time ago now, but residents across Victoria are still trying to put back the pieces following the fires that tore through our state. It was impossible to prepare for the immense loss that we experienced during this time, of homes, of flora and fauna and of human life. And just as we were beginning to come to terms with the extent of this devastation, along came COVID-19.

The pandemic hit us hard and fast, and by mid-March all Victorians were having to adapt quickly to a new way of life. This was not easy for anyone, and the unique barriers facing many cohorts and individuals only rose higher and higher in the months that followed. The pandemic heavily and disproportionately impacted on already vulnerable people, including young people, women, multicultural communities, Aboriginal Victorians, people experiencing family violence, older citizens, people living with disability and many others. Indeed the sacrifices that they and all Victorians have had to make to stop the spread of this virus have not been in vain. I would like to take this opportunity to thank every single Victorian for everything that they have done, given up and fought through.

It has been a long and exhausting journey, but there have been some positives to note along the way, such as bridging geographical divides and improving the accessibility of programs and services by moving them online. Victorians are spending more time with their families and better balancing their many commitments with more flexible work arrangements. The work that women do has never been valued more highly, and we know that we need to provide better support for women both at home and in the workplace. In fact we have learned that we do not want to return completely to how we were before COVID. Our 2020–21 state budget recognises all of this and that COVID has brought with it unprecedented and enormous challenges, but many of these challenges were pre-existing and have simply been heightened. Some of the things that have changed should stick.

There is so much in this budget that I could speak to, but instead I have picked some highlights relevant to my portfolios, to my constituents in Yuroke and to Victorians everywhere. For our multicultural Victorians, who we know have done it particularly tough during COVID due to language and cultural barriers, racism and the often volatile nature of their work and visa status, the 2020–21 budget will help bring people closer together by dedicating \$21 million for the development of new and upgraded community facilities. This investment in local halls and meeting spaces will make sure that more multicultural and multifaith communities have a place to call their own and to share their traditions. Not only will this help bring multicultural communities together, but it will also create vital construction jobs as we rebuild from the pandemic. The budget will also provide support for

playgroups for newly arrived families, allowing parents and little ones to connect and to find friends. This initiative adds millions of dollars to our support for those who have come to Victoria on humanitarian grounds. To help them find new opportunities or get back on their feet, more than \$14.4 million will support multicultural and young Victorians into jobs by breaking down barriers to employment and making sure that they know their working rights. Accessing information in one's own language has never been more important, which is why we are committing \$3 million in this budget for multicultural media outlets so that they can extend their reach and improve their services.

We are also staying true to our 10-year commitment to the *Victorian African Communities Action Plan*—something that I know is very important to you, Acting Speaker Carbines—and we are building on the work undertaken thus far to advance real outcomes for our African communities by allocating a further \$4.5 million to it, and \$35 million more will be provided to the International Student Emergency Relief Fund to lend a helping hand where finances have become increasingly tight. Through this budget we are demonstrating our readiness to combat racism and support the many diverse communities that enrich our state.

Community sport is an essential part of life for many Victorians, and I am proud that this budget demonstrates our commitment to this sector through a whopping \$164 million investment in community sport. \$137 million of this will go towards infrastructure, which takes the Andrews Labor government's total investment in community support infrastructure to more than \$1 billion since 2014. But it does not end there. We do not want our children to miss out on opportunities to participate in sport and recreational activities due to financial pressures. That is why the Andrews Labor government is investing \$21 million in the Get Active kids voucher program, the first of its kind in Victoria. This will see around 100 000 eligible children obtain vouchers of up to \$200 for membership fees and subscriptions as well as uniforms or equipment.

It is incredibly important for the health of our kids and for the health of the community sport sector that kids get out and back into participating in sport, and we do not want finances to be a barrier to this occurring. That is why this program, the first for any state government in Victoria, is so important, and I am proud that the Andrews Labor government has supported it in this budget. Alongside this initiative we are investing a further \$6 million in the sporting club grants program so that clubs can purchase new uniforms and equipment, provide additional skills development to coaches and staff, increase their operational capacity and support COVID-safe operations. We are supporting community sport through COVID recovery in this budget because we know the importance of this sector. We value the 16 000 community sporting clubs, leagues and associations, and we understand the flow-on benefit that this investment has to the physical health and the mental health of the 3.9 million Victorians who play sport or engage in activity every week across this state.

Victoria's young people have been amongst the hardest hit by the pandemic and the impacts will be felt long into their futures, which is why I am thrilled that this budget prioritises young Victorians and that we are making record investments in the youth portfolio in 2020–21. With a baseline budget of \$34.7 million and a state budget allocation of \$11.6 million, we are proudly enabling the continuation of successful initiatives that engage young people and promote access to opportunities as we emerge from the pandemic.

Our innovative place-based programs build protective factors around vulnerable young people, connect them to social and economic opportunities and build a sense of belonging that prevents disengagement. Our initiatives include \$8.3 million for youth organisations to continue six community support groups and the Le Mana Pasifika Project, which supports and empowers young people from culturally diverse backgrounds; \$2.5 million to support young people living in regional and rural Victoria who face barriers accessing supports and services compared to their metropolitan peers; \$0.7 million for five Aboriginal organisations to deliver bespoke mentoring programs for young Aboriginal people, strengthening their identity and building pathways to education, training and employment; and we are continuing to deliver on our 2018 election commitment to build and upgrade

scout halls across the state, with \$1.4 million allocated to these projects in 2020–21. These initiatives complement the longstanding youth programs, including FReeZA, Engage! and Advance.

Mr Fowles interjected.

Ms SPENCE: It is a very good policy. More broadly, the Victorian budget is supporting young people into work through our \$1 billion investment in training, higher education and workforce development, giving Victorians the skills they need to get back into work. \$619 million will go to Jobs Victoria to connect more Victorians with employment opportunities, and \$235 million, which has been announced for the recovery workforce initiative, will support young people to enter the mental health workforce. The Big Housing Build will deliver 10 000 jobs each year over the next four years, with 10 per cent of the work on major projects to be done by apprentices, cadets and trainees. A record \$5.3 billion is being invested in this social housing project, which is the biggest this nation has ever seen and will see 12 000 quality homes built across the state for those who need them most. I am incredibly proud of this initiative.

Concerns around our mental health have never been more prevalent. During the pandemic many Victorians have experienced increased loneliness, anxiety and stress. With the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System having handed down its report, we have committed to implementing every one of the recommendations, and we are already making a record \$868 million investment to help fix our broken mental health system. We are putting Victorians with lived experience at the centre of our new system, and this funding will support the delivery of more mental health beds and a statewide rollout of post-suicidal clinical supports.

I am so pleased that the 2020–21 Victorian budget also makes significant investments in education. Our groundbreaking \$1.6 billion disability inclusion package will provide additional support to students with disability and implement inclusive education reforms. The Andrews Labor government is also providing \$250 million to deploy 4100 tutors across Victorian schools in 2021 to support students who may have become disengaged during periods of remote learning, and children and young people will soon be learning in the best facilities through our \$3 billion investment in school infrastructure.

I am particularly proud of the unprecedented investment by this government in building and upgrading schools given my electorate of Yuroke has seen significant investment in this area over recent years. This has continued in this budget. We will rebuild Mickleham Primary School, a beloved local institution with a reputation of providing young people with a terrific education. In recent years Mickleham Primary has experienced a massive increase in enrolments, going from under 100 students a year to now over 400. This is due to the massive growth in the outer north. Expanding the existing school site and providing funding for a complete rebuild will ensure that Mickleham Primary can provide local children with a terrific education for decades to come, whether they are from rural communities or the new growing communities.

This growth in the outer north is also recognised in this budget, with funds to acquire land for the Merrifield West secondary school, the first secondary school in this rapidly growing community that saw its first primary school open this year, Gaayip-Yagila Primary, with over 600 students. Thanks to our record investment in education we will also open the nearby Kalkallo Common Primary School next year.

I am most proud of this government's investment to deliver the long-awaited secondary school for Greenvale residents, who were told for so long that this would just never happen. Indeed that is exactly what the Liberal Party told the local residents during the last election campaign. There have been countless dedicated community advocates who have fought so hard for this outcome, and petitions were tabled in this place as far back as May 1996 calling for this school to be delivered. As a long-term Greenvale resident I know firsthand the experience of many local residents who have been frustrated by the lack of access to a local secondary school and the huge difference that this will make

to local families, so I look forward to seeing Greenvale Secondary School take shape throughout this year and to its opening at the start of the 2022 school year.

Fixing our local roads has been and remains my top priority as the member for Yuroke. As a local resident who has driven on these key arterial connections every day, I have seen a huge increase in vehicle movements over recent years. Many of these roads remain inadequate, designed for the once-rural communities they served, and this budget makes important investments in their future use. At long last we will see initial progress on upgrading Mickleham Road, with new lights at Aitken College as well as critical planning work for future upgrades to this corridor. While this particular investment is a great step in the right direction, Mickleham Road does need a lot more work to bring the road up to an acceptable, modern standard, and I will certainly continue to advocate on behalf of local commuters. Work will also start soon on the long-awaited, massive Craigieburn Road upgrade, improving traffic movement from the Hume Highway right through to Mickleham Road, including additional lanes and upgraded intersections which will make this dangerous and congested road much safer.

I rise very proudly today to commend this budget which seeks to do much more than just get us back on track to where we were pre COVID. With people at its heart, this is a budget which will be felt by all Victorians for a long time to come. I congratulate the Treasurer on an absolutely terrific 2020–21 state budget, and I commend it.

Ms WARD (Eltham) (10:23): Like the member for Yuroke, I rise with great happiness for this budget. This is a terrific budget. It is a budget that again, as it has in every year of our government, talks to our values and talks about the things that we care most about, which is the people of Victoria and ensuring that they have the best quality, the best chance at life and the best opportunities available to them.

One of the most important ways to do this of course is to focus on education. Our budget has invested more than \$3 billion in school upgrades. \$1.9 billion of this funding will roll out the next phase of the school building boom. Acting Speaker Carbin, you also have firsthand experience of this. Our communities have benefited incredibly well from this government's generosity in investing in our schools. I have had a number of schools in my community either upgraded or rebuilt. In fact it was only recently at Research Primary School, my old primary school, where I saw the fantastic work that has gone into the nearly \$6 million upgrade to that school. New buildings—the old buildings have gone. The old library that looked almost exactly the same as it did when I was a kid there in the 1970s has gone. Now there is this amazing space, this integrated learning space, that embraces the outdoors and that really looks like the bush primary school that it has always been. It is just beautiful, and I commend the school community and the principal for their fantastic work. I also congratulate Fiona on the birth of her baby, Eddie, recently, who is nothing but a bundle of cuteness.

The extra \$1.9 billion investment will support more than 6400 construction and supply chain jobs, including more than 4830 jobs related to projects in metropolitan Melbourne and more than 1570 jobs related to projects in regional Victoria. It includes \$1.28 billion for 162 upgrades, targeted to those schools most in need, with the architects to be appointed from January 2021 and construction work on every project to start within 16 months, creating an ongoing pipeline of work. I know the member for Yuroke referred to this a bit in her speech around the importance of employment as we come out of last year's battle with COVID in this state, and having that pipeline of projects where we can guarantee ongoing employment for people is incredibly important.

Of course my community continues to benefit from the generosity and foresight of this government. We have got \$6.83 million for Greenhills Primary School to rebuild their gym, which is a fantastic opportunity for them but also for the Greenhills Basketball Club, and I thank the wonderful Sandra MacNeil for all of the work she has done for that community club over the years in advocating for them. She has been a strong supporter and pusher of trying to get an improved gym at the school, which we have now been able to achieve, and I wish her all the best in her ongoing battle to achieve

the same for Yarrambat. I also thank the principal and committee at Greenhills Primary School for their advocacy, as well as the previous principal, Rowan Kayll, for his advocacy.

We are also providing, importantly—and this will also benefit people in your community, Acting Speaker Carbines—the \$10 million that we have got for Diamond Valley Special Developmental School to upgrade and modernise their school. For the member for Yan Yean and me, because we both have a number of students who attend that school, it was a fantastic day when we turned up to that school and let them know that they were going to be the recipients of \$10 million to improve it. The joy on their faces was just fantastic. As an aunt of a child who also attends an SDS I know exactly how important those schools are but also how important it is to have modern facilities, to have purpose-built facilities, that are equipped to provide for the needs of students who have physical challenges, who have wheelchairs that are quite large, who have mobility issues, who have sight issues—who have so many challenges. To create a school that really addresses and is built for them and around them and is responding to their needs is something which I am incredibly excited about, and I am also really glad that this government recognises the value of investing in education across the whole spectrum of our schooling system and the importance of making sure that all students are given state-of-the-art good facilities—facilities that help them with their learning and that respond to their needs.

As a part of the Safer, Better Public Parks program, which is around 52 million bucks, visitor facilities within Birrarung and Westerfolds parks will be upgraded to ensure safe and equitable access and to facilitate community exercise and wellbeing. The visitor facilities at Plenty George will also improve, which is terrific because I know my community enjoys both of those facilities greatly.

One thing that I have been working on with the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change for some time, and I am so glad she has been able to continue to push for this and get this over the line, is an \$18 million fund for a deer control project. People in this house may recall that I have spoken about this before, but it also still may come as a surprise to some people to know that we have deer—rogue deer—roaming some of the streets of Eltham. I have got constituents up towards the Yarra who have had their roses eaten by deer. I also have a constituent who regularly likes to send me photos of deer and kangaroo faeces on his property, he objects to it so much.

It is terrific to see this strategy. It is terrific to see that we are doing something about this really serious problem. I think there are a lot of people who are not aware of how invasive deer are and the challenges that deer create to our environment: the erosion they create, the trees they destroy, the ring barking they do and the natural habitat that they really, really damage in such a way that it is so hard for our native animals to thrive and prosper. So I do look forward to the fact that we can get rid of some of these deer. Hopefully we will be able to purchase some of the meat from these deer and get them out of our parklands where they do not belong.

Important also is the funding to provide land for the Eltham community hospital and to continue the planning work for this. This is something that I know my community is looking forward to very excitedly and with a lot of anticipation. There was a lot of angst in my community many, many years ago when the Diamond Valley, which was a private hospital, was sold and we no longer had what we felt to be a community hospital local to us. And while we do really love the Austin Hospital and the fantastic services they provide—and I know you, Acting Speaker Carbines, are very proud of the work that the Austin Hospital does in your electorate—to have our own community hospital, local to us, where we can get a number of medical conditions, illnesses, concerns and treatments addressed will be terrific, and I look forward to the ongoing work here. I also thank my community reference group who have been plugging away at this with me as we look for the best site to put our community hospital, along with the best bespoke services we can provide.

There was also, I am happy to report, \$1.5 million in development funding for a walking and cycling path as part of the Hurstbridge line upgrade works, which will improve amenity and deliver safer journeys for my community. As a number of people know, while I have not been referred to as a hillbilly, my community is pretty hilly, and having a flat path along the train line will be of great

advantage to us, as there are so few flat places to cycle in my community. I look forward to the ongoing work that the Level Crossing Removal Project will be doing with this development funding. I know it is something my community is very keen to see, and I do hope to see this work ongoing.

One of the fantastic things that has come out of this government, of the many, many fantastic things to come out of this government, has been the Growing Suburbs Fund. It has been a game changer for a shire like Nillumbik, which only has about 60 000 people and where 90 per cent of the population is rural. It means that we have a very low rate base and we have a lot of agricultural and natural land to care for, as well as facilities to provide for local communities. To have this Growing Suburbs Fund funded again by this government is terrific. There was a \$25 million boost last year, and it has been increased to \$50 million. It will boost the number of community facility projects across our periurban and growth areas.

Nillumbik so far has benefited from about \$35 million from the Growing Suburbs Fund into our community. This includes terrific things like the upgrade to the Eltham Football Club clubrooms, the cricket club clubrooms, the Eltham North Reserve with the soccer pavilion as well as the cricket club pavilion. It includes the cafe built at Edendale farm. It includes money put into the extension of the Diamond Creek Trail and the redevelopment of the Eltham Leisure Centre. There are so many things that this money has allowed my community to have—really much-wanted projects that Nillumbik has been looking forward to seeing realised but has never had the full funding to do. It has been for us an absolute game changer, and I do hope that this fund will continue into the future.

I also look forward to Nillumbik, I hope, having a successful application with what they want to do with a new synthetic pitch for Diamond Valley Secondary College, which would be used by the whole community and linked to the Diamond Creek Trail, as well as the netball courts and toilet facilities that they would like to see installed at Hurstbridge.

All of these things and all of the investments that we are putting money into speak to jobs. Jobs are at the heart of this budget, as they are with every Labor budget. We want to have people in gainful employment. We want to have people in safe and good employment. We want to have people with the pride of having good jobs. We have set ourselves a target of creating 400 000 jobs by 2025, half of them this year. With Jobs Victoria there is a \$619 million investment that will help those most affected by the pandemic.

We know—this has been spoken about a number of times—that one of the biggest cohorts affected by the pandemic economically is women: women who have had reduced hours at work; women who have lost their jobs because of the manner of work which they are in, such as the service industry; women who have got insecure work; but also women who have had to shoulder the majority of the work at home, whether it was caring for children or whether it was assisting with their online learning at home, many things.

I am sure, Deputy Speaker, you also probably heard the stories of women at home who had husbands who very kindly just shut themselves away in rooms at 8.00 am and came out again at 6.00 pm, leaving them to carry the burden of everything going on in their households as well as juggling their jobs. I had phone calls from a number of husbands, including one who was complaining that his wife was missing out on opportunities in order to help their son with his online learning. He wanted schools to go back because she needed to also work for him in the business that he ran. How he was not able to find the time to support her in this and share the load I do not know. Women have been unfairly affected by the pandemic, as have young people and Victorians without formal qualifications but who may have a lot of experience.

We have got \$250 million to partner with employers to subsidise the wages of at least 10 000 new workers. That is an opportunity for 10 000 people to find new experiences, to find new employment opportunities and to increase the amount of money they earn along with their work satisfaction. At least \$150 million of that wage subsidy support will go towards employing women, and \$50 million

of that is for women over the age of 45, recognising the additional barriers they face from both before and after the pandemic. This is especially important, as we know that it is women in this age group who are most at risk of being homeless. We know that single women in this age group are most at risk of living in poverty, so everything that we can do as a government to help lift these women up and provide them with opportunities is absolutely important.

I have to say I am very glad to hear this morning that the federal government is now taking another look at their proposal for women fleeing family violence—those women who are often at risk of homelessness, of living in poverty and of struggling. They were expecting them to dip into their superannuation to help them survive as they left violent relationships. I am glad to see that the federal government is thinking twice about that, because the penny has finally dropped on them that financial violence is an issue and that women could be coerced through financial violence to draw down on their super and give it to the perpetrator of family violence, notwithstanding the fact that they should not have to do withdraw their super because they are leaving a violent relationship. But I digress. This is a fantastic budget. This is a great budget for my community, and I fully support it.

Ms HALL (Footscray) (10:39): I am absolutely thrilled to make a contribution to this debate and to talk about the terrific investment that is coming as a result of the budget in Footscray. It is going to be transformational for education in particular in Footscray, with more than \$75 million going into local schools, so I am absolutely thrilled to be speaking to this motion. This investment for Footscray schools is just a game changer. To make some of those phone calls last year to principals who had had such a tough year—those schools had such a difficult year—and to let them know that such a huge investment was coming to their school community was an absolute delight.

So from that \$75 million I will just run through some of the different school communities that are going to be benefiting from this investment. There is \$25.29 million for the Kinnear Street campus of Footscray High School to modernise the main block of the school. Footscray High is part of the Footscray Learning Precinct, which in itself is an Australian first and a really innovative education project. I would like to put on record my gratitude to the Minister for Education for his ongoing support and interest in the Footscray Learning Precinct. Frank Vetere, the principal at Footscray High, was absolutely thrilled to hear that he would be receiving that upgrade to Kinnear Street, because for Footscray High the investments just keep coming.

We have of course recently opened the brand new vertical school at Pilgrim Street in my colleague the Minister for Ports and Freight's electorate of Williamstown. That campus for the community of Seddon and Footscray and Footscray City Primary School is so exciting.

We have redeveloped the Barkly Street campus of Footscray High School, which has a long, proud history in Footscray. For more than a century it was a girls school. It was a school that my grandmother went to. Many of my relatives went to that school, and I do not think they would recognise it now. It is a beautiful mix of heritage and new buildings, and that was part of a previous budget investment of around \$60 million. So for Kinnear Street, \$25.29 million, and that will I suppose be the final piece of the puzzle for Footscray High, which has been a project so many people in our community have been fighting for. Ever since Jeff Kennett closed Footscray Yarraville Secondary College we have been fighting to reopen it, and now we have a beautiful three-campus school across Footscray and Seddon.

There was also a very exciting announcement for another school in the Footscray Learning Precinct, and that is Footscray Primary School, a beautiful school community. It was an absolute pleasure to ring the principal there, Jen, and ask if I could come down and visit and meet with some of the students to let them know the good news that they would be receiving \$18.22 million to upgrade that facility to accommodate a further 200 students for the 2023 school year. That is in addition to the \$2.25 million that the Minister for Education announced earlier in the year to plan for that major upgrade. I know that the Footscray Primary School community is such a tight-knit community. They are really excited about this important upgrade.

Another very special school in my community is Sunshine Primary School, a beautiful heritage school in Sunshine. It was wonderful to call the principal and let her know that the school would be benefiting from an \$11.16 million upgrade to modernise the main block of that school. Of course the students at Sunshine Primary School will now be able to go to a beautifully modern school and then they will be able to go to the new Sunshine College campus. I think over several budgets there has been about \$40 million in investment in Sunshine College, and that is just huge for that community. The campus at Lachlan Road is just absolutely spectacular. It has been great to see the students start there, even though they had I suppose a difficult start to the year. They started at that campus in mid-2020, during the pandemic. But it is wonderful to see Sunshine Primary being upgraded and the students then being able to go on to their beautiful new campus at Sunshine College.

One of the things we are really passionate about locally is the high-quality education and support that is provided in special education in the Footscray electorate, and I have two wonderful special schools. I have Sunshine and Rosamond, and the Rosamond Special School and the Sunshine Special Developmental School both received \$10 million in last year's budget. I recall calling both principals there—Louise and Nicole—and letting them know that the upgrades were coming, and they were so overwhelmed. I think they thought I was calling about a shade-cloth grant or a smaller upgrade, and they were both lost for words. I had the great pleasure of visiting Sunshine developmental school last week and walking around with Nicole, seeing their beautiful new sensory garden and memorial garden and also checking out the new kitchen garden that they are building at the school. Sunshine developmental school is just a wonderful place in our community, and it was so exciting to give them that news.

This is an incredible investment in education and commitment to the Footscray community by this Andrews Labor government. When I was first told about the budget I was lost for words, because this investment will provide such a huge change to those school communities, those very deserving school communities. I would like to extend my congratulations to the students and the parents and the teachers who have all advocated for these upgrades. I have been very pleased to be able to deliver them with the Andrews Labor government and the education minister.

There is huge change coming to Barkly Street with the \$36.6 million upgrade to Whitten Oval. The Whitten Oval, as many of you would be familiar with, is in many ways the heart of the Footscray community. Many people who grew up in Footscray or who support the Bulldogs would know what it is like to stand in the cold at the Whitten Oval, at the Barkly Street or the Geelong Street ends. This upgrade will deliver first-class facilities for the Western Bulldogs, who are much more than a football team in our community. They do incredible work through their community foundation—preventative health initiatives, work with migrant and emerging communities, and lots of work with young people. The Western Bulldogs are very much the beating heart of our community in Footscray, and I am so pleased that they will be receiving this major upgrade. I am very hopeful that we will be able to see a men's AFL game at the oval. The highlight of the year at the oval is when the women's games are on, and it has been great to go down there and see the stands full of people from our community watching our fantastic AFLW team play. It is going to include vital upgrades to the oval facilities, including lighting and seating, so we will have TV-broadcast-quality lighting for the Whitten Oval.

The new Footscray Hospital is a huge project for Melbourne's inner west and for the western suburbs. The people's hospital, arguably the biggest winner of last year's budget, will be home to a brand new skills and jobs centre. That was announced in this budget. I am absolutely thrilled with the progress. We are not wasting a day to deliver the new Footscray Hospital to my community. It is a \$1.5 billion investment, and I would like to acknowledge the hard work of the former Minister for Health, the member for Altona, who put a huge amount of work into the new Footscray Hospital project. Having a skills and jobs centre located at the site will mean that TAFEs will have the ability to train their students alongside industry professionals, providing the next generation of skilled workers with hands-on experience.

Because this is a government that cares about justice, we are investing \$26.8 million to redevelop the Sunshine law courts. That will provide two additional courtrooms that will be safer, more secure and

technology enabled. We know from the pandemic and our experiences through that about the efficiencies and the importance of having the best technology in our court system, so I am very pleased that that upgrade is coming to the Sunshine law courts.

Early Start Kindergarten is being extended in Footscray to three- and four-year-old refugee and asylum seeker children regardless of whether they have accessed it in the past. At all stages and ages of life we are delivering in education in Footscray, from early childhood through to TAFE. The Le Mana Pasifika youth project will receive \$600 000 to support over 2800 Pasifika young people to strengthen educational engagement and mental health support. Following the release of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health's System report in recent weeks, we know that this sort of work among peer groups is so incredibly important.

In this budget the Andrews Labor government has invested an unprecedented amount in Footscray. I am a very proud member for Footscray. The works will continue to come and the investment will continue to flow over the years to come, with major projects like the new Footscray Hospital getting underway shortly, with the contracts recently signed for that project to commence. It has been exciting to see the hoarding going up on the corner of Geelong Road and Ballarat Road.

I would just like to conclude in the time I have left by talking a bit about the values of this budget and how proud I am to see our Labor values reflected in the budget papers. Public housing is a passion of mine. One of the reasons I wanted to be in this place is so I could fight for more public and social housing, and I will always fight for more public and social housing in my community of Footscray. It changes lives, and we know how beneficial, how essential it is to everything in someone's life to have a roof over their head. Again that was affirmed by the mental health royal commission report last sitting week. The \$5 billion investment into public housing is something that I am enormously proud of, and I cannot wait to work with the minister to see upgrades to public housing across the Footscray electorate—in Braybrook, Footscray and Sunshine. It has been a very proud time to be a member of the Andrews Labor government.

Ms KAIROUZ (Kororoit) (10:53): It is a pleasure to rise to speak on the take-note motion for the 2020–21 budget papers, and I congratulate the Treasurer on the budget that has been handed down in the tradition of strong Labor values of equality, fairness and opportunity. This budget, like other Labor budgets, continues to put people first. It delivers jobs that create opportunities for Victorians, but particularly for people that live in my electorate of Kororoit.

Standing here in this place 12 months ago I never would have imagined the world as it is today. We are in a very different place to where we were at the beginning of 2020, and we are in an optimal place compared to where we were just a few months ago. Globally there have been over 68.6 million confirmed cases of COVID and, sadly, over 2.68 million deaths. In contrast, here in Victoria we have had 20 483 confirmed cases and, regrettably, 820 deaths. Representing an electorate in the top 10 of COVID-19 cases, I want to put my thanks on record to every person in my electorate and to every Victorian for heeding the advice of the health professionals and following the rules. I know that what was asked of Victorians was difficult. I also found it difficult. But I am grateful to every single member of my community who endured the challenging times, and I thank small businesses for their patience and their perseverance.

I know many people whose livelihoods have been impacted as a result of this one-in-100-year pandemic. I think about the many conversations that I have had, particularly with those people, and about how far we have come in the last few months. Thanks to the hard work and to the determination of Victorians, we are now able to move more freely, spend time with the people that we love, particularly at the places that we love most.

This is a budget of our time. This is a budget that significantly increases expenditure to stimulate the economy, and this is a budget that changes lives. The Governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia, Dr Philip Lowe, urged states to capitalise on low interest rates by borrowing money and spending that

money on infrastructure in order to stimulate the economy, create thousands of jobs and provide confidence in the community. The Andrews Labor government has always been astutely and acutely aware of the need for government to invest and to provide Victorians and the business community with certainty and confidence. The 2020–21 budget delivers on investments that will see our economy recover and, more importantly, our community recover and come back even stronger than before.

Now that the health crisis is over, the Andrews Labor government has delivered a budget like no other. No-one is left behind and no community is left behind. The Victorian budget invests more than \$3 billion in school upgrades and an extra \$1.9 billion to support more than 6400 construction and supply chain jobs. This includes \$1.28 billion for 162 school upgrades for targeted schools and \$388.8 million towards improving facilities at 39 specialist schools. Six of those specialist schools, I am proudly able to mention, are in the western suburbs, and children with special needs from my electorate can now learn, explore and flourish. The six schools are Furlong Park School for Deaf Children, which received \$9.429 million; Jackson School received \$10 million; Melton Specialist School received \$9.56 million; Rosamond Special School and Sunshine Special Development School, which the member for Footscray just so proudly mentioned, received \$10 million each; and Yarraville Special Development School received \$5.472 million. These schools will receive funding for upgrades to create modern safe places for students with disability to learn and explore and also to provide comfort and confidence to their parents, knowing that their children will have access to improved and inclusive learning spaces.

Closer to home in my electorate of Kororoit, land will be acquired for two new schools that have been provisionally named Aintree Secondary School and Rockbank (Murray Road) Primary School as part of the \$147 million to acquire land for 11 new schools. I am extremely proud to be part of a government that is investing in growth areas and in our children's future.

I am also pleased to see that the Andrews Labor government is delivering on its election commitment for a new Melton hospital, and thanks to the advocacy and hard work of the member for Melton \$75 million has been put aside for land acquisition, planning and early works. We are all looking forward to settlement on the location of the land as soon as possible. This is something that the community is eagerly waiting for. The Melton local government area is one of the fastest growing regions in Australia—Acting Speaker, you are nodding your head; is it time to stop? As I said, it is one of the fastest growing regions in Australia— (*Time expired*)

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

MINISTERIAL CONDUCT

Mr M O'BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (11:01): My question is to the Acting Premier. Yesterday in—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition has the call.

Mr M O'BRIEN: My question is to the Acting Premier. Yesterday in Parliament the minister for veterans affairs said, quote:

... you will get a chance to get your selfie, looking all sad, when you are putting a wreath in front of there, when you push the war widows ... the veterans out of your way ...

Will the Acting Premier direct the minister for veterans affairs to make a formal apology to veterans today in this Parliament for his deeply offensive comments?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! All members are warned about shouting across the chamber from the start of this session. I particularly notice the member for Kew and the Minister for Regional Development shouting across the chamber, but all members are warned.

Mr MERLINO (Monbulk—Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health) (11:02): It has taken the Leader of the Opposition all week to ask me a question. He squibbed it for two days, and what have we got? We have got a question for me on leadership from a bloke who has not shown any.

Mr M O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, I passed my leadership test. This one is for the Acting Premier.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask the Acting Premier to come back to answering the question rather than attacking the opposition, and I again remind members that points of order should be points of order, not points of argument or repeating the question.

Mr MERLINO: Passed the test? A third of his party room preferred an empty seat. A third of his party room preferred an empty seat than the empty suit in front of—

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Speaker, under sessional order 11, I would ask you on a matter of relevance to bring the Acting Premier back to answering the question and stop defying your ruling which you handed down just a few seconds ago.

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

Mr MERLINO: The point the minister for veterans affairs was making yesterday and every day that he has been the minister for veterans affairs is that our focus should be on the veterans and their families every single day—every single day—not just on Anzac Day, which is a special day where all of us commemorate and give thanks to our service men and women for their past sacrifice and their current-day sacrifice on behalf of our nation. But the point that he was making yesterday and every day that he has been a minister is that our support should be with them not just on Anzac Day but on the other 364 days in that year. No-one—no-one—is more passionate about that issue—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members have been warned.

Mr T Smith: On a point of order, Speaker, let the record reflect that the Acting Premier is defending the comments, he is defending the disgraceful—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Kew should resume his seat.

Mr T Smith interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Kew can leave the chamber for the period of 1 hour.

Member for Kew withdrew from chamber.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Acting Premier has the call. I ask the Acting Premier to come back to the question.

Mr MERLINO: The minister for veterans affairs cares deeply about this issue. He cares deeply about veterans and their families. The minister's father was a World War II vet, was a person—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the House!

Mr T Bull: On a point of order, Speaker, also on relevance, the question that was asked by the Leader of the Opposition was whether the Acting Premier will ask the minister to issue a formal

apology. We all have family members that were veterans and our veteran community has clearly taken offence, and I urge you to encourage the Acting Premier to answer the question that was asked.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Acting Premier is answering the question, is being relevant to the question.

Mr MERLINO: The minister cares deeply about veterans' issues. His father was a World War II vet. He spends every day supporting veterans and their families. He was asked yesterday to withdraw in the chamber and he withdrew. But I will tell you what else I heard yesterday—I will tell you what else I heard. There was an event in the Parliament gardens that I attended, and the minister was out there with colleagues and with veterans and with veterans' families. And we heard from Connie. Connie's partner died from suicide, a veteran who died from suicide three years ago. We heard from Annabel, whose partner died from cancer a few years ago, just before she gave birth to her little baby.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I know that emotions are running high on this particular issue, but I just counsel the chamber. The subject matters that are being discussed on both sides of the house are ones that I think we need to reflect on how we are discussing. So please, I ask members to stop shouting across the chamber.

Mr M O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the Acting Premier is debating the question. He is not answering the question, which was: would he force the minister for veterans affairs to apologise for his offensive comments yesterday? In the 17 seconds remaining, the Acting Premier has the opportunity to say yes or no.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Acting Premier is being relevant to the question that has been asked.

Mr MERLINO: The minister yesterday spoke passionately to Connie, to Annabel, to every veteran, to every veteran's family that deserve better from the commonwealth, from the Department of Veterans Affairs. The high number of deaths by suicide, the lack of support—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Bulleen and the member for South Barwon can leave the chamber for the period of 1 hour.

Members for Bulleen and South Barwon withdrew from chamber.

The SPEAKER: There will be more members to follow if that continues.

Mr M O'BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (11:09): Honouring our veterans and their service should unite the Victorian community and this Parliament. Given the deeply offensive and divisive slurs made by the minister for veterans affairs yesterday, why won't the Acting Premier force this minister to apologise or resign?

Mr MERLINO (Monbulk—Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health) (11:09): The minister for veterans affairs is both a passionate and a strong advocate for the rights of veterans and their families—the lack of support, the tragic number of deaths by suicide of our veterans, the need for a royal commission. There is no better supporter for our veterans and their families than the minister for veterans affairs, my friend and colleague Minister Leane in the other place. The only test of leadership this week has been on that man opposite, and he failed. We all know how this movie ends. We all know how this movie ends—you are done.

Mr Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, on the issue of debating the question again, I ask you to bring the Acting Premier back to actually answering the question.

Members interjecting.

Mr Walsh: ‘Sorry’ is the hardest word to say. Why is it so hard for him to actually say—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals!

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Acting Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked. He did veer away from answering the question, and I ask the Acting Premier to come back to answering the question.

Mr MERLINO: Thanks, Speaker. Veterans around Victoria know that the minister in this government, Minister Leane in the other place, has their back and is advocating for real change at a national level. We have too many deaths by suicide. We have too many families who are denied the support they need from the Department of Veterans Affairs—denied. The minister is fighting for them, and on Anzac Day, the point he was making is that the focus on that day—

Ms Britnell interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for South-West Coast can leave the chamber for the period of 1 hour.

Member for South-West Coast withdrew from chamber.

Mr MERLINO: The focus on that day should be veterans and their families.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: LEVEL CROSSING REMOVALS

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (11:12): On coming to government in 2014 we immediately set to work on the commitment the Andrews Labor government made, which was to then remove 50 dangerous and congested level crossings by the end of 2022.

Now, there were a few non-believers out there; a few people who said that this just could not be done. I know my colleagues want to know who said this—it was the former and future Leader of the Opposition, the member for Bulleen, who said this, and he made these comments in Frankston, of all places. As communities right along the Frankston line know very well, they have seen the removal of 11 level crossings already along the Frankston line, and work is underway right now on another seven dangerous and congested level crossings. Indeed 46 level crossings have been removed in total, and Victorians overwhelmingly supported our agenda, which was to increase the number of level crossings we are removing to 75 by 2025.

There were also some non-believers who tried to seize on the popularity of our level crossing removal program but added their own little twist—their own little flourish—to this transport policy. An alternative policy was to wind back the removal of level crossings and instead replace it with a 50 road intersection removals policy. We had a look at this policy. We assessed this policy, which would have put freeway-style interchanges in the suburbs, trenches and flyovers at the front doors of homes and businesses. We had a look at this alternative policy, and I can tell you, Speaker, that it was a complete stinker. It was so bad that it was a policy that the member for Bulleen as Leader of the Opposition never spoke about again. But we will keep speaking about it because it is such poor policy to stop our program of removing dangerous and congested level crossings, and we will continue with that agenda.

RICHMOND MEDICALLY SUPERVISED INJECTING FACILITY

Ms KEALY (Lowan) (11:14): My question is to the Minister for Health. On Friday Richmond West Primary School was sent into lockdown because of a person experiencing a dangerous and

violent drug-induced psychosis outside the school. Yesterday the school was again sent into lockdown when a man armed with a knife breached security and entered the school grounds. This morning families were told that students must enter via the rear gate because there was a dead body in front of the school. Does the minister stand by the decision that an injecting room next to a primary school is both safe and appropriate?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (11:14): I thank the honourable member for her question. I have received reports on the matters that the honourable member raises, and I will await the verification from the appropriate authorities—the details. But the initial reports suggest that the honourable member might well be misinformed in some details that she refers to here. Can I start perhaps with the first item, regarding how there was a death in North Richmond this morning—or overnight would appear to be the case. Those matters are currently before the relevant authorities, who are putting together the appropriate reports. I can say that any death, whether it be from alcohol or drugs or addiction, is a tragedy. I will await the appropriate report from those authorities, and those appropriate authorities will be making a statement in the very near future.

In regard to the issues surrounding the school, the school rightly continues to be a strong supporter of a harm minimisation approach to an issue in its community that has been at the core of the heroin market in this state and in this town for some 30 years. As Professor Hamilton—

Ms Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, we are almost halfway through the minister's time to respond. On the matter of relevance, my question was directly to the point of whether the minister stands by his decision that an injecting room is safe and appropriate. I ask him to answer that question, which is a simple yes or no.

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister is being relevant to the question that has been asked.

Mr FOLEY: As I was indicating in direct relevance to the question the honourable member asked, the issue in regard to where rehabilitation and support and a medically supervised injecting facility and all the wraparound services that go with it should be, report after report, including the most recent report from Professor Margaret Hamilton, say it has to be where the harm is. It has to be in the services where the drug market operates. Where the drug market operates, sadly, is in the North Richmond community, and that is where this centre is and that is where it will continue to operate for the rest of this operation of the five-year trial that is underway. That is why the Yarra council supports this process. That is why the school community supports this process. That is why every independent review that has looked at this process supports it being where the harm is, and that is why this government will continue to support it.

Ms Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, again on relevance, the question is directly—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister has concluded his answer in any case.

Ms KEALY (Lowan) (11:17): What harm is being done to young children at the Richmond West Primary School who are being repeatedly forced to witness drug-induced psychotic events and dead bodies and being forced into repeated lockdowns?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (11:18): Once again, as I indicated in my substantive answer, the honourable member's assertions as to the facts of the matter as to where very tragic incidents happen are currently the subject of review by the relevant authorities. But what I can say is that discussions that I have had with the school community and discussions, more importantly, that the school community has had with its honourable local member, the North Richmond Community Health centre, Victoria Police, the education department—

Ms Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, again on relevance, there are students that are being exposed to dead bodies, people overdosing, an armed man. What harm is being done—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member will resume her seat. I ask the member to raise a point of order in the appropriate fashion.

Ms Kealy: On relevance, Speaker, my question was specifically around the harm to children that have now experienced two lockdowns in three days and a dead body this morning. I want the minister to answer: what harm is being done to these kids?

Ms Allan: On the point of order, Speaker, you have ruled repeatedly on the member for Lowan's previous points of order on how the Minister for Health could not have been more relevant to the question that she has asked and her supplementary question. Rather than preparing for her next point of order, the member for Lowan would do well to listen to the Minister for Health's answer to understand how he is being relevant rather than trying to simply grandstand over what is a serious issue for the local community.

Mr M O'Brien: Further to the point of order, Speaker, asking about the harm to kids is not grandstanding. It just shows that the Leader of the House has got no idea of the damage that is being done to primary school kids.

The SPEAKER: Order! I do not uphold the point of order. The minister is being relevant to the question.

Mr FOLEY: What I do know is that during the course of this five-year trial a 16-year-old boy who had no connection to North Richmond died of a drug overdose in a nearby North Richmond squat. I know that a 16-year-old boy is a child, a 16-year-old boy is a member of a family and a 16-year-old boy addicted to heroin is a tragedy. Every death is a tragedy. That is why this school community supports this, as it is a pathway out of that tragic circumstance.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: EMPLOYMENT

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (11:21): After a very challenging 2020 the Victorian economy is roaring back. Business confidence is back, economic growth is back and there are new jobs being created in every corner of the state, in no small part due to this government's ambitious Big Build and jobs plan. While the economic news is positive, there was some sad news yesterday when we heard that the member for Bulleen has ruled out contesting the Liberal leadership. We know that he is a man of his word, with the possible exception of parliamentary pairing agreements.

Members interjecting.

Ms Staley: On a point of order, Speaker, I seek your clarification. As you have ruled many times, question time is not an opportunity to attack the opposition. That is certainly for answers to questions. Is it also the case that ministers statements are not an opportunity for ministers to attack the opposition?

Mr Pakula: On the point of order, Speaker, I was listening intently to the Treasurer. I did not think he was attacking anyone. I thought he was praising the member for Bulleen.

The SPEAKER: Order! I warn the Treasurer against attacking the opposition as part of a ministers statement.

Mr PALLAS: While those opposite play counting games, we remain focused on delivering our jobs plan. Of course the numbers are quite inspiring. We set an ambitious jobs target. We said 400 000 new jobs by 2025, and we are already on our way, with over 210 000 jobs created to date. Our plan is to get Victorians back to work, to deliver more apprentices, more teachers and more nurses. This stands in sharp contrast to those opposite and the actions of the previous government that was all about cuts, closures and crustaceans.

We are delivering the things that matter: jobs for Victorians, support for Victorian businesses and an unprecedented infrastructure pipeline. As we deliver that infrastructure, we will ensure that taxpayers get value for money every step of the way. Of course there are alternative approaches—you could rezone Fishermans Bend or do a dodgy deal around Ventnor. Thanks to our approach, business confidence is up—it is up plus 12. That is higher than at any time when the member for Bulleen was in government. While those opposite might be lining up for round 2, those on this side of the house are intent on the interests and the welfare of the Victorian people.

EVENTS INDUSTRY

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (11:24): My question is to the Minister for Industry Support and Recovery. Today Victorian event operators have been circling Parliament House in a desperate bid to draw your attention to their plight. Will the minister today meet with these businesses, which have lost millions of dollars as a result of the government's failures to manage contact tracing and hotel quarantine?

Mr PAKULA (Keysborough—Minister for Industry Support and Recovery, Minister for Trade, Minister for Business Precincts, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Racing) (11:24): I thank the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party for her question, and I could well hear the events sector circling the Parliament. I think one of the things that they were demonstrating about was the impending end of JobKeeper, and the fact that at the time—

Members interjecting.

Mr M O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, under standing orders answers to questions must be factual. If the minister had actually gone out and met with them like I had, he would have known that he was wrong. He is wrong!

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition knows that is not a point of order.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members on both sides!

Mr PAKULA: I am not the one you are angry at. At the time that the commonwealth decided that JobKeeper was going to end on 31 March—

Members interjecting.

Mr PAKULA: I am coming to it—they believed that there would be—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members on my right!

Mr Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, I know a number of government members might think this is funny, but these are mum and dad operators that are on their knees at the moment. The question was very clear: would the minister meet with these mum and dad operators and find out their request and actually help them?

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Caulfield to resume his seat. The member for Caulfield has been here long enough to know that is not a point of order.

Mr PAKULA: The point I was making was that at the time the commonwealth decided that JobKeeper would end on 31 March they believed that 4 million people would have been vaccinated, and there may well be a very good case for some continuation in some sectors, like this one. The fact is in regard to the events sector it has been badly affected by the absence of international visitors and not helped by the fact that they are now trying to send tourists to other parts of the country.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask the Manager of Opposition Business and the Leader of the House to assist with the smooth running of the house.

Ms McLeish: On a point of order, Speaker, this is about the Victorian government's lack of assistance for the event operators. The question was: will you meet with them today so that you hear that they are not roaring back, that they are struggling and that they are on their knees?

The SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party knows that is not a point of order.

Mr PAKULA: It is a bit difficult to get to the answer if the opposition takes points of order every 4 seconds. The events sector has been terribly affected by the lack of international visitors. They have also been affected by the fact that business events that normally take place in person have been taking place online, and that is not something that is going to change in the near future. Having said that, the government has been providing an enormous amount of support to the business event sector. We have paid more than 6300 coronavirus support payments to businesses in the events sector, totalling \$57 million across—

Ms McLeish: On a further point of order, Speaker, on relevance, these event operators operate carnivals and sideshows. They are not getting a zack from this government.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party!

Mr PAKULA: Quite clearly those opposite do not want to hear the answer. The fact is that the recipients have included catering businesses. They have included food businesses. They have included equipment hiring operators. They have included event organisers, managers and performing arts operators. Most recently in the circuit-breaker support package there was support there as well. In regard to engagement with—

Mr Southwick: On a further point of order, Speaker, the question was very, very, very simple: would the minister meet with these operators? These operators do not receive international visitors. They are carnival operators. They are—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Caulfield can resume his seat. It is not a point of order.

Mr PAKULA: The most recent meeting between my department and the events sector was on 3 March—only a few days ago, two weeks ago—to discuss opportunities for how they could be supported under the public events framework. There have been more than 10 creative and cultural forums hosted by my department with peak organisations and 20 forums with the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions. We will continue to support the sector, and we do not need the advice of the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister's answer has concluded. Father of the house!

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (11:29): Jason Humphris from Event Management International lost \$425 000 in bookings on a single event within 48 hours after the Premier announced the last snap lockdown, forcing him to postpone the event to 2022 and refund all tickets. Will the government refund Jason for his losses, which can be directly attributed to this government's incompetent management?

Mr PAKULA (Keysborough—Minister for Industry Support and Recovery, Minister for Trade, Minister for Business Precincts, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Racing) (11:30): What the deputy leader of the Liberals describes as incompetent management we would describe as following health advice and ensuring that that circuit-breaker lockdown went for five days and no longer. We were also the only government to deal with a circuit-breaker lockdown by supporting industry with \$143 million worth of payments. We are also putting public events through the public event framework—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Gippsland East!

Mr PAKULA: You are like a sack full of cats. We are also putting event after event through the public event framework. We are reducing restrictions and increasing capacity. And each and every one of those changes means that more and more events are able to proceed closer and closer to normal than they have for the last 12 months. So we will continue to follow the health advice and continue to open the economy.

Mr Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, can I ask you to bring the minister back to answering the question. Jason wants a refund. Are you going to look after Jason, Minister?

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Caulfield! The minister's answer is concluded.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: MELBOURNE FOOD AND WINE FESTIVAL

Mr PAKULA (Keysborough—Minister for Industry Support and Recovery, Minister for Trade, Minister for Business Precincts, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Racing) (11:31): Speaking of events, it was wonderful to see the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival back and thriving last week. I want to give special credit to Radek Sali, Anthea Loucas Bosha and all the team at Melbourne Food and Wine and special thanks to our guest chefs Philippe Mouchel, Stephanie Alexander and Jacques Reymond.

There were two amazing events last week: firstly, the world's longest lunch on Friday, with some incredible food, not lobster but kingfish, and some incredible wine, not Grange but Victorian Chateau Tahbilk—and the member for Bulleen is not even here to hear the gag. Then on Saturday the world's longest brunch, held hostage by the threat of rain—and it is never nice to be hostage—so we moved that to the exhibition buildings. That event had a menu from Nathan Toleman of the Mulberry Group and Kate Reid of Lune. So all up there were 3000 guests at a great event eating, drinking, enjoying what Melbourne does best and then coming into the CBD and going into Carlton to spend more of their money and to ensure the benefits of that event have been spread out.

Over the balance of the year Melbourne Food and Wine will move to the suburbs, not to Beaumaris but to Melbourne's west, including Altona, Melton and Caroline Springs, from 17 to 31 March, and then out into the regions right through the winter and the spring. The produce we have in Victoria, whether it is fished, farmed, grown or hunted, is some of the best produce in the world, and the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival is a wonderful opportunity to show all the best that we have to offer.

YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM

Dr READ (Brunswick) (11:33): My question is to the Acting Premier. In Australia children as young as 10 can be charged and sent to court, and around Australia hundreds of children are jailed and two-thirds of them are Aboriginal. The Australian Medical Association, Amnesty and Aboriginal legal services have at various times called on governments to raise the age because imprisonment is so harmful to such young children who are still developing, and the long-term mental health consequences are so severe. Criminalising children under 14 sets them up for future reoffending and imprisonment when what they need is treatment and support. Will this government commit to raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14 without further delay?

Mr MERLINO (Monbulk—Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health) (11:34): I thank the member for Brunswick for his question on what is a very, very serious issue in regard to our young people. The best outcome for our young people in Victoria is for them to avoid contact with the justice system in the first place, and that means tackling the root causes of crime and of youth offending, and that will be and is our first priority. To that end last year we launched our youth justice strategic plan, which sets out a 10-year strategy to focus on early intervention to prevent crime, reduce reoffending and provide genuine opportunities for young people to turn their lives around. We committed \$11.8 million in the Victorian budget to implement an Aboriginal youth justice strategy to address the issues that the honourable member quite rightly raises—overrepresentation of young Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander kids in custody. Together with the Aboriginal community we established the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement, which is now in its fourth phase, and the longest running agreement of its kind in our country, and it has self-determination at its core.

In my portfolio responsibilities in education, again another focus has been on early intervention, grabbing those kids who are at risk of leaving school and leaving the education system, whether it is through our Navigator program or whether it is through Lookout, which supports children in out-of-home care, and most recently with the release of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System report and the powerful findings and recommendations in regard to engaging young people and preventing kids from coming off the rails as early as possible. So that is our focus.

The member would understand that we have got a longstanding practice in this place not to support private members bills, but I want to say that in terms of this issue, in terms of whether it is the Attorney-General, the Minister for Crime Prevention, the Minister for Health or the Minister for Housing, a number of us have responsibilities in this place to support young people and ensure they do not get into the criminal justice system. I do not have any further announcements to make, other than to say that prevention, early intervention and tackling the roots of crime are the most important things we can do.

Dr READ (Brunswick) (11:37): The Acting Premier seems to be saying that this government will not be raising the age of criminal responsibility in not so many words. Could the Acting Premier actually confirm that? The ACT has decided to lead the way by undertaking to raise the age of criminal responsibility. Other states have more punitive policies than Victoria, and therefore have higher numbers of children, particularly Aboriginal children in detention. By joining the ACT, Victoria could lead other states away from their harsher policies and protect some of our most vulnerable and disadvantaged children from further harm. Will Victoria join the ACT and raise the age of criminal responsibility?

Mr MERLINO (Monbulk—Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health) (11:38): I thank the honourable member for his supplementary question. What I indicated to the member is that I have got no announcements to make today, and we have got a longstanding practice of not supporting private members bills. But this issue is a very, very serious one, and subject to deep discussion and engagement around the cabinet table and within other forums in government. The focus of the Andrews government from the day we came into office was to support young people and ensure that we tackle the roots of crime. That is the most important thing we can do, and whether it is with crime prevention, whether it is with engaging with our Indigenous communities, whether it is supporting Victoria Police and their youth support services and again engaging with kids who are at risk of offending or whether it is in the education system, that is our focus, and we have got a proud record in this space.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: MULTICULTURALISM

Ms SPENCE (Yuroke—Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Youth) (11:39): I rise today to acknowledge the extraordinary value of multiculturalism in our state. We are a community that embraces people from all backgrounds, and Victoria has proudly cemented itself as one of the most successful multicultural societies in the world. At this time of the year, during Harmony Week, celebrating multiculturalism takes on a whole new meaning. This occasion emphasises the need for each of us to proactively foster inclusiveness, respect and belonging for all Victorians, not just this week but every day. Our differences in cultural backgrounds and beliefs strengthen and enrich us, and we have a collective responsibility to uphold attitudes and behaviours that support a culturally inclusive society. This week Victorians are coming together to celebrate the contributions of multicultural communities, and many of the Harmony Week events taking place have been supported by the Andrews Labor government's multicultural festivals and events program. I am also pleased that the approach to multicultural affairs has largely been bipartisan as a reflection of the importance of this portfolio to the values of our state. However, this week, Harmony Week, I am reminded of the importance of these values because the actions of some undermine our collective

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efforts—actions like those of Bernie Finn in the other place hosting fundraisers for far-right extremists who seek to undermine our multicultural and multifaith activities and values, actions like those—

Mr M O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, it is contrary to the forms of this house for any imputation to be made against a member here or in the other place other than by way of substantive motion. I ask you to call the minister back to order.

Ms Allan: On the point of order, Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition's point of order should be ruled out of order. The Minister for Multicultural Affairs was simply stating matters of fact, and if the Leader of the Opposition wants to defend far-right extremism, let that be a question for him to answer.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ruled earlier in the day, when a member of the opposition was referring to comments made by a minister in the other place, that it is not in order to personally reflect on a member of the other place but it is allowable to reflect on the actions or comments of a member of the other place. I will remind the minister in her comments to do that.

Ms SPENCE: Actions like those of the previous Leader of the Opposition, whose Liberal Party 2018 election review noted that the focus on African gangs was seen as a political tactic rather than as an authentic problem—

Mr M O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, this has nothing to do with government business, nothing to do with government business whatsoever, and if ministers statements are simply going to be used to attack the opposition, then there will be consequences.

Ms Allan: On the point of order, Speaker, the Minister for Multicultural Affairs is absolutely being relevant to government business, and talking about alternative policies is entirely relevant to government business, particularly when those alternative policies are so divisive in our community.

The SPEAKER: On the point of order, I remind the minister to stick to making a minister's statement and not attacking the opposition.

Ms SPENCE: In Victoria, historically we have been better than that. Multiculturalism has been a bipartisan portfolio. Harmony Week is a good time to reflect upon that, and I wish everyone a very happy Harmony Week.

Mr Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, you ruled against the minister in terms of going down that path, and the minister just read her statement verbatim. I ask you to rule her minister's statement out of order. You ruled twice against the minister going down that path. Multiculturalism has always been an issue that we have bipartisan support for. It is ridiculous the minister would take that approach—ridiculous.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Caulfield is not making a point of order. The minister's statement has been concluded.

HEALTHCARE WORKERS ENTERPRISE BARGAINING AGREEMENTS

Mr MO'BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (11:43): My question is to the Minister for Health. In 2018 the Labor government agreed to an enterprise bargaining agreement with doctors employed by the health department for them to be paid overtime. Three years on, thousands of Victoria's hardworking doctors are now suing the Labor government for underpayment. When was the minister first made aware that these hardworking frontline healthcare workers are being ripped off by this Labor government?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (11:44): I take the advice of the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, through the Chair, to be factual. Well, let us get some facts straight. No-one is suing the Victorian government in this business, right? What has happened is proceedings have been filed by one unnamed client against Peninsula

Health. That is not quite the Victorian government. Similar proceedings are in place in the New South Wales court system in the Federal Court. The arrangements in place—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party!

Mr FOLEY: This is a very serious issue. Every health worker, indeed every worker, is entitled to be paid what they have earned, and that is a fundamental principle. That is why this government supports a whole range of issues when they go through fair industrial systems, and that particularly applies to our health system. Arrangements have been in place since 2002 in enterprise agreements covering the salaried medical professionals seeking to deal with what is a deeply entrenched problem in how our salaried medical young doctors are trained and paid. This government is committed to working through those issues, and indeed we have scheduled enterprise bargaining agreements yet again with the salaried medical officials to seek to deal with that issue.

In regard to the facts of the matter that the honourable Leader of the Opposition has portrayed, he needs to just check the facts, whether it be through the proceedings that have been on the papers in the Federal Court, to get his facts right and to reflect on the fact that these are significant—

Mr M O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the question was when the minister was first made aware of these matters, and I ask you to draw the minister back to answering that question.

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister is being relevant to the question.

Mr FOLEY: I have been aware of these matters since 2002 when I was a union official and understood what happens when workers are not paid what they are entitled to. That is the issue.

In regard to a longstanding issue, multiple enterprise agreements entered into between the state and the salaried medical officials, including enterprise agreements that were delivered by those opposite in the four long, tortuous years that they held the government benches, have sought to deal with this issue. But this is a very significant issue. At the moment we have one health service subject to Federal Court proceedings. It would be inappropriate for me to comment on a matter that is currently before the Federal Court, other than to say every worker is entitled to be paid what they have earned and what they are entitled to. That matter is addressed through successive enterprise agreements with this group of workers, and we look forward to discussions with that group of workers and any legal representatives they bring to the table to seek to address that matter in a fair and reasonable way to make sure every worker is paid what they are entitled to.

Mr M O'BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (11:47): How does this Labor government justify perpetrating what amounts to wage theft against hardworking junior frontline workers?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (11:48): This would be the wage theft bill that they voted against, right? This would be the champion of the workers that this mob pretend to be. Let me tell you about what has happened about wage theft today. Let me tell you about what has happened in the federal Parliament this morning. The great champions of the working-class salaried doctors in the federal Parliament have ditched their wage theft bill to make sure that the only legislation—

Mr M O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question. He needs to start cleaning up his own backyard first before he starts throwing rocks anywhere else.

Mr FOLEY: On the point of order, Speaker, the honourable Leader of the Opposition raised the issue of wage theft in his question. There have been important developments around wage theft legislation in this country this day, and I am entitled in my answer to reflect on that.

The SPEAKER: Order! I do not uphold the point of order. The minister is being relevant to the question that has been asked.

Mr FOLEY: Thank you, Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition needs to reflect on just the nature of what he is actually pretending to do here. Is he supporting the arrangements where salaried medical officials, or indeed any worker in our health system or indeed any worker in our great state of Victoria, should be entitled to what they have earned and what their enterprise agreements say they should be paid? This government says yes. That is why we have that legislation in place, and that is why we will support the salaried medical officials through their enterprise bargaining agreement.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: GOVERNMENT ACHIEVEMENTS

Mr MERLINO (Monbulk—Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health) (11:49): We promised the people of Victoria that if given the gift of a second term we would not waste a day, and I am proud to say that is a promise that we have kept. We have delivered the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, and we will deliver on every single one of those recommendations, rebuilding our broken mental health system.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I am going to need to be able to hear the Acting Premier's comments and not have members shouting across the chamber from both directions, particularly those at the table.

Mr MERLINO: We promised to build 100 new schools, and I am pleased to report that we are ahead of schedule. We promised funded kindergarten for every three-year-old child, and already more than 130 services are delivering it. Next year it will extend to every corner of our state.

A few more numbers for you: we funded 500 000 extra specialist appointments for patients in regional communities, just like we said we would; 46 of those dangerous and congested level crossings are removed, gone for good; solar panels have been installed on 100 000 homes through our nation-leading Solar Homes program; we promised free TAFE, and we delivered it; we promised fairer renting, and we delivered it; we promised to create 400 000 jobs by 2025, and we are well on our way. The ABS figures for February have just been released, and I am proud to say 26 000 jobs have been created, and our unemployment rate is now 5.6 per cent—well below the national average.

There was an alternative—an alternative that tried to take us backwards, an alternative that we are going to see again from the future Leader of the Opposition. He is sitting over there, and he will be sitting here soon. That is an alternative—

Members interjecting.

Mr MERLINO: Well, he was sitting in the ejector seat. Oh, you got ejected for the day. We will use every day to make our state fairer and stronger. That is the record of our government, and that is the promise we will keep.

Mr Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker, I was doing something interesting and missed the whole point of that. Could the minister please repeat what he said? I am very interested to hear it.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Ms Allan: On a point of order, Speaker, I would request that you review the footage of the actions just now of the Leader of the Opposition. That behaviour is unbecoming of any member of this place. Yes, we have had a robust question time, but that behaviour is well beyond the pale, and he should not be using the cover of the end of question time to try and show some sort of Mr Muscle routine as he leaves the chamber. I simply ask that you review this, and I would be very happy to join with the Manager of Opposition Business to have discussions with you about that behaviour. We are all robust in this place, but that went beyond the pale.

Mr Wells: On the point of order, Speaker, the Leader of the House is being a blatant hypocrite. I am sorry, it was—

The SPEAKER: Order! A point of order is not an opportunity to attack another member.

Mr Wells: I agree, I think we should look at the footage, because on a number of occasions you, Speaker, warned the Acting Premier about attacking the opposition, and he did it over and over and over again, and then in his ministerial statement he could not help himself. If the Acting Premier is going to provoke the opposition, then there will be consequences—then there will be consequences—so when you have your ruling, we expect that the Acting Premier heed your warnings and your directions. When he breaches them, then there has to be a consequence, and that is what happened right there at the end of question time.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will meet with the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business in my chambers after constituency questions.

Constituency questions

GIPPSLAND EAST ELECTORATE

Mr T BULL (Gippsland East) (11:55): (5811) My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in relation to the recent announcement that elements of VicRoads will be privatised. The information I seek is whether negotiations include a guarantee there will be the same levels of employment in rural and regional Victoria but also East Gippsland. There remain some concerns that with this announcement services will be reduced and jobs may be reduced, so if the minister could please provide that information on behalf of my constituents I would be most grateful.

BUNINYONG ELECTORATE

Ms SETTLE (Buninyong) (11:55): (5812) My constituency question is for the Minister for Mental Health. I ask the minister: following the release of the final report from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, can the minister provide an update of some of the investments that we can expect for the Ballarat region? The Andrews Labor government has committed to implementing every single recommendation from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and has already invested a historic \$868 million in mental health in the most recent Victorian state budget. Any additional investments will build on the wonderful work done so far in Ballarat, particularly around the hospital outreach post-suicidal engagement service.

MALVERN ELECTORATE

Mr M O'BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (11:56): (5813) My constituency question is to the Minister for Health. My constituent, Mr Denis Chinnock of Armadale, has been corresponding with my office since 2019 regarding his wife Catherine's care at Monash Health. In 2018 Mrs Chinnock suffered complications during an extended wait in the emergency department. Mr Chinnock raised his concerns regarding her care to staff several times but did not feel he was adequately responded to. Mr Chinnock then took matters into his own hands, took his wife to another hospital where her heart failure was diagnosed and correctly treated. Mr Chinnock has previously corresponded with the minister's predecessors, all of whom effectively palmed off his grievances to Safer Care Victoria, but there has been an inadequate response. I understand that Monash Health have made procedural changes in their emergency department, including staffing, nurse checks and improved family communication. But on behalf of my constituent I am seeking further information as to what is being done on a clinical level to ensure that incorrect diagnoses of future patients suffering from heart failure are not made again.

BROADMEADOWS ELECTORATE

Mr McGuire (Broadmeadows) (11:57): (5814) My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Can the Department of Transport investigate the construction of a pedestrian-cyclist bridge at the Broadmeadows railway station? This would be part of a redevelopment of the station itself, which is strategically really important, and also would be part of the comeback strategy on how we actually recover from recession and from the pandemic. It is really critical because this would actually provide a bridge between the civic centre and the new jobs centre that we want for

Broadmeadows. Infrastructure is obviously really important in how that is done and is just part of the new vision strategy and advocacy to reimagine Broadmeadows. We all know how significant it is. This is where CSL will manufacture the crucial ingredient in 50 million vaccines. It is how we will bring back the jobs. This is really important right now to see it as a new epicentre of national importance.

POLWARTH ELECTORATE

Mr RIORDAN (Polwarth) (11:58): (5815) My question is to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. My question is a simple one. My office is currently being inundated by mainly elderly Victorians who are trying to apply for the \$250 power saving bonus program. Unfortunately, as we saw when the government tried to implement its help for small business, which involved making complicated and difficult applications online, so too many constituents in my electorate who do not have computers at home and do not have internet access are being denied their fair share of support in the coming winter months to keep themselves warm and provide hot water, cooking and other necessities that of course we all rely on electricity for. I ask the minister very clearly: can a review be taken into the way people can apply for this power saving bonus so that people are not disadvantaged and left without that support?

PASCOE VALE ELECTORATE

Ms BLANDTHORN (Pascoe Vale) (11:59): (5816) My constituency question is for the Minister for Community Sport, and the question I ask is: what is the latest update on Moreland council's application for a package of local sport lighting infrastructure projects to the Andrews Labor government community sports infrastructure stimulus program? As the minister will be aware, as part of round 2 of the CSIF, Moreland council were invited by Sport and Recreation Victoria to resubmit one of their round 1 applications for a package of sporting lighting projects at sporting grounds right across our local area. This package of lighting upgrades would greatly benefit participation, inclusivity, safety and accessibility at our local sporting clubs and for their competitions. Better lighting can mean more time and better performance capability on the pitch and more opportunity to grow membership, diversify competitions and give locals of all ages and abilities greater chance to get active and connect with a team sport in their community. The Oak Park sporting association in particular has long been advocating for a lighting upgrade, with a vision to open doors to demand for increased playing and training opportunities across their AFL, cricket and Auskick programs. I ask for information on the program.

SHEPPARTON ELECTORATE

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) (12:00): (5817) My constituency question is for the Minister for Housing. Minister, the November 2020 Victorian state budget provided for a major build of social housing across Victoria. It included \$45 million for expenditure on housing in the Shepparton region. My constituents are seeking to know your government's plans in relation to the type of housing that is proposed to be built with the \$45 million, the agencies that will be administering the build and an assurance that local communities will be consulted in relation to local needs.

CARRUM ELECTORATE

Ms KILKENNY (Carrum) (12:01): (5818) My question is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. Minister, how are households in my electorate of Carrum benefiting from the Andrews Labor government's \$250 power saving bonus? Many families and households in my electorate are concerned with household expenses, including their gas and electricity bills. The Andrews Labor government has been working hard to make it easier and fairer for Victorian households, including by introducing a whole suite of reforms designed to bring down energy costs. I know my constituents are very keen to hear about the \$250 energy saver bonus and are keen to take up this offer, and we look forward to the minister's response.

EUROA ELECTORATE

Ms RYAN (Euroa) (12:01): (5819) My constituency question is to the Minister for Health. When will the minister remove requirements for face masks in supermarkets? I have been contacted by Tim Burton from Burton's IGA in Euroa. They are finding it very, very difficult to manage the requirement for face masks with supermarkets, and there is a fundamental question as to why small country supermarkets are different from any other retail or cafe, for example, in country towns. They have about 25 per cent of people that they are required to ask to wear a mask because they are coming in perhaps not aware of the requirement or flouting the requirement, and it is putting their staff under great pressure. They have obviously really struggled through COVID, and this is creating a lot of pressure and a lot of tension in a small country town, so I would ask the minister to provide the health advice— (*Time expired*)

YAN YEAN ELECTORATE

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (12:02): (5820) My constituency question is to the Minister for Planning, and I ask: what process will the minister use to make a determination on the planning application for a proposed quarry in Beveridge North? Many constituents are contacting me daily, asking me to oppose the quarry and wanting an update on the process.

Motions**BUDGET PAPERS 2020–21****Debate resumed.**

Ms KAIROUZ (Kororoit) (12:03): As I was saying, Melton local government area is one of the fastest growing regions in Australia, and locals within that LGA and its surrounds deserve a 24-hour hospital and the very best health care.

Continuing on the topic of health, this budget will invest \$121 million for the delivery of hospital services in the comfort of the patient's own home. The budget will also provide funding which will support the implementation of responses to the review of the supervised injecting room, including the establishment of a second supervised injecting room. What I have learned during my time in this place is that alcohol and drug addiction does not discriminate, and I am pleased to see that drug and alcohol use is viewed as a health issue rather than a crime issue and that more funding is allocated for specialist positions and more beds for people seeking support and rehabilitation for drug and alcohol use.

Closer to my heart, I am pleased to see the budget supports the mental health needs of asylum seekers and provides material aid like food and clothing, subsidised medication and housing for people that are seeking asylum.

Also within the Melton LGA, I am pleased to see \$19.88 million allocated for the busy and dangerous Melton Highway–Leakes Road intersection. This initiative involves a conversion of an unsignalised intersection into one with traffic lights, providing safer access and minimising delays on this very busy intersection. It is one thing that the locals have been asking for for a number of years, and they are very pleased to see that we are finally getting this done.

I now proudly turn to the historic \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build to construct more than 12 000 new social and affordable homes over the next four years. My heart certainly swells with pride to see that the budget delivers this unprecedented investment, one that many members of the community wholeheartedly support. Not only does this investment deliver thousands and thousands of crucial jobs, more importantly it invests in the lives of the most vulnerable people in our community. The significant investment in social housing provides tenants with modern 21st-century housing, security and most importantly dignity.

The Andrews Labor government's ambitious infrastructure agenda is one of the largest in the nation. Many people certainly are watching it, and I am very, very proud of it. This Big Build agenda delivers

the removal of dangerous and congested level crossings, the metro rail tunnel, the North East Link, the West Gate Tunnel, the Suburban Rail Loop, the Geelong fast rail and the airport rail, creating 165 000 jobs for Victorians and creating opportunities for apprentices, trainees and engineering cadets. Our TAFE investment supports this ambitious agenda by helping Victorians reskill, upskill and find work, offering 80 000 free TAFE and subsidised training places.

The pandemic has well and truly exposed some of the most vulnerable cohorts in our community, specifically our casual and insecure workers. Workers in the outer suburbs have experienced greater economic impact due to the pandemic; many work in the sectors of construction, hospitality, retail, tourism and the aviation and airline industry. Many have casual and insecure work and sadly have had to choose between a day's pay and their health. This is proven to be unsafe, dangerous and unfair. I am pleased to see the Andrews Labor government develop a new secure work pilot scheme that provides up to five days of sick and carers leave at the national minimum wage for casual workers, which also includes cleaners, security guards and hospitality and supermarket workers. The budget will provide \$5 million for the pilot scheme, which will be finalised after the consultation process with key stakeholders.

There is so much more that I can say about this budget and that I can talk about, but as we are now in the process of starting to prepare for the next budget, I am sure I will have much more to say about that as well. This budget is like no other budget. It is about putting people first, and it certainly leaves no-one behind. As a member of this place that represents the seat of Kororoit, where some of the most vulnerable members of our community live, I am very, very proud to be part of a government that delivers this unprecedented budget to people like those that I represent my community. This budget helps us repair and recover, and it also makes us stronger than ever. I commend the bill to the house and I wish it a speedy passage, and I certainly look forward to speaking on the 2022 budget.

Ms THOMAS (Macedon—Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional Development) (12:09): I am very proud to rise today to speak on the take-note motion. The Labor government's 2020–21 budget was a budget like no other, and I want to congratulate the Treasurer and the Premier on the delivery of this fantastic Labor budget, a budget for its time.

We will never forget that 2020 was a year like no other. It was a year that reminded us all about what is most important—that is, people, their families and their loved ones. This is a budget that does what good Labor governments always do: it puts people first and at the centre of all of our decision-making. It is a budget that will deliver on our promise to build back better, and it is a budget that will deliver for every corner of the state.

As Minister for Regional Development I am so proud that this budget puts regional Victorians at the centre of all that we do, with \$8 billion to get regional Victorians back on their feet and to ensure that no-one is left behind in our recovery. It is about getting more Victorians, more regional Victorians, back to work as soon as possible. I really want to take this opportunity to acknowledge my predecessor in the other place, the Attorney-General, for her work to secure this unprecedented investment of \$8 billion in regional Victoria. Central to this of course is the \$156 million in our Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund. This is a critical Labor policy, the RJIF. It has been central to the delivery of so many exciting projects in regional Victoria, and I would say it has been central to the drive that we have seen for people to make a decision that they want to live, work and raise their families in regional Victoria. This money is so important because it helps us to create and retain jobs and to leverage private sector investment, and I am so proud of the many, many projects that have been supported as a consequence of this fund.

There are so many projects that I could talk about, but I do want to draw the house's attention to a couple of things. It is really important to understand that out of our \$5.2 billion investment in social housing and affordable housing \$1 billion will be invested in regional Victoria. This is on a scale that we have never seen and is going to make such a difference to the lives and wellbeing of people in regional Victoria, and it is great to be delivering this speech with so many regional MPs in the house.

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Of course it is timely to remember that the Labor government has 18 members representing rural and regional Victoria—that is three times as many members as the National Party has in this place—so it is no surprise, with that many MPs advocating so strongly for the regions and our rural communities, that we have had such a fantastic budget.

There is \$1 billion on housing and \$4.9 billion on country road and rail upgrades. This is something that is incredibly important because transport is a key driver of economic and social success and wellbeing in regional Victoria. \$465 million will not just support the visitor economy to recover but help deliver our reform program in regional tourism to ensure that Victorians and others, when they are able to do so, will look forward to a trip in regional Victoria as they perhaps may have once thought about a trip overseas. There is so much to see and do across beautiful regional Victoria. You know that very well, Deputy Speaker, as indeed your electorate is one of the most highly visited in the state. There is a lot to be said for our investments in regional Victoria. I do want to make the point that since being in government we have created more than 80 000 jobs in regional Victoria, and right now unemployment has fallen to 4.6 per cent. That is almost 2 per cent lower than under the previous government.

Our investment in agriculture is also second to none, and I am very proud to be working to deliver our state's agricultural strategy. Some of the key investments that I am pleased to be able to deliver include \$15 million to help our farmers better access ag tech, \$20 million to support our farmers to expand their export potential, \$30 million to extend the very successful agriculture energy investment plan, which puts money back into farmers' pockets, and \$50 million to support the next generation of farmers. It has been really wonderful to get out and about and meet some of our young farmers, and indeed we have a young farmers advisory council that is supporting me to understand what the particular needs of both young farmers and first-time farmers are. We are doing some excellent work in supporting our very important, significant agriculture sector.

I will turn locally and talk a little bit now about my beautiful electorate of Macedon. It is such a privilege to represent this part of Victoria. People say to me when you look around the towns that make up my electorate, the difference in those communities now to when I was elected in 2014 is unbelievable, what has been created and built. I come back to this point every time. The member for Sunbury, in a members statement the other day, spoke about our investment in the Sunbury and Macedon Ranges Specialist School. Our investment in the specialist school across Sunbury and Bullengarook at \$20 million is \$5 million more than the previous Liberal government invested in the entire electorate over their entire four years. That tells you something about the key differences between Labor governments and what we stand for and what we deliver and what those on the other side do. No wonder they were kicked out of government.

I will be working hard every day to continue to deliver for the people of my community in the areas that are most important to them, and that is investing in our roads, investing in our schools and ensuring that the amenity of my community continues to grow. Sporting facilities are very important in the community that I represent. As all of our 18 regional members know, sport is at the heart of so many regional communities. When I reflect on the changes that have been made under the Andrews Labor government with our investment in girls' and women's change facilities, that has changed the culture of so many sporting clubs right across the state. Girls and women are feeling welcome for really the first time to play their sports—to play netball, to play football and to play cricket—and to participate like never before. These are the things that really matter in my community. I am delighted that our Andrews Labor government continues to invest in the things that matter.

I do want to talk about 2020 and the challenging year that we had as a consequence of the coronavirus. We all know it. We all felt it. We were all on the receiving end of calls from members of our constituencies who were struggling through that year and who were anxious about what the future held for them. We also know that when we look at who was most impacted by the pandemic and we look at the consequences of the shake-up in employment, women really bore the brunt of so many impacts of the pandemic. Not least they were most likely to be balancing the need to supervise their

children who were learning from home while also trying to work at home, and not surprisingly, because women hold a disproportionate number of the insecure and casual jobs in our community, they were amongst the first to lose work during the pandemic.

What we have done is very deliberate. I am so proud also, I have got to say, to be part of a government where almost 50 per cent of our caucus are women. What are we sitting on? 48.9 per cent are women. The difference is when you look at us and you look at that lot over there, the needs and the issues that are important to women are front and centre of our policy development. This to me says it all really: Neil Mitchell described this budget as sexist because it has a focus on women. To me that was a badge of honour. I think it is really great to know that our budget is focused on really delivering for women. I talked about women being on the front line of the pandemic, and I do also want to mention the critical role that women have played in the essential work during the pandemic, from working at the supermarket to working in the cleaning industry and of course at the front line of so much health service delivery—still being the highest proportion of nurses—

Ms Green: Education, aged care.

Ms THOMAS: education and aged care. Women were front and centre of that frontline response. So during last year, in many phone calls that I received and the Zoom meetings that I held with my constituents, the women in my community told me about the impact that the pandemic had on them, and I was so glad that the 2020 budget took immediate steps to address the needs of the women who lost their jobs during the pandemic. We are providing \$250 million in the budget to create around 10 000 jobs using wage subsidies to support Victorians to find steady employment, and at least \$150 million of this funding will go towards getting women back in work—I think that is the bit that Neil Mitchell did not like—of which \$50 million is targeted support for women over 45, who we know face additional barriers. For women who want to train or retrain, we are delivering \$631 million for free TAFE and subsidised training places plus an additional \$155 million to provide access to those who are most impacted by the pandemic. We also know that Victorian women often find it hard to break into the male-dominated world of startups and can be left behind. That is why we have established the \$10 million Women's Angel Sidecar Fund to back women's startups, to help them grow and to help women achieve their dreams.

This is a brilliant budget focused on jobs, because here in the Labor Party we understand the importance of a good secure job. A good secure job is about a person having agency and control over the life that they want to lead. Here on this side of the house we believe in the dignity of all labour. As I said before, the pandemic exposed the workers who we really turn to, who we really need, in the times of crisis, and they are often women workers, they are often some of the lower paid workers in our community and they are often workers who are in insecure and casual employment. For me this was one of the big lessons that we learned during the pandemic.

This is a brilliant budget. It is about putting people first. I might also say I was delighted that it also allocates another \$10 million to Kyneton High School to ensure that it will continue to be one of the leading secondary colleges in my electorate. I have got three government schools. They are all brilliant. They are all doing well. They have all had investment from this great Labor government. This is a budget that, as I said, puts people first. It reflects the values that those on this side of the house hold so dear. I am so proud of it, and I cannot wait to get up again and talk about this year's budget in a few short months. Thank you very much. I commend this brilliant budget to the house.

Ms SULEYMAN (St Albans) (12:24): I too rise to speak on the Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020. Let me say, taking the next turn after the member for Macedon and her passionate contribution, this is surely an amazing budget for my community in St Albans. Not only is it again delivering on our commitments, but most importantly it is investing in the west. We continue building the Education State, connecting our local communities and more importantly, by investing into local infrastructure, creating those vital jobs. We are ensuring that not only the constituents in my electorate of St Albans but also those in the western region get the best health care. Just recently—yesterday—I

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had the pleasure of joining the Acting Premier and the Minister for Health in opening the fantastic \$34 million emergency department at Sunshine Hospital. Let me tell you it is our government, it is this government that has actually built brick by brick not only Sunshine Hospital but also the new Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital. With the multistorey addition they are specifically targeting having a children's ward in the emergency department. It is our government that has actually delivered on this absolutely important infrastructure for the people of the west.

We have spoken about the emergency department. It includes 55 additional treatment spaces, a medical imaging centre and, most importantly, as I said, a unit for children, making it bigger and better and, most importantly, reducing the waiting times. I know my constituents are extremely supportive of making sure that during their time of need and pain they are not waiting very long periods in very uncomfortable spaces. I am really, really proud to have joined the Acting Premier and the Minister for Health in opening the new emergency department.

As we have heard, there is no doubt that the last 12 months have been extremely tough on Victoria. Of course every single person has felt during the pandemic that it has been extremely difficult, but most importantly I want to commend our healthcare workers. I am very passionate about Sunshine Hospital and the great work that they do. Just yesterday I heard that Sunshine Hospital dealt with 46 per cent of all COVID cases. That is a mammoth figure, and it just shows you the great work that all the healthcare workers are actually doing at Western Health.

Another passion of mine is education. In St Albans we are delivering and building at Monmia Primary School in Keilor Downs. They received a further \$6.9 million to build a brand new STEM centre, and principal Lorraine Bell said that the Andrews government has brought such joy to Monmia Primary School:

This announcement is one of the most amazing opportunities—
for us—

... in my 15 years as principal.

That really sums up what it means for this school.

And of course there is Jackson School. I was absolutely moved when I visited the school and met with principal Joan O'Connor-Cox. They received \$10 million to build quality teaching areas, but most importantly they have been able to deliver the second stage of Jackson special school. The feedback from parents and the school community has been absolutely amazing. Giving every child, regardless of their postcode, the opportunity to learn and to prosper is so important to our government, and I am absolutely ecstatic that they have received \$10 million.

Another school that has benefited from this budget is the Furlong Park School for Deaf Children. What an amazing school that is, not only for St Albans but also the western region. We committed \$9.4 million, and they will be able to deliver and build their master plan works for the next stage of their school development. I do want to shout out to the principal, Lee Bullock, and all the teachers for the fantastic work that they do in such challenging circumstances at times. When I had the opportunity to visit the school, it was just amazing to see the children and the message that they sent to our Premier and to the Minister for Education.

This is what Labor budgets do. They deliver to people and communities regardless of their postcodes. Those are our values, and quite clearly we are investing not only in education and our schools but also in free kinder in 2021. I know how important it is to make sure you get the proper education from day one, and that includes investing in kinder. Families will be able to save up to \$2000 per child. And also we are boosting out-of-hours care. In addition to free kinder, we are making sure that we are bringing forward the school readiness funding, and that means close to \$800 000 more for St Albans kinders. This is about, as I said, giving kids the best start in life and making sure that they have the appropriate support—and not only kids but kids living with disabilities as well. And we are rolling out additional upgrades as we get ready for universal three-year-old kinder, and I am looking forward to

next week joining the minster as we visit Ardeer Primary School; we are actually building a joint kinder at that school site.

So after a challenging 2020 families deserve to have one less worry and concern. I know that families in St Albans have been doing it tough, but I am also very proud of our families, because in times of challenges we saw the community unite and take care of one another. Whether it was the school communities, whether it was our community organisations, whether it was our religious institutions as well, everybody joined together to take care of one another, and that is really the essence and the spirit of the St Albans community.

Another thing—and I know that my constituents have embraced this—has been the household energy savings package and the \$250 power saving bonus to help eligible families with their energy bills. I know that a lot of families and pensioners have advised me that this is something that they just needed a bit of relief with. As I said, this is a government that understands the pressures on working families and understands the pressures on seniors and pensioners and those that are doing it tough, so I am really happy that this program was put forward by our government.

We are making sure that we are supporting families, supporting children, and also a further \$200 million we are going to be investing in Western Health for new equipment. Also additional beds in our mental health system are being proposed and invested in. We know—we have heard—that the system is broken, and we know that the west has many challenges, but by providing the support and the funding and by including 52 new mental health beds at Sunshine Hospital we are improving the quality of health care but most importantly making sure that we do have the right supports and assistance and that those who need the system are able to get that support. That is integral, and I am really pleased to see those 52 mental health beds going to Sunshine Hospital.

We are making so many more investments when it comes to our health. As I said, just yesterday I was part of the opening of the new emergency department. And I note the Minister for Health is at the table, and I thank him for his excellent leadership in this space and for making sure that Sunshine Hospital, with the new Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital, continues to get the appropriate support from our government.

But we are not just stopping with health, we are also building social and affordable homes. And it is fantastic to see that we will invest \$5.3 billion, which means 12 000 new homes. And I know—my electorate covers the City of Brimbank—how important it is for those who are doing it tough, those who need a roof over their head, that they do have the support to be able to access safe and appropriate accommodation. As part of this package of delivering 12 000 new homes, this will also mean a further 18 000 new jobs created, and that is fantastic. I know it means a lot to my apprentices, because 10 per cent will be dedicated to new apprentices, cadets and trainees. I know Victoria University and the polytechnic in Sunshine will embrace this plan.

The core of this government is about creating jobs—creating 200 000 jobs by 2022 and then 400 000 jobs by 2025. Also, as we have heard previously, it will add a secure work pilot scheme to tackle insecure work. We know in St Albans the challenges when it comes to insecure work, and this government is taking steps to provide five days of sick and carers leave, and that is absolutely important to the families of St Albans. This is about giving people security, stability and, more importantly, a real chance to find their feet and really be able to prosper in their communities.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the airport rail link. That will create an absolute transformation of Sunshine and St Albans for my community. This will mean that Victoria will connect to Sunshine. We have already seen \$5 billion committed by our government and the federal government. As I said, Sunshine will become a gateway to the world and also every single part of Victoria—joining at Sunshine. This means connecting to health care and education and, most importantly, having one of the best public transport connections. What it will mean for the constituents in my community of St Albans is that they will have many more transport options and be one stop away from the world,

and that really gives me great joy, creating those jobs of the future, providing opportunities, but most importantly giving our locals a fair go. This is one of the nation's largest transport infrastructure projects, and it is in the heart of the electorate of St Albans, so I am looking forward to watching and really making sure that my local community is connected to this absolutely amazing project.

Just down the road we are expanding the Sunshine law courts. Close to \$27 million will be invested to make sure that our law courts are appropriate. We are also investing into our local parks, including one in Sunshine and one in Sunshine North. But let me say that we have also seen some minor capital works for schools such as Albion Primary School, to upgrade their basketball and sports courts, and also for University Park Primary School as well in St Albans and of course St Albans Primary School. This is fantastic for our local schools, and as I said, since I have been elected we have seen an enormous investment into our local schools. Some schools have never seen investment by a government before at this level, so it really shows our passion and our values when it comes to education, because we understand the value of education and we understand that it should not be based on the postcode you live in.

There is so much more I could talk about in the budget, but I am looking forward to the next couple of months, with further announcements for the community of St Albans. This is a budget that puts people first. It continues to redevelop and revitalise St Albans. It continues to place St Albans at the heart of the west.

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (12:39): I will start where the member for St Albans left off really in speaking on this take-note motion on the budget of last year. It was such a good budget. It was brought down in November, and we are still talking about it. The member for St Albans said that this was a budget that really nailed Labor's colours to the mast; it was about values. I think particularly your values really stand you in good stead when there is a crisis like the world has been living in—our state, our nation—with the COVID pandemic. It was a break from the tradition of all the budgets that I have been around in that we have always had a commitment to surplus budgets and in fact delivered surplus budgets in all my time in the Parliament. We are moving with the advice of the governor of the Reserve Bank—whose advice to all governments in this nation was to fill in the gap. With the private sector absolutely doing it tough and not being able to invest, it was the time for governments to invest. We have invested, and we have invested consistent with our values.

The member for St Albans and other members have talked about the commitment to education. Servicing my electorate and that of the member for Eltham, there is \$10 million for the Diamond Valley Special Developmental School. Nothing says more about your values than when you fund services and facilities for those most in need. Kids with disabilities and their families need all the support in the world, and they need support from our government. I have been in this place for over 18 years now, and I had the pleasure to visit the Diamond Valley Special Developmental School with the member for Eltham the day before the budget and give them the good news. Because of COVID we could not actually do it to a mass audience, but we were able to go there and meet with the principal and the deputy principal and unfurl a banner and give them a drum roll and a lead-up. To see their faces, knowing that they were getting \$10 million—I have been part of many large announcements with many more dollars than this one, but I think there was hardly another one that gave me such joy.

Consistent with our commitment to students with disabilities, I am really glad that there was a further \$1.6 billion to transform support for students with disability. That is doubling the number of students receiving extra support to 55 000 students. This will also create up to 1730 jobs across the state, with the additional staff that will be needed to provide that support to students. I want to pay tribute to the Speaker, the member for Bundoora. I know that he did a lot of work, at the request of the now Premier when we were in opposition, on policy in this area. It is something that maybe we had all thought was a pipedream—to actually get down to this level of support for students with disability. It really was that work by the Speaker, the member for Bundoora, that policy work, that made this budget announcement possible. It is going to include a lot of those students that have previously fallen through the cracks—you know, without an absolute, defined diagnosis of why they might be developmentally delayed or

just struggling with being on that wide spectrum of ASD disabilities. It really is tough for parents to get answers. I know I have heard the Premier speak about this many times, saying that sometimes it is not even a matter of money, because this can afflict families that have actually got reasonably deep pockets, but sometimes there just is not the right answer and you cannot find the right professional to assist your child. For us to be doing it within the state school system and wrapping support around these children and families is something that I am particularly proud of with this budget.

Kids are back in the classroom this year, and I had the great pleasure of starting my week by visiting Mernda Park Primary School, which has now got about 350 students. I think this is their seventh year of operation. Principal Mary Ryan is a local, and she has got a great local team of teachers there delivering a great standard of education. I was really rapt to go and present the leadership badges to that school. That is a school that we built on coming to office. Now we are seeing the biggest single investment in our schools so that we can bring many other schools up to the standard of new schools like Mernda Park, Mernda Central College and others.

Wallan Primary School is going to get a new competition-grade gym. I must admit I have not represented the Mitchell shire part of my electorate for that long—only since the last redistribution—but I was absolutely stunned on going into the school's gymnasium. I had been to the school many times, but I had just not been invited into the gym. The gym on the outside looks like a reasonably new building; I think it was probably only built in the 1990s. Inside the gym for some reason—I do not know who ever signed off that build, and I am glad we have got expertise now in the Victorian School Building Authority that ensures we do get good-quality outcomes—the roof leaks. It actually has a floor-to-ceiling gap in one corner of the building that is about half a metre wide. Obviously it was a mistake by whoever constructed it. Ann, the principal there, and their staff and the students—you know, Wallan is a pretty windy place—have wind and rain blowing in through that gap in the building. I have never seen anything like it anywhere, so I am really delighted that Wallan Primary is getting a competition-grade gym that will be open for community access. It will mean those kids and the staff are not having to deal with the buckets on the floor for the water and all that dust and dirt. The amount that must go on cleaning, and the risk that is posed to students from slipping over on dirt because it is blowing in—I was speechless. I am so glad that the budget has responded to my agitation around this matter.

There are other projects. My electorate has the highest number of construction workers in the state, so anything that is around buildings my community just loves, because that puts dollars in the pockets of mums and dads in my community, meaning that they are able to put food on the table for their kids, pay off their mortgages and spend money in the local businesses.

There are projects underway now at Diamond Creek East Primary with their admin building, which was the only building remaining there that needed to be upgraded. At Diamond Valley College a building there, their new science and technology wing, is nearing completion. They will get handover and the keys to that building very soon.

Victoria's amazing, amazing social housing spend in this budget—I am delighted that two out of the three municipalities that I represent are targets for this social housing spend: the City of Whittlesea and the Shire of Mitchell. I will also be very much encouraging some of that spend to be in the Shire of Nillumbik too, which is where I live. Just because Nillumbik is socio-economically a more well-heeled part of the greater Melbourne area does not mean that you do not have cohorts—people with disability and it does not matter what your social strata, women of my age and older are retiring on lower incomes. If they have had a family breakdown or if they are widowed—or indeed if they have not had a partner and have been on their own—they are retiring in poverty. I do not subscribe to this view of 'not in my backyard' of people that oppose social housing. Social housing is for your neighbours, the person who serves you in the shop, those front-line workers in the supermarket, in cleaning and in aged care. I want the women of Nillumbik and people with disability to be able to age in place and have access to good-quality social housing, and I am not going to brook any 'not in my backyard' conversations about the Shire of Nillumbik.

I know that the build will be embraced within the City of Whittlesea. People living in that municipality understand how important construction and the growth of housing and diversity of housing are. With the Shire of Mitchell, Beveridge and Wallan in my electorate are inside the urban growth boundary but they are actually in a regional shire, so I call that a special economic zone. New houses being built in that area continue to get double the first home owner grant of other parts of the state, and businesses establishing in the Shire of Mitchell get access to the lowest payroll tax in the country. That is why Regional Development Victoria is saying that the Hume region, of which Mitchell is part, is the second-highest area, second only to the South-West Coast—the Warrnambool area—in terms of the number of people inquiring about real estate and potentially making that move to regional Victoria.

It is an absolute dream of mine to see that people, particularly in Wallan and Beveridge, do not have to travel to work anymore, that there will be more businesses setting up there so that they can actually work close to home, but also that there will be businesses setting up there so that other people from the northern suburbs will actually travel outwards to work. We have seen with the pandemic that more people want to work from home, and people have understood that they just want to work closer to home. I think having more businesses setting up in interface shires like the Shire of Mitchell will mean that more people in the growth areas of the northern suburbs—say, in Hume and Whittlesea—will be travelling outwards to work. It is a very efficient use of infrastructure to be travelling on the opposite side of the road to where most of the traffic is going and also to be filling up the seats of trains travelling in the opposite direction.

I am delighted to see that in our commitment to supporting jobs and coming back from the pandemic there will be a new skills and job centre established as part of the North East Link Project, which is Victoria's biggest ever road building project that will really, really be a game changer for my electorate in terms of congestion. I know that with the Mernda rail project having a job centre there helped many disadvantaged workers get back into work. They had targets and definitely went over their targets for the employment of Indigenous people and particularly getting women into construction. I know that centre will be of assistance.

It was great to see the Growing Suburbs Fund get \$75 million over this financial year. That fund just continues to deliver for outer suburban communities, whether it is playgrounds or playing spaces. I was delighted to officially open with the member for Eltham and Peter Perkins, the mayor of Nillumbik, a great mate of mine, the Diamond Creek Regional Playspace last weekend. It was really great to see the member for Eltham be the first on that flying fox, followed not long after by the mayor. I think it was the photo of the year, the member for Eltham being on that flying fox. It is just big kids and small kids really benefiting from the great playgrounds that have been built by the Growing Suburbs Fund. Other projects like the netball pavilion in Diamond Creek that will soon be officially opened will be followed up by new court playing surfaces there. Our investment in community sport has never been better. I want to thank all the ministers that I get to work with as the Parliamentary Secretary for Sport: the Minister for Community Sport, the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events and the newly minted Minister for Regional Development, who gave her budget contribution before. This is a budget that delivers for all Victorians, and I look forward to the next one in a very few short months.

Mr MAAS (Narre Warren South) (12:54): It too gives me pleasure to rise to speak to the take-note motion on the 2020–21 budget, and it is always a pleasure to follow the member for Yan Yean as well, a very passionate advocate for her community. My contribution to this debate will be truncated somewhat with lunch due in about 6 minutes, but it will give me the opportunity to talk to some of the projects which are happening in my community.

When you speak to constituents in my electorate, the things that concern them first and foremost are jobs. This budget delivers those in spades, not only the jobs themselves but the ability to get to work and back home faster as well. That is particularly important in the electorate of Narre Warren South as it is a residential electorate with no industry within it. With the community itself being on the outer

fringes of the south-eastern suburban network, it is very important that we have transport to be able to get around, and good roads to get around quickly as well.

In the time I have remaining, I will just quickly go through some of these projects which are providing jobs and speediness on our roads and our public transport networks. Firstly to public transport infrastructure, of course the announcement of the Melbourne Airport rail link will be huge for my community. Some \$5 billion has been contributed to that by the state government, and that will mean an airport rail link via the Pakenham line, which will mean no need to change trains for my community. Obviously that is in the planning stages, with completion due in 2029.

For the South Gippsland Highway between Lynbrook Boulevard and the Dandenong bypass, \$12.63 million has been put towards widening it at strategic points to increase capacity and optimise traffic flows there. We also have two level crossing removal projects which are currently taking place.

Members interjecting.

Mr MAAS: Absolutely amazing. We have got one happening at the Clyde Road level crossing in Berwick, with expected completion next year. That is part of the overall \$15 billion Level Crossing Removal Project scheme. As well as that, we have the Hallam station level crossing removal works, where there will also be a new station built.

In terms of education, Hampton Park Secondary College is getting a massive funding boost with \$7.6 million, and that will go towards a wellness centre for that school. That is on top of \$3.9 million which was previously announced for upgrading classrooms and facilities, and an additional \$2.62 million for double-storey classrooms, which have already begun to be built. Strathaird Primary School is a school in the electorate which has a very strong focus on the environment and climate change not only in its curriculum but also the physical structures that it has built. Strathaird Primary School, I am very pleased to announce, received \$10 million within this budget to upgrade and modernise those facilities and to help prepare it to be a school for the future that delivers on those environmental and climate change programs that it has.

When you are creating jobs, TAFE and training become particularly important, and there was \$631 million announced in this budget, with up to 80 000 free TAFE and subsidised training places, with almost 60 000 in recovery areas to help people reskill, upskill and find work. There is \$155 million to support Victorians affected by COVID and as a result of the pandemic to retrain, and \$33 million for the Big Build training pathway to support 1500 apprentices and trainees with opportunities for employment.

As I did say, my contribution has been truncated somewhat. I have not even been able to go into housing or talk about health.

Sitting suspended 1.00 pm until 2.03 p.m.

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (14:03): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Bills

CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIA AMENDMENT BILL 2021

*Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Mr FOLEY:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms KEALY (Lowan) (14:04): I rise today to add my contribution to the Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Bill 2021, and from the outset I would like to pay my respects to Karen Ristevski, whose horrific murder and subsequent treatment by her murderer have been nothing short of horrific. I extend my deepest sympathies also to her family: to her children, also to her brother Stephen and to her wider family. What has happened to the family and what has happened to Karen is something that we should all be horrified by and devastated by, and as parliamentarians we must take this on board to make sure that these kinds of horrific actions of domestic violence which result in the needless deaths and murder of women must stop. It must stop. It is happening too often in our community, and for the people who are left behind it is just devastating to have to pick up the pieces and work through that. So as I said at the outset, I would like to just pay my respects to Karen in particular for her needless loss of life but also to Karen's family.

The purpose of this bill is to protect affected persons against further significant harm, pain or suffering that may be caused as a result of the exercise of a right of interment. The bill also makes miscellaneous amendments to the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003, clarifying how rights of interment held by more than one person can be exercised jointly and separately. It provides provision for refunds in the case of voluntary surrender of rights of interment when held by more than one person and clarifies the tenure for cremated human remains and makes other minor amendments.

As I referred to in my opening remarks, the key driver behind the amendments that are before us today is the horrific treatment around the burial site and particularly the headstone of Karen Ristevski. Karen has been laid to rest, but it was not her loving family who were able to influence what was on the headstone. It was her killer who devised the wording of the headstone and even had the most repulsive gall to leave a blank section on half of the headstone to indicate that that is where he should lie, and it should outrage every single Victorian that any killer would have the ability to be able to be laid to rest next to the person that they murdered.

This recommendation was first raised a few years ago. In fact in September 2016, just a couple of months after we understand Karen to have been murdered, the Victorian Law Reform Commission issued a report entitled *Funeral and Burial Instructions*. I note that sections of this report actually refer to amendments that would ensure that the legislative framework would be in place to ensure that this kind of treatment of Karen would not have occurred. In particular I refer to recommendation 6, which states:

The person with the right to control the funeral and burial arrangements of the deceased should forfeit that right if they:

...

- (e) act in any other manner, before or after the death of the deceased, which the court considers makes it inappropriate for them to retain the right.

This is very similar to the amendments that are put forward in the bill that we see before us today. It is something that we need to take always with great consideration—recommendations provided to us, particularly by the Victorian Law Reform Commission. While it is certainly well overdue, it is very welcome that these amendments will be before the house today. I do note that the Victorian Law Reform Commission in this report related to funeral and burial instructions also recommended that a brand-new act in relation to funeral and burial instructions should be developed. I do urge the government to revise this document. I think it encompasses some very important elements of recommendations that would provide further security for families around the rights of those who have

passed but also rights of interment and of family members and would assist to clarify the areas where there is confusion and there is dispute. I certainly encourage the government to take all of those recommendations on board. As I said, this report was actually published in September 2016. Had the government acted on this report and that recommendation to actually have a legal framework where a court could make a decision that for somebody who had the right of interment it could be deemed inappropriate for them to retain the right, we may not have seen the situation of the cruel treatment of Karen Ristevski and the format that her cemetery site and her headstone currently present today—and the grief and anguish that that has caused her family.

There are a number of concerns in relation to this bill that have been clarified to some level during the briefing that was provided to the coalition. There are still, though, a couple of sections which have not yet been clarified, and so I do ask that these are, hopefully, addressed through the contributions that are made to the chamber today. In particular we posed the question: can a cemetery grant a right of interment to someone else after becoming a sole holder of the right of interment? The department official said the drafters would be contacted to see if a drafting error had occurred. This is in relation to section 84H, so I will just refer to the outline. A bill briefing question was asked on notice as to why proposed section 84H does not make reference to section 73 in the principal act whilst proposed section 84I does. The department official said the drafters would be contacted to see if a drafting error had occurred.

As it stands, cemetery trusts can grant rights of interment to individuals as it sees fit. A clarification is being sought as to whether this bill limits cemetery trusts in granting such rights. This is an important point and it does require some clarification. If an amendment of the bill is required, then I would ask that there is an attempt. I know it is late in the day on the final sitting day, but it would be appreciated if that amendment could be circulated to ensure that we have a prompt addressing of this gap in the legislation, a drafting error in this legislation. That amendment could be perhaps passed today and then therefore taken to the Legislative Council in the following sitting week, and we could get some clarification for the Ristevski family to have more prompt action to resolve the problems which surround Karen's headstone. I hope that will be taken on notice. I know we are on very short time frames. I think it has to be circulated before 3.00 pm, so I hope the advisers are listening and we do get an amendment circulated shortly.

The second point that I would like to raise is a question that we posed: does the bill cover cases other than when the holder of the right of interment has murdered the person interred in the place of interment, for example, in cases of sexual abuse? I think all members of Parliament would agree that while the case of Karen's heinous murder certainly should result in revocation of the right of interment, there are other heinous acts which occur in our community—which we would love to see wiped out but still do occur—and we must recognise and ensure that similar situations are not occurring. I will give the example of sexual abuse. It would be horrific if there was a sexual abuse case of a child and the parent who conducted that assault was still granted the right of interment. We could still see similar situations where a familial burial plot was put together, which would be deeply offensive to other family members and disrespectful to the victim of the assault.

The response we got from the department at the time of the briefing was that it was confirmed that the bill does have a wider scope than the examples presented and that it includes convicted offenders of any crime and responsible persons determined by the coroner to have killed someone. But the operation of the bill requires an affected person to demonstrate how they would be impacted or would have been impacted by the exercise of a right of interment by such a person. There is therefore a higher obligation to have to demonstrate that, rather than it being an automatic refusal of the right of interment over another family member. I think that this needs to be worked through. There needs to be a level of security for all people in the future who may be victims of horrific crimes that there is an ability to not have to jump over too high a hurdle to prove that there would be a significant impact from the exercise of a right of interment by their abuser, by their murderer or by whoever had wronged them. This should be certainly not too much of a challenge for the family, and of course we want people to be able to be

put to rest as soon as practicable. This is particularly relevant for various religions, where there is a very short time frame that they have to conduct their interment rights. In some religions, it is as short as 24 hours or even sooner, so we do need to ensure that we have a legislative system that is also practicable and applicable and is able to be applied within the precious hours that may exist between someone passing, or their death, and the time that they are then interred, or put to rest.

I hope that this does not put too many additional hurdles in place and that people are duly respected at the time when they need it most. I think that is probably the most important part. I have been to a lot of funerals in my time. I have had loved ones leave this earth far too early. It is a time when people are working through all of their emotions of grief. It might be anger and hurt, it might be loss and the feeling that they could have done something better or differently, even those final words that they could have passed on to somebody they love, and people dwell on that for years and years to come.

We cannot have the system around the mechanisms and the practicality of burial rights and interment becoming more of a stress and an emotional and mental obstacle for people when they should be focused on their own wellbeing and looking after their family's wellbeing as well. We know the burden of organising a funeral can be very, very difficult. Sometimes it is a distraction for the family to get on and do something practical, but always that grief comes through, and we simply cannot have legislative mechanisms that draw out the process of right of interment and determining or appealing who has that right of interment for months and months. It is simply not fair on the family members to inflict that on their mental health and wellbeing at that very, very difficult time.

There are other matters that were raised during the bill briefing which I will briefly touch on. We asked the question: if multiple affected persons make an application to the secretary that might be in conflict, how does the secretary resolve such matters? It was responded to us that in cases where there are conflicting requests the secretary can ultimately determine not to act or may make a compromise as they see fit. Further, we asked: if the cemetery trust becomes the sole holder of the right of interment, can it look after places of interment and subsequently erect memorials? It was stated to us that if an affected person contacts the cemetery trust requesting a memorial or other amendment to be made to a place of interment, the cemetery trust can write to the secretary seeking to alter a place of interment and the secretary can decide to approve or deny such a request.

We also asked if the amendment to section 78 of the principal act caused complications in family disputes. At the bill briefing the department clarified that under the existing wording of the act it is possible for a single holder of a right of interment to exercise that right unilaterally, even if the right is jointly held by one or more other persons. The purpose of the amendment is to ensure that the rights of interment with multiple right holders are exercised jointly except in certain cases as outlined in the bill. This aims to address family disputes that arise from family members unilaterally deciding key factors such as tombstones or memorials without obtaining consent from other right holders.

We undertook a broad consultation in relation to this piece of legislation before us today. We consulted the Cemeteries and Crematoria Association of Victoria, Ballarat General Cemeteries Trust, Remembrance Parks Central Victoria, Geelong Cemeteries Trust, Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust, Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust, Boroondara Cemetery Trust and Broadford Cemetery Trust, so it was very broad ranging.

This amendment bill does go some way to address some of the gaps and lack of clarity in the existing legislation from 2003, and also of course some details which clearly show that we have failed to provide support to victims of family violence who have not had the respect they deserve, where their killer is responsible for the details on a headstone and also the structure of the burial plot, which may involve the killer being laid to rest next to their murder victim.

I would like to just reflect upon the barriers that have been put in place by Karen's killer and just how obstructive he has been in regard to the entire murder and disrespect to Karen's family throughout this

process. I refer to an article from the *Saturday Age* from Saturday, 7 December 2019, by Tammy Mills, entitled ‘Wife killer’s silence spoke volumes’, and I quote:

“[Ristevski] did more than maintain his right to silence. He took active steps to avoid discovery of his crime and how the death was caused,” Chief Justice Anne Ferguson and Justice Simon Whelan said.

“To this day, the respondent has shown not one scintilla of remorse. He has subjected those affected by the death to the most awful state of the unknown.”

...

“Not merely has the respondent refused to reveal how he killed his wife, but he maintained the charade of a grieving husband whilst weaving a web of lies and deceit,” Justice Priest said.

The steps that Karen’s killer took to confuse police, to deliberately mislead investigators and mislead his family are absolutely disgraceful. He hid the body in an area that he knew would be difficult to find and therefore he tried to keep it significantly secret from everybody. He told so many lies to family and police and made a number of pleas which were broadcast on television around calling for either Karen to come home or for Karen’s killer to be found. He refused to disclose—to this day he has refused to disclose—how or why he murdered Karen.

This has led to an enormous amount of uncertainty for the family and an inability in so many ways to be able to close off mentally the horrors of this story. It is their mum, it is their sister, it is their niece, it is someone very close to them, and they absolutely have a right to understand why on earth this death occurred and what led to it. There is no remorse at all from this killer. He has left the family in an awful state of unknown, and yet he was still able, under current legislation, to finalise the wording of the headstone, which says that Karen was a ‘Devoted wife, mother and friend’, and I quote:

You touched our lives with your love, laughter, warmth and grace.

Your memory will be eternal.

Dearly loved, never forgotten and forever in our hearts.

I have no doubt that some of that message is applicable to Karen’s broader family, but it is so inflammatory to put ‘devoted wife’ from the person who murdered her. That must change.

Family violence across the state is increasing. It is almost five years since the Royal Commission into Family Violence handed down its findings and recommendations on family violence in the state of Victoria. This was an important royal commission, as every royal commission is, which put structures in place to make sure that the outcomes of reducing and eliminating family violence are achieved in Victoria. We still have far too many women and children being impacted, and quite significantly, by family violence, particularly in the home.

Today we saw the Crime Statistics Agency release current data around family violence, and horrifically we see family violence reports continue to rise under this government despite it being five years since the Royal Commission on Family Violence. Today we saw a 2.3 per cent increase in offences recorded for the year ending December 2020, particularly around family violence, where we had an increase of 9.4 per cent over the reporting period, or more than 21 additional family violence cases each and every day since the start of 2020. This follows reports of a 20 per cent spike in cases of child-to-parent family violence and comes as many households have faced increased difficulties in reporting or fleeing family violence.

And this simply is not a case of more people reporting family violence. We are also seeing the admission of women who have been victims of family violence increase, with presentations to emergency departments increasing by 16 per cent between 2018–19 and 2019–20. This is the highest number in the past five years. The number of male patients was also higher than at any time in the past five years, at 538 individuals. Also, we know that this is not just increased reporting. We have got increased harm being done. The number of Ambulance Victoria patients where family violence was identified totalled 1894 in 2019–20—the highest since Ambulance Victoria started keeping records of family violence incidents in 2016. That 2019–20 figure was a 15 per cent increase on the previous

year—a 15 per cent increase in the number of ambulance patients where family violence had been identified. This is a terrible, terrible blight on the government, who claim to be making a real impact on family violence. But we are seeing higher and higher rates of criminal offences, of presentation to emergency departments and of ambulance-related cases. It is just not good enough.

It is always the outcomes that we must look at. It is not the flashy media releases. It is not the number of dollars that you throw or the number of recommendations that you implement. The only thing that matters is the people, and the people are the women and the children who are victims of family violence, who continue to be killed, who continue to be assaulted and who continue to be harmed in ways that are often irreparable—mental harm and sometimes physical harm as well. It is simply something we have to put an end to, and until we take this seriously and look beyond just the inputs but look towards the outputs and what harms are being done to their community and really try and make that change, then we are going to just continue to see these incidents increase.

Children are recorded as present at nearly 30 per cent of incidents of family violence in Victoria. Keeping in mind that the number of offences that were reported were well in excess of 65 000, we really need to wonder: what on earth are we doing to our next generation of adults? What are we setting as an example for them on how you behave in the home and for young girls what is acceptable in how you are treated by your partner? We must stop this. We can no longer hide behind comments, as we heard from the Attorney-General today, that this is merely a reflection of increased reporting. It is not more reporting when more women are dying. It is not more reporting when more women are turning up to an emergency department with injuries related to family violence. It is not just increased reporting when we have got Ambulance Victoria carrying more women and children who are victims of family violence. If we do not stop the excuses and the spin, and with Labor particularly, if we have got the Attorney-General trying to spin their way out of the harm that is being done in the community, we are never going to move forward under this government.

It is so, so difficult to be able to talk about this, because I have friends who have been incredibly harmed in family violence incidents. I would like to make special mention of someone who I deem a very close friend, and that is Simone O'Brien, who survived a horrific assault from a man who she had left, who then met her at her home after work and beat her with a baseball bat dozens of times, in front of her children, to the point where ambulance officers who attended the site firstly could not believe she was still alive but secondly told her that her injuries were so severe that it caused such significant swelling around her brain that it actually kept the bone fragments away from causing serious damage to her brain and may have saved her life. To be beaten so badly that it actually saved your life from permanent brain injury is horrific, absolutely horrific, and yet it took years for Simone to get justice for that crime—just too long. But can I just say, Simone has to be one of the bravest, most inspirational women that I have ever had the pleasure to know. She is one of the fiercest advocates for stopping family violence in our communities. She is an advocate and keynote speaker for so many different organisations working to eliminate family violence in our communities and various organisations, not just around Australia but even in New Zealand. I know she spoke to the police over there a couple of years ago. She has taken her pain, her grief and her horrific situation and turned them around so that she is a true champion, making a difference in the community in eliminating and stopping family violence. Simone, I absolutely respect everything that you do. You are an amazing woman, and thank you for being the voice that so many women have not got—the women who are in existing family violence situations; the women who are just too hurt still to be able to speak up and share their story; the women who just do not want to for whatever reason, who may just want to move on with their lives; and of course the women who are no longer with us, women like Karen who cannot speak for themselves any longer.

I do appreciate this bill. The coalition will support this bill. It was too long coming. It should have been an automatic adoption of the recommendation from the Victorian Law Reform Commission *Funeral and Burial Instructions: Report*, which was published five years ago. We need to ensure that women are respected at home, at work, down at their local footy or netball club, at the pub and when

walking home, but also after their death, ensuring that they are appropriately laid to rest, that they are given respect for their funeral service, that families are given their right to grieve in an appropriate way and, most importantly, that that everlasting memorial of their tombstone, their plaque or whatever memorial it is reflects the intent of how that individual would have wanted to be remembered.

I know that Karen lived a full and wonderful life. She was a fantastic mother. She was a great family member. Her brother speaks of her so fondly. Her entire wider family remember how much she gave in life, how much she gave her community and she gave her family. She has the right to be remembered in an enduring way that reflects that. She should never, ever have to be remembered as a person who was murdered by another, because that caused a very untimely and early end to her great life but it should not define her. In no way should she ever, ever be forced to be laid to rest next to her murderer, because that is simply unacceptable in any civil society.

I hope that this legislation will allow the Ristevskis to move ahead, to remove the headstone and to ensure that there is an appropriate memorial put in place for them so that they are allowed to get the closure that they deserve and that Karen is allowed to be immortalised and memorialised in a way that is reflective of and appropriate for her wonderful nature, her great contribution and the love that she had for her family and for her community.

Mr CARBINES (Ivanhoe) (14:34): I am really pleased to make a contribution on the Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Bill 2021. In particular I just want to pick up on a couple of points in the second-reading speech, which states:

This Bill was initiated in response to the high-profile conviction of a person found guilty of the unlawful killing of their spouse. This killer continues to have rights over the victim's place of burial because they are the holder of the right of interment for this grave.

It is unacceptable—

of course, as the minister said in the second-reading speech—

that a killer has the right to make decisions about what type of memorial their victim should have, what words should be inscribed on the memorial, and even who can be buried with their victim.

The member for Lowan eloquently went to the detail of those matters, and I will not go over that ground further. What I will say, though, as was outlined by the minister, is that the bill enables the secretary in giving effect to these changes to direct the variation or surrender of a right of interment to protect affected persons from further harm, pain or suffering that may be caused because of the exercise of a right of interment where there is a causal link between the crime and the harm, pain or suffering. And then lastly, the bill will also apply retrospectively to convictions and coronial findings made and rights of interment purchased or transferred on or after 1 July 2005 up to the commencement of the legislation.

So that is, in a nutshell, the amendments that we are dealing with today. I want to go back I suppose to lay a bit of the groundwork on some of the history that has got us to this point in relation to the legislation. I suppose, firstly, since we first marked time as the human race we have commemorated or reflected on those who have gone before us, and you can see that in the Pyramids or you can see it in local country towns in windswept fields in small cemeteries. You can see that up at the shrine on St Kilda Road. You can see right around the world the way in which in history we have chosen to commemorate those who have gone before us. So it is pretty critical stuff.

As Parliamentary Secretary for Health I am here with my co-conspirator, my fellow Parliamentary Secretary for Health, the member for Melton. In our roles, dealing with health is about dealing with the living, and that is clearly the priority in communities, the priority for the Parliament and the priority for so many people who dedicate their working lives to keeping people well, to keeping people safe and to keeping people healthy. Fundamentally in a public health sense—and haven't we seen through the worldwide pandemic public health come to the fore right across the world and certainly in the way in which it has kept us safe in our communities?—public health also has a responsibility around those who have died. That is significantly the work that is the responsibility of the Minister for Health and

the Department of Health in relation to administration through the statutory authorities that are our cemetery trusts. Remember that we have got something like nearly 500 cemetery trusts across Victoria. The vast majority of those—take out a dozen or so—are largely run by volunteers. We salute them and we thank them for the work that they do in trying times to maintain these places right across Victoria, to show respect, to support families and to be the guardians of our history in communities. That is really significant work that they do.

I chair a Parliamentary working group of cemetery trusts—the terms of reference have been approved by the Minister for Health—that brings together the key cemetery trusts. They are remunerated boards. They are ministerial appointments; all cemetery trusts are ministerial appointments. But in particular in the role of those major cemetery trusts in regional Victoria and in metropolitan Melbourne they ultimately have multimillions of dollars that they are managing. They are massive landholders in our community. They are big employers. They are guardians of hundreds of millions of dollars of perpetual maintenance funding that goes towards the maintenance of those cemeteries of our history here in Victoria. It is very significant work that they do. The Cemeteries and Crematoria Association of Victoria is their stakeholder group. They are also engaged in that task force work that we do, and that is about looking at the big picture of the work that we need to do across the sector to make sure that we are relevant to the communities that we serve and that we continue to look at our pricing, the tendering and the opportunities to secure other land across Victoria to make sure that we are able to continue to provide the memorialisation opportunities that people expect and deserve.

A lot of that goes back to, I should say, a range of work. Firstly, you can go right back to 1996. There was a discussion paper on cemeteries and crematoria and what we were going to do. That was done of course under the Kennett government, and I refer to page 6 of that discussion paper from back in 1996. There was then a discussion paper released in 2001 by former Deputy Premier the Honourable John Thwaites, and it related to the issues that were raised in 1996. One of them was options for privatisation, and you would be pleased to know that when the Bracks government delivered its discussion paper in 2001 it noted very clearly that it would maintain all cemeteries and crematoria in public ownership.

Then we went further than that, and I know that back in 2005 the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003 came into effect. At that time I was working with the then Minister for Health, Minister Pike, a former member for Melbourne. Our Parliamentary Secretary for Health was the now member for Mulgrave, and he led the work to reform the Cemeteries Act 1958 and bring about significant change in the way that cemeteries were governed in Victoria and the way in which we grouped and aligned these multimillion-dollar organisations in regional Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne. That led to the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003, which came into effect in July 2005.

We also saw the Auditor-General's *Review of Major Public Cemeteries* investigation report, which was tabled in July 2006. The government got out ahead, if you like, in relation to the reform that was needed in that sector. These statutory authorities need to be accountable. They are massive landholders in Victoria. These are very significant authorities and organisations. That Auditor-General's review found that cemetery moneys were being spent on travel and accommodation and meals for partners and trust members, which was not considered to be an appropriate use of cemetery funds. We had cemetery trusts where they were not complying with government executive remuneration policies and not all employees had their salaries accounted for tax purposes. There was a range of issues, and the broom was put through the place. I was there at the time when we did that. It was really significant to restore confidence to communities and also to those employees, many of whom were Australian Workers Union members, such as the gravediggers, the gardeners, the people who maintain our cemeteries and the people who provide great services to them.

I do not dwell on that history, but I do make the point that it was a catalyst for much of the change that we benefit from today in the very professional organisations that provide critical supports in our communities, not just those volunteers at the nearly 500 cemetery trusts across the state but those key organisations that are the drivers of better public policy and outcomes in the cemetery sector today. I

was really proud and pleased to be able to lead that work with them on what we need to do into the future and certainly through the COVID pandemic, to get on the phone with those CEOs and board chairs of those major public cemeteries and discuss how they would provide leadership to those volunteer organisations as well to make sure that we were prepared and we were organised and we were ready to support people in our communities who still needed to find ways to memorialise and to go and visit on significant occasions and anniversaries, let alone people who wanted to visit graves and show their respect. There were heartrending stories of people who went above and beyond to provide those opportunities in difficult circumstances and for people to be able to get together online. Many of us have had that opportunity now to be online at memorial services, which was a different way of thinking for so many of our cemetery trusts.

I will also mention that when I was a Banyule councillor I was a cemetery trust trustee at the Heidelberg, Warringal and Pioneer cemeteries, and I got an understanding of the work that is done, perhaps not so much for the burials, but the very significant work that is done to maintain those services in the community.

There is much we could say about the work that has been done here. I think we have outlined very clearly why this legislation is important. No-one likes to think much about death and dying and no-one wants to make plans for the future, but we do need to make sure that our Parliament is keeping the cemetery trust sector accountable by working hand in glove with them in the significant work they do as landholders and as the protectors and guardians of our history, and also to pay great respect and care and love to the people who at their most vulnerable times rely on their support and their commitment and their guidance.

This bill continues to build on the work of the Bracks government, the work of this Parliament under our Premier and the work that needs to be done to continue to keep people safe but to show great respect to the way in which the cemeteries and crematoria sector supports our community. I commend the amendments to the house.

Ms BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (14:44): I rise to speak on the Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Bill 2021. The purpose of this bill is to protect affected persons against further significant harm, pain or suffering that may be caused as a result of the exercise of a right of interment. The bill also makes miscellaneous amendments to the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003, clarifying how rights of interment held by more than one person can be exercised jointly and severally. It provides provision for refunds in the case of voluntary surrender of rights of interment when held by more than one person, clarifies a tenure for cremated human remains and makes other minor amendments.

This bill effectively has come about as a result of a shocking case of the murder of a woman by her husband. A headstone was placed on her grave which had 'In loving memory' or words to the effect that her husband was respectful, and there was nothing further from the truth. It was upsetting for her children, her family, her brothers, her sisters. Obviously it was completely inappropriate. Not only that, but the man who murdered her, her husband, had the right to in time, when he died, lie beside her. So it makes complete and utter sense to change that for those who have been, like in this case, murdered, harmed, and in some cases it even applies to a victim of sexual assault, where a family member may be able to lie beside them. That is completely wrong, and this bill goes exactly to where that needs to be changed. This discussion actually happened before Karen's death. In 2016 the Victorian Law Reform Commission made a recommendation. That was five years ago, so it is a real shame that it has taken the government this long to fully adopt—which is what we are doing here—those recommendations. It is simple, and it has been far too long coming.

This makes me think about what we are really doing to support women. Are we doing enough? Clearly we are not. Not when you see the figures that my colleague the member for Lowan just raised in her speech around the people who are victims of family violence. They are on the increase. Violent crime stats just out today demonstrate the increase in family violence, not decrease, of those cases that are being reported to police. It is just not okay. Women have the right to feel safe. They have the right to

feel safe wherever they are, be it at work, be it on the street or be it at home. Are we doing enough? Clearly we are not. I was at the March 4 Justice just this week with my colleagues, and I back the fact that we as a group of community members, as females together—both sides of this house—must work together. Colleagues—be it my male colleagues, my female colleagues—we can all do so much more.

Mr Southwick interjected.

Ms BRITNELL: That I believe is certainly our intent, as is supported in that comment by the member for Caulfield. Our team can do more and want to do more and will do more.

There was a real white-hot anger at that rally, and I could feel the women just so intent on making a change. You can understand the anger, particularly from women who were present who have been abused. Sexual assault is a really serious crime, and we are not seeing the results in convictions that we see in other serious crimes like murder. Why is that? I am reminded of when I was at school in year 11 studying legal studies, and I remember learning about momentous change that was happening in the legal system where, for the first time—and I learned this I reckon in 1983—women, instead of being in the box facing their perpetrator, could actually do what was called a hand-up brief. The very fact that it was called a hand-up brief or is still called a hand-up brief—I know it is a fairly common legal term still; I am not sure if it is the right one anymore—is kind of bizarre in itself. What it means is that women, instead of facing their perpetrator, could write their report and hand it in as a written format rather than as a verbal format in front of the perpetrator—a great and momentous change. But it made me think: have we done enough? I know we have got the Royal Commission into Family Violence results and we have had 227 recommendations, 64 of which are still to be implemented, but have we really actually looked at what we can do?

I suggest we get the legal minds of this state and perhaps this country together—the brightest and best—and look at the meaningful reform we really need to have so that we get the convictions just like we get in other serious crimes. Because it makes no sense that we are not getting the same level of convictions. It is not that the women are making it up; it is not that it is not true. It is that we need to find ways to support them. There must be an opportunity for us to look around the Western world and see how other nations are perhaps doing it better. I am not saying we should undo the very important rules of law that we have in place, the foundation of our very democracy, but I am wondering: have we really put those minds together and formed a panel that can actually do that review? I think it is time we made a difference, and I believe that meaningful reform is absolutely possible.

I had in my office just a few weeks ago a woman who was terrified for her safety. The intervention order that she had out on her husband was coming to an end. I do not want to give any more details than that, but it struck me as strange that she was relying on that IVO. She was terrified for her life and she gave me lots of reasons and stories that made me also very concerned about her life. The very fact that she was being put into such a fearful place really sent a chill down my spine. I wrote to the minister that day with a sense of urgency, via email, which obviously is instant. I am actually still waiting to hear back, and it was three weeks ago. So we must be able to do better. I know we have got to support our women, and sexual abuse, murder and being treated like this woman was—with absolute fear—is no way for any human being to live.

I think the bill does do one thing that will help change what has happened to Karen, and I pay my respects to the family for the pain and suffering that they have gone through, which no family should have to go through. But it is time, well and truly past time in fact, to make these changes. I hope that we do more than make these changes in this legislation. We look at the figures today of 1800-plus people being treated by ambulance call-outs in the 2019–20 year that are victims of family violence, where 30 per cent of children are actually witnessing these events. We need to support women so they can call these situations out early, know that they will get help and not be like another woman who came to my office having left a marriage situation where there was a lot of emotional violence and withdrawing of ability to see friends and withdrawing of finances. Four years later she said to me, ‘I’m couch surfing, and I really did think, given all the support they talk about for women, that I would at least be supported

with a home'. After 3½ years of couch surfing, for the last six months she has joined up with her friend, pooling their funds and living in motels. But she is on a national disability insurance scheme package. She cannot drive. She has to walk to services that do a great job, she said, supporting her. She cannot move out of the area because those support services are critical for her disability. But come May when we have the May races in Warrnambool, when the motels are full, she is out on the street.

And that is just last week's story. How many stories do we get in our offices where we are just not doing enough? She left her husband in that abusive situation—it was not physical abuse, it was emotional abuse but fairly significant—believing that she would be supported, because that is what we say to women these days. But it is not; it is just not happening enough, and that was why the rally occurred. We can do more, and my suggestion is we get the best legal minds in our nation together, particularly in the state of Victoria, and lead the way of finding better ways to support women. That hand-up brief, the example that I spoke about, was 35 years ago at least. So I think it is time for change, and there are ways to do that.

Mr McGHIE (Melton) (14:54): I rise today to speak on the Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Bill 2021. This is an important piece of reform from the Minister for Health to help address injustices caused to families and unwitting victims of violent crimes. Victoria's legislation regarding cemeteries and crematoria provides very precise directions when it comes to burials and cremations. In particular under the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003 any person who is interred in Victoria is interred in perpetuity. Therefore memorials placed on these interments to commemorate a loved one who has passed away can be permanent reminders for those that are left behind. The person who owns the right of interment on a plot is often the partner or another close family member of the deceased. The right of interment is purchased from the cemetery trusts. They have the legal right to choose the memorials on that plot within the guidelines and rules that the cemetery trust outlines.

Recently through a high-profile case that shocked the Victorian community it was discovered that the perpetrator of a murder held the right of interment over the victim's burial place. Further, her murderer had the right of interment for himself next to her grave and shared a memorial. The family of this victim are obviously sickened that the evil perpetrator, her murderer, could still continue to cause further grief to her family and to her memory by holding the right to her interment. The ability to change this right of interment in these circumstances is not currently included in the act. This is obviously an unintended injustice to her and potentially other victims' families. These amendments seek to right these wrongs and are another signal from this government that Victoria says no to domestic violence and perpetrators. The ability for families to grieve for their loved ones without the emotional violence continuing is a necessary step. The Victorian public clearly do not accept that anyone should have the right to make decisions about a grave or a memorial of the person they have killed.

Memorials on interments do not just contain the names of those who have passed, they also portray a message and tell a story. It is clearly not appropriate that someone who has caused someone's death then has the right to control the words, stories and messages of the deceased. This just simply does not hold up to a community's values. Surviving victims should not have to suffer any further injustices. These amendments are in line with the Andrews Labor government's gender equality strategy. This strategy reinforces the notion that all Victorians should have access to equal power, resources and opportunity and be treated with dignity, respect and fairness.

A right-of-interment holder in most cases is the partner or next of kin. It is possible in some cases that the person who holds that right will organise the funeral or the burial or cremation and only long after this is it discovered that the right holder was the perpetrator of the deceased person's death. Rights of interment can also be granted before death; this is common with family plots or in the planning of a will or in an end-of-life plan. It is also important in many cultural and religious communities.

Amending this bill will give new powers to the Secretary of the Department of Health to vary or remove a right of interment following application by someone who has been directly and adversely affected by an indictable offence and where the perpetrator has been convicted. An application can

also be made by someone who has been directly affected by the death of a person when there has been a coronial finding that a person is responsible for the death and that responsible person is themselves deceased—for example, in the tragic circumstances of a murder-suicide. Currently the secretary does not have these powers, and I think we can agree that this is a power that the secretary should have. These changes will also apply to all convictions, coronial findings and rights of interment purchased or transferred from 1 July 2005. This will line up with the implementation of the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003.

It is appropriate that indictable offences and coronial findings from other jurisdictions and not just Victoria should be considered to ensure an equal application of the new laws. This is of course reflecting that a person may have died in another state or even overseas but has been brought back to Victoria for interment for one of many reasons.

Losing a loved one is always a painful experience. For those who have lost someone in tragic circumstances where someone else has been responsible for that death, it is even more painful. Those suffering that grief should not have any more pain inflicted on them by the right of interment being controlled by the offender. By passing these amendments, the bill will give new powers to the Secretary of the Department of Health to direct the variation or removal of a right of interment held by a right holder. This can be done by written application from an affected person. The secretary will be required to assess the application based on a range of mandatory criteria. These include but are not limited to the nature, level and seriousness of the offence; the coroner's findings about the circumstances of the death; and the nature of the responsible person's responsibility for that death.

The opinions of the affected person or persons and those of the responsible persons or their associates will also be considered along with whether or not remains have already been interred. If the secretary determines that a variation or a removal is required, they are required to take the least restrictive approach. They are required to consider a variation over a forced surrender where a variation is sufficient to adequately prevent further significant harm, pain or suffering for the loved ones. The secretary's decision will be subject to judicial review in the Victorian Supreme Court.

These amendments are important and a necessary step in protecting the rights and dignity of victims of family violence and their families. It is simply unacceptable that across Australia more than one woman per week loses her life at the hands of a partner or former partner. It is a national shame that family violence remains the leading cause of death, disability and illness for women between the ages of 15 and 44 in Australia.

The Andrews Labor government's commitment to ending family violence is unwavering. This government five years ago embarked on the world-first Royal Commission into Family Violence. This is an issue that we have taken seriously, seeking to understand and bring to light some of the horror of family violence. We are committed to rebuilding a broken system, to better support victims as well as to assist perpetrators to change their behaviour, and to end family violence in our state for good. We are committed to the findings of the royal commission and have already acquitted more than two-thirds of the commission's 227 recommendations, and all of those remaining are well underway. We have backed that up with over \$3 billion in investment. We take this issue seriously. We have invested more than any other state and the commonwealth combined. We know that just one death to family violence is one death too many. It is our duty in this government and this Parliament that we all do whatever is necessary to stop the scourge of family violence and to prevent any further deaths.

These amendments try to prevent further hurt and pain to victims and their families. Family violence can be about control and attacks the dignity of those involved. This legislation goes a small way to return that dignity and respect and control to victims and their families. By perpetrating violence and causing a death, offenders lose any dignity and all rights to their victims. These amendments make sure that in a victim's final place of rest their dignity and respect can be returned. It is my hope that the families who carry the ongoing pain and suffering of losing a loved one will no longer have to face the retraumatising process of negotiating with a perpetrator about the memorialisation of their loved

one. There are also some minor technical amendments to the act which will make it easier for trusts to execute their duties to their communities, and I will touch briefly on just one of those.

This bill seeks to require that cemetery trusts offer both perpetual rights of interment for cremated remains and 25-year limited tenure to ensure certainty and choice for all persons. This, although minor, is a change that I welcome. As I have mentioned earlier, a right of interment is in perpetuity. This means that if you choose a burial or are interred in a mausoleum, then this is a permanent interment. However, the provisions are not currently the same for people who choose cremation. Our society is constantly changing. An ever-increasing number of people choose cremation. There are of course many cultural and religious communities where cremation is the preferred option for respecting the remains of a loved one. Giving people the choice of perpetual or limited tenure for a cremation is a good addition to this bill—to give an option to receive the same perpetual memorial if they so choose.

Finally, I would like to take a moment now to thank the courage and determination of Stephen Williams. Stephen has fought for many years to return some dignity to his sister Karen in correcting the injustice continued by his sister's murderer holding the right of interment for her grave. Stephen has erased this injustice and has given dignity back to not just his sister and family but to many other families. I extend my thanks to him and his family for helping correct this injustice, and I commend this bill to the house.

Mr SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (15:04): I rise to make some comments on the Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Bill 2021, and I am pleased to say that the opposition are supporting this bill and what is a very, very important bill with some important changes when it comes to interment. We have seen a number of examples where victims unfortunately, again, have lost their rights at the ultimate period when they have lost their life. But then, in losing their life, the murderer of that victim has the ultimate ability to have that person interred and to take away the ability of any other family members to give them a proper resting place. I am pleased to see that finally change, and I will talk a little bit about that in a tick.

But I also just wanted to especially pay tribute to a couple of people in my electorate that run the Brighton Cemeterians. Lois Comeadow is the treasurer and Malcolm Gray is the president of the Brighton Cemeterians, which is a non-profit community group working actively with the Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust. It has been doing lots of really good work in honouring those people that have been buried in that cemetery. Some 70 000 people are buried in the Brighton cemetery, including some household names. Sir John Monash is buried in the Brighton cemetery. Thomas Bent, a former Premier of Victoria, is buried there, and Squizzy Taylor.

Ms Addison interjected.

Mr SOUTHWICK: Thank you, yes. There are some really interesting names, a lot of war veterans. Brighton Cemeterians run regular theme tours that give visitors the opportunity to discover history, which is really, really important. I commend their work and certainly we would always do whatever we can to ensure they are provided with whatever support is necessary for that work to continue.

This particular bill goes to the crux of supporting victims and their families. We talk a lot about this in this chamber and we talk a lot in many instances about victims that are still here but have lost loved ones. Often they are forgotten, their struggle is forgotten. Quite often it is the murderer that tends to get the limelight and unfortunately there is not enough in terms of being able to support victims. I think the Ristevski case, with particularly Karen and the struggle that that family had to put up with because her murderer—I will not mention his name, but her husband—wanted to not only choose what was put on the gravestone but have himself buried next to her.

I think this change is really, really important. I mentioned earlier the fact that these graves are historical graves. These graves are the opportunity for family—children, grandchildren, generations—to come and visit and to relive those memories. You cannot rewrite history and you cannot have those murderers choosing to erase the hurt that they have done, particularly when they have taken someone's

life. We speak about family violence because what we are talking about here, particularly in Karen's case, is the ultimate example of a horrific family violence incident. That happens far too often. Particularly if you have a woman that has experienced a lifetime of family violence, then ultimately in Karen's case it is the worst affront of all for the perpetrator to have the right to make the decision of where she is buried, how she is buried and what is on the headstone. It is important this is changed.

I know the member for Lowan and the member for South-West Coast made mention of the fact that the Victorian Law Reform Commission did some very, very important work in September 2016 and suggested this change but it has not been taken up until now. I am glad that it has finally been taken up. They suggested that the person with the right to control the funeral and burial arrangements of the deceased person should forfeit that right if they act in any other manner before or after the death of the deceased which the court considers makes it inappropriate for them to retain the right. That was clear back in 2016 that this should change.

It is interesting that we are talking about this bill today, because the crime statistics have come out. The horrific part of the crime statistics is the fact that family violence continues to rise here in this state. We are up, with over a 9 per cent increase in family violence in the last 12-month period and for this quarter. Certainly in the last period we have seen a 21 family violence incident increase each and every day. That is 21 additional family violence incidents that have been recorded as an increase. I know people will say that it is great that people are reporting it, but what we have got to do is tackle it so that these family violence incidents do not happen in the first place. There needs to be more done. We had the Royal Commission into Family Violence back in 2016, and there are still a significant number of those recommendations from that royal commission that have not been taken up. It is really important for more of that work to be done.

We know that during the lockdown one of the huge problems was that many of those most vulnerable of families were locked down with perpetrators of family violence, and these numbers today absolutely show that. They absolutely show that if you are in a home when you are locked down with a perpetrator of family violence and you cannot escape, it is very hard. I do not know how somebody would escape or flee that particular situation. I actually think that the numbers reported today are under-reported. I think there would be a lot of people that have not reported a situation because of the difficult predicament they were in during the lockdown. I do make the point—and hopefully Victoria will never have to go through another outbreak again—that COVID has not passed; we still live with it.

I would say to the government going forward that these are things that need to be considered to ensure that if we do end up with another outbreak, we do not have another statewide lockdown, we have a targeted approach like New South Wales and other states have done, because there are consequences. Mental ill health is one of those consequences and family violence is another. So those figures today are very, very important. When we are talking about family violence, it is important to be honest with ourselves and to be able to say, 'How can we ensure that people can be safe? How can they be safe in their homes? How can they be safe on the streets? How can they be safe on public transport? How can they be safe in their lives?'.

So today we honour Karen Ristevski, who made the ultimate sacrifice and who should be able to be buried in peace. Up until today that was not the case, and up until today her murderer had the ultimate ability to say where she would be buried and what would be on the gravestone. I just think that is appalling, and that is why we are supporting this bill—for every other Karen that exists out there. To every other Karen that has to deal with this out there, we should say to them that they should have the comfort to be able to go about their lives without that kind of abuse. We should do whatever we can to curb that. We should never have to deal, ultimately, with burying a woman, somebody elderly or a child that experiences some kind of harassment or violence against them.

This is a power situation, ultimately, where one person exerts power over another, regardless of who that individual is. It needs to stop, and we need to do everything we can to support those victims. So

today it is about victims. It is about supporting victims, and we should always do everything in this chamber to support victims and their families to make sure they have a voice.

Ms ADDISON (Wendouree) (15:14): I rise today to speak in support of amending the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003. That will ensure that Victorian families are protected from harm and distress after the death of a loved one from a violent crime. Our government believes that an offender who has been convicted of killing a person should not have the right to make decisions about the grave or memorial of the person they have killed. This bill will deny killers that right, instead giving the final say to the families left behind.

These changes are not designed to further punish perpetrators of serious crime or associates of perpetrators; they are designed to protect and prevent people affected by that crime from enduring further pain, hurt and suffering. The changes proposed in this bill will enshrine in Victorian law that Victorian families will have the right to make decisions over their loved one's grave or memorial after their death in cases of murder-suicide and indictable offences.

I genuinely wish to thank the Minister for Health, the staff of the ministerial office and the department for the work that they have done to bring this bill to the house and for the stakeholder consultation that has occurred. It is very important to undertake stakeholder consultation, and the department have sought feedback from the cemetery trusts and the sector and will continue to consult with them as the bill is implemented. Impacted families, including the family of Karen Williams, have also been consulted about the proposed changes and have welcomed the move to protect the rights of victims and families.

I am very pleased to speak following the contributions of our two excellent parliamentary secretaries for health, the member for Ivanhoe and the member from Melton, and I thank them for their contribution. In listening to the member for Melton's contribution, his empathy and compassion just shine through. He is such an outstanding member of this Parliament and brings such depth and empathy to us, so I am so pleased to be able to follow the member for Melton.

As the member for Ivanhoe stated, he actually chairs the parliamentary group of cemetery trusts, and I was pleased to welcome him my electorate of Wendouree in December 2019 to meet with the Ballarat Cemeteries Trust CEO, Annie De Jong, and the then chair, Judy Verlin, AM, to discuss a range of issues and have a tour of the Ballarat cemetery. The Ballarat cemetery trust provides a great service to my community and offers comfort and support to families of all interred there. Our Ballarat cemetery offers much choice for burial, including a carefully maintained lawn section; the baby's garden and tree of memories; a contemplation garden; the terraces; the conifer garden; and the Dreamtime, a special place of belonging for those to be buried within their ancestral homeland of Wadawurrung country. It also offers a variety of memorialisation options for cremated remains. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the trust board chair, now Gayle Boschert, and board members for the good work that they do, as well as Ballarat cemetery staff operations manager Charlie Stebbing, chief financial officer John Noone and all the workforce there. As mentioned earlier, the cemetery trusts were consulted, and this bill will have no major impacts on the current governance arrangements of cemetery trusts and the important work that they do.

The purpose of this bill and this important legislation is to provide respect for the victims and their families and friends by denying rights to the perpetrators who are responsible for the victim's death. This bill proposes to protect people against significant harm, pain and suffering by making changes to the rights of interment by or in favour of certain persons and makes various other amendments to the act in relation to rights of interment and for other purposes. The bill also makes a number of minor technical and other amendments to clarify ambiguity and address inconsistencies, which will improve the administration and the sector's understanding of the act, which is very important.

So we are going to talk a lot during this debate about the right of interment. A right of interment refers to a specific place of interment within a public cemetery. It could be a plot, a grave, a crypt or a

cremation niche. It is important to clarify a common misconception that the purchaser of a right of interment actually buys the land associated with a cemetery plot, grave, crypt or cremation niche when the right of interment is purchased. This assumption is not correct. It is important to clarify this, as all public cemeteries in Victoria are situated on Crown land. So let me be really clear: what is actually purchased is the right to determine who can be interred in that grave or other type of place of interment and the type of memorialisation, if any, to be established at the place of the interment. That is very important because at the heart of this legislation we are addressing this issue of the right of interment.

The right-of-interment holders are usually next of kin or family members, but they can also be held by multiple parties. So what this legislation is seeking to do is to amend the power that the Secretary of the Department of Health has, and I will read directly what we are going to do. The bill will provide the Secretary of the Department of Health with the power to:

... direct the surrender or variation of a right of interment and ensure that the rights of all victims and other persons directly and adversely affected by serious crimes are given appropriate respect and a say in what happens to the remains and resting place of their loved ones.

Therefore the changes being introduced in this bill will prevent a convicted killer from having the right to make decisions about what type of memorial the victim should have and will prevent them from determining what words should be inscribed on the memorial, and they will have no rights over who can be buried with the victim. Importantly, this bill has Australia-wide application and considers indictable offences from all Australian jurisdictions to ensure an equitable application of the scheme. Once passed, a 'relevant offender' is a person convicted on or after 1 July 2005 of an indictable offence, and whose appeal period for the conviction has expired, or whose appeal has been finally determined. Safeguards are in place to ensure appropriate consideration is given to the views of affected people.

This bill is being introduced following the high-profile conviction of a person found guilty of unlawfully killing their spouse and the campaign undertaken by her family to bring about change. I wish to acknowledge the family of Karen Williams and offer them my deepest sympathies for the pain and suffering they have experienced following the murder of Karen by her husband in 2016. I also want to recognise Karen's brother, Stephen Williams, and other family members for their strong advocacy to bring about this important change, not just for their family but for many other Victorian families now and, sadly, into the future. This case identified a gap in current legislation and a circumstance that is out of step with community expectations and values. The Williams family deserve to have the right to make decisions about how Karen is remembered, including where she is laid to rest. This bill will act retrospectively and will mean that Karen's killer will be denied rights over Karen's place of burial and will no longer be the holder of the right of interment for her grave.

This bill is consistent with our government's approach to gender equality. The Andrews Labor government's gender equality strategy reinforces that all Victorians are to be treated with dignity, respect and fairness and that everybody should have equal access to power, resources and opportunities. With this bill today we are saying dignity and respect will apply not just in life but also in death. The amendments put forward by this bill have been carefully considered with relevance to family violence, and I am pleased that this bill has been drafted to enable persons affected by the death of a victim of murder-suicide to make an application to the secretary under the scheme. I will briefly respond to the member for Caulfield's comments regarding our response to family violence. Victoria has invested more than \$3 billion to make Victoria a safer place for families and address the scourge of family violence. We have agreed to implement the 227 recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence and we are doing all we can to stop preventable deaths. So at the heart of these proposed amendments is dignity and respect for the dead and the living. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms CONNOLLY (Tarneit) (15:24): I too rise to speak on the Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Bill 2021. This bill is really about strengthening Victoria's interment rights. But from listening to the contributions in the house this afternoon this bill goes far beyond that. It is about something much more important that needed addressing urgently about the actions and the domestic

violence that are going on behind closed doors and in the homes of families across this state. Most certainly it is another very, very important step forward in our government's fight against the scourge of family violence.

Now, my colleagues here this afternoon have talked about the extraordinary tragic circumstances that have brought about this change, and I too pay tribute to Karen Williams and her family and absolutely condemn the way in which this woman died at the hands of her partner. It is a very unfortunate reminder of the scourge that family violence has wrought right across our local community and indeed our nation. It causes us to reflect on the damning statistic that one woman every single week is killed in this country as a result of family violence, and it certainly does remain the leading cause of death for women aged between 15 and 44 in this country. For all of us here today and those listening, I am sure we can agree that one death per week is far, far too many. These women are more than statistics. They are women in our community, they are friends, they are family. Karen was someone's daughter, someone's sister and a mother. These are people we are talking about. They are no different from you and I, and Karen's death was entirely preventable, which adds to just why the death of Karen was just so unbelievably tragic.

Our government believes in giving all Victorians access to power, to resources and to opportunities and supports the idea that everyone in this state should be treated with dignity and should be treated with respect. That is essentially what this bill does. We know that our government takes family violence incredibly seriously. The member for Wendouree in the last part of her contribution—the last 60 seconds—talked very much about the Royal Commission into Family Violence, a very important royal commission here in the state that shone bright light on the deeply devastating impacts that family violence continues to wreak on families here in Victoria and Australia as a whole. Almost two-thirds of those 227 recommendations that came out of that royal commission are already being implemented. The other third are on their way. As the member for Wendouree pointed out, this has been more than \$3 billion worth of investment. That is more than any other government in this country has ever spent on preventing family violence in this country. In fact it is more than any other government across the states combined has ever spent. The amendments in this bill might seem a little bit small, but this is a significant change that will make a huge difference in the lives of families left behind and to the family of Karen Williams, who are grieving her death. This is most certainly a positive step in the right direction.

Under our current laws when someone dies, the right of interment—the right to determine how and when someone is buried—goes to the next of kin, and that essentially is always the spouse. I think we can all agree here that it is a grave injustice that someone who kills their partner retains the right to determine how and where that person is buried. That is why this change was specifically recommended by our government's gender equality strategy.

I note that changes to the right of interment are essentially a tricky thing. In 2016 the Victorian Law Reform Commission completed a review of Victoria's burial laws. They examined the right of interment and whether a deceased person should be able to leave binding instructions for their burial, such as through their will. Because the reality is the deceased has no right to determine their own burial and no actual guarantee that their wishes will in fact be respected.

When I think of Karen and what has happened to her and what has brought about this change we are all talking about today I am also reminded that this issue is not just confined to a single woman and a single family. This is an issue that does not just affect women in our state. It affects people from different faith backgrounds, it affects people from the LGBTIQ community and so, so many others who are at risk of having their wishes disrespected when they are deceased. That is why I know that the changes that this bill makes are a step in the right direction.

Now, what specifically is changed by the bill is that the Secretary of the Department of Health will be empowered to change or to remove a right of interment from someone who has committed an indictable offence. This application can be made by someone who is directly and adversely affected by that offence or when a coronial finding is made that the person responsible for causing a death is

themselves deceased—and we see that very tragically where there is a murder-suicide. What this does is not intended to punish people any more than they have been, but it gives protection to the victims of that crime from further pain and further grief as a result of the offender exercising a right to interment. Because here we have a high-profile case of Miss Williams, where a man has murdered his wife and now has the audacity to decide that she should be buried next to him. The current laws allow him to do this. He has the right of interment. There currently exists no power that the Victorian government has to address this matter or indeed similar situations, and right now the family of the victim, Karen's family, are being forced to negotiate with her murderer—their loved one's murderer—about how she is to be buried. Now, that is completely unconscionable, and I for one cannot begin to understand the trauma and true devastation that Karen's family is currently going through. I say to Karen's family: my heart and my thoughts and my prayers go out to you all.

In a lot of cases, we know there are no convictions, and that means a lot of families who lose people they care about to family violence suffer in silence. I do really hope that one day we will reach a day when the number of women who are killed by their partner each week is indeed zero, but we are most certainly not there yet. We may never be able to reach that goal, but that most certainly does not mean we should not be trying.

The other key area that this bill makes some changes to is its operation of our cemetery trusts that administer our local cemeteries, and I would like to acknowledge the work of the Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust in administering and managing our local cemeteries in and around Melbourne, including my community's local cemetery in Werribee. This bill is going to help trusts by clarifying their powers both in a general sense and when it comes to a delegation of powers. The bill is also going to remove the requirement for outstanding burial costs to be passed on to friends and associates of a deceased should the deceased or their estate be unable to afford them. Now, this is both unenforceable and absolutely insensitive, which is why I am sure that no-one in this house will entirely miss this provision under the act.

This bill makes a small number of changes, but they are ones that I think will deliver just outcomes—just outcomes for the families of victims of violent crimes. Our government is absolutely steadfast in its commitment to eliminating family violence in this state, and this bill makes it abundantly clear that perpetrators of homicidal offences should not be able to hold the right of interment of their victims. Their families deserve much better than that, and it is for this very reason that I commend the bill to the house.

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) (15:34): I rise today to speak on the Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Bill 2021 before us. The bill primarily provides the Secretary of the Department of Health with the power to direct the surrender or variation of a right of interment and ensures that the rights of all victims and other persons directly and adversely affected by serious crimes are given appropriate respect and a say in what happens to the remains and resting places of their loved ones. The bill also makes a number of other minor and technical amendments.

I was listening to the member for Lowan, and she outlined the Ristevski case in quite some detail, and so I do not intend to go into that again. But I would say that my heart also goes out to the family who had to go through and endure such horrendous circumstances for such a long time. There was a great deal of media coverage of the crime, and we all recall it well. There were some extraordinary facts involved in that case, but ultimately what I can say is that it was clear that there was a tragic loss of life of Karen. She was a woman in her own right who did not belong to anyone. She may have been a wife and a mother and a sister, but she was an individual who should not have had her life taken from her.

The statistics for family violence are stark, and we regularly revisit them, but I think we just have to. We have to keep on repeating them until something changes, until they start going down, and hopefully one day they will have disappeared. Approximately one-quarter of women in Australia have experienced at least one incident of violence by an intimate partner. On average one woman a week in Australia is killed by her intimate partner. Most victim-survivors of intimate partner violence are

women. Approximately one in five Australian women—18 per cent, or 1.7 million—has experienced sexual violence. Partner violence often occurs when women are pregnant. Intimate partner violence is the greatest health risk factor—greater than smoking, alcohol and obesity—for women in their reproductive years. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience high rates of violence, with significant health impacts. An estimated three in five Indigenous women have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner since the age of 15. Over one-third of women with disabilities experience some form of intimate partner violence. Children often see the violence between their families. Family violence is a factor in so many of the child protection cases that we see.

Many women do not seek help about their experience of violence. Of women who have experienced violence by a current partner, just over 54 per cent had sought advice or support about the violence they had experienced. They say that 82 per cent never even contact the police. As someone who spent 35 years in legal practice as a family lawyer before I came into this place, I can say that representing women and children in these violent situations always left me shocked and distressed when I heard their stories. As a matter of course with every woman that came in I would ask her whether she had been hit, whether she had been the victim of family violence. In the early days I used to be surprised when someone would say, ‘Oh, not really. Just a smack or a bit of a hit’ or, ‘Pushed me up against the wall’ or did this—like that was not family violence.

There is such an expectation among so many women that they just seem to accept so much of this. It is not acceptable, and often it takes a great deal of time for women to get to the point where they feel empowered enough to do it. There is no doubt that the additional services, all the things that have been put in place in providing resources for women, do make a difference, but when you see these numbers, they are so great. It is like you feel like you may never be able to provide the level of service that is truly needed.

In Shepparton in my early years in family law practice Sergeant Ken O’Connor was the only policeman who dealt with family violence. There was probably a notion that it did not happen very much anyway and only one policeman might be required, and it was only part of his job. Today we have a family violence unit with I think at least six men and women operating in it, and they are busy all the time. And of course the reporting rate has gone up, so there are many more cases. Our local Magistrates Court has family violence days now where that is basically all the cases that are being heard for the morning or the afternoon, just depending on how many are listed.

There is no doubt that there has been a real shift in the way people think over all those years, that there is much more of an intolerance and that the police have become more involved. I remember the days when you would ring up the police and say, ‘There’s something going on next door’ or, ‘There’s a fight going on down the street’, and they would say, ‘Is it just a domestic?’. That was just a classic statement that so many people used to report. Even on attendance at a house sometimes in the old days that was the sort of response the police had.

A lot of things have changed, and they have been really welcome changes. There is no doubt that the Royal Commission into Family Violence has highlighted the issues surrounding it. I was here in the Parliament when Rosie Batty addressed us during the last term of Parliament, and the work that she has done has been truly outstanding to raise the profile and get a better understanding of what family violence is, because it is not just being hit or killed or thrashed in some way, it is also all of that controlling behaviour that so often exists in relationships and that can in itself be just incredibly damaging to women.

During the course of last year there was much talk about the likely increase in family violence as a result of the lockdowns and people being at home and the very significantly changed circumstances as a result of the pandemic. There was a recent Monash University paper that affirmed that indeed the figures had gone up and that the complexity and level of violence was greater in so many cases. This legislation has just highlighted a case of terrible family violence where a woman’s life has been taken. It is making provision for some justice for families, those left behind, the loved ones, to be able to deal

with the remains of their family member in a way that is respectful and appropriate and at a time when people are just so distressed and vulnerable in themselves. So I certainly welcome this change.

I think probably many people did not even realise that the law was as it was, and there would be very few who would disagree that this is appropriate. The March 4 Justice that we saw earlier this week is something that is, I think, a response to so many things that are happening in our society at the moment, including workplace harassment. We have seen the Brittany Higgins exposure, telling her story alleging that she was raped in federal Parliament. We are seeing how federal Parliament is dealing with, or in some cases not dealing with, the issues. We have heard Grace Tame speak very eloquently not only at the National Press Club but in the speech at the March 4 Justice in Hobart on Monday. These are outstanding young women who are now coming forward, and many of them will become leaders as people like me stop being leaders, in a sense. It is very heartening to see that there is a real passion and desire in the next generation of young women to do something about this.

I have a daughter. So many of us do. We do not want this sort of life for our children. We want our daughters to be safe in their relationships and to know that they can stay well and enjoy good health and a good relationship. Until we address these issues that are just around us every day, that have been exposed continually in recent weeks at various levels, we will not achieve much. But we are talking about them. I have been around since the women's movement of the 1970s and have seen a great deal of change in what has happened with the women's movement. I feel quite strongly that we are at a point now where we are not going to go back. This is just another monumental step that means we are demanding that things change, that violence against women must stop and that women will no longer tolerate this sort of treatment that they have been subjected to for so long.

Ms SETTLE (Buninyong) (15:44): I too rise to speak on the Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Bill 2021. Before I proceed, I would just like to acknowledge the contribution from the member for Shepparton and in particular to thank her for her work in supporting victim-survivors in her previous role. It is very important. We rely on people like the member for Shepparton in the workforce to protect women in our community.

When I looked at this bill and looked at how I would speak to it, I was really quite moved, and I must say I belong in the category of people that were not aware that this was the case and was really shocked to read it. This bill is important on several levels. It is around that respect that we owe people into eternity. It is interesting, I recently visited the Smythesdale Cemetery, which is a small cemetery in my electorate. They had received a \$5000 grant from this government to put up plaques about the achievements of women on the goldfields. All of the plaques exist about the men of the goldfields and none about the women. It was really moving to walk through that cemetery and talk about the women that played such a vital role. Of course when I think about that, what it reminds me is that those headstones stand for, if not eternity, a long, long time. It is not just in the moment but for many, many years to come that those words will be reflected, and so it is incredibly important that we ensure that families and indeed victims are acknowledged in the way they would like to be.

This government is taking action to ensure the Victorian families who become the unwitting victims of violent crimes are protected from further harm or distress after losing loved ones. In reading about this case that this was based on, I could only imagine the horror that the family must have felt in realising that they do not have control over this situation, so I am very, very glad that this government has responded and reacted to this to ensure that no other families need to go through that sort of distress. No-one should have the right to make a decision about the grave or memorial of a person that they have killed.

The changes outlined in this bill will ensure that all Victorian families affected by indictable offences or by death due to murder-suicide have the right to make decisions about their loved ones' graves and memorials after their deaths. It is absolutely unacceptable that a killer has the right to make decisions about what type of memorial the victim should have and what words should be inscribed on the memorial, or even who should be buried with the victim. It really is fabulous that we have

acknowledged this gap. I often think being in this place is really about trying to find the gaps, trying to find the things that need improving. Without question, in the legislation as it stands now there is a horrendous gap, and I am very, very glad that this bill seeks to change that.

This bill will give new powers to the Secretary of the Department of Health to vary or remove a right of interment following an application by someone who has been directly or adversely affected by an indictable offence where the perpetrator has been convicted. A right-of-interment holder is the person who can authorise a burial or interment of cremated remains as well as the establishment of a memorial such as a headstone or plaque. Right-of-interment holders are usually the next of kin or family members. The right can also be jointly held by multiple parties. These changes will apply to all convictions, coronial findings and rights of interment from 1 July 2005. An application can also be made by someone who has been directly affected by the death of a person when there has been a coronial finding that a person is responsible for that death. This bill was initiated in response to a very high-profile conviction of a man—I will not use his name—that was found guilty of the unlawful killing of his wife. In this circumstance I choose not to acknowledge him but rather to acknowledge his victim in this.

Of course this was a terrible, terrible case of family violence. I think that one of the truly extraordinary things about this Andrews government—or I should say the previous Andrews government in the 58th Parliament—is that it held a world-first royal commission into family violence; no-one had done that. I think that it shows the absolute commitment this government has to gender equality, to protecting women. I noticed in the contribution from the member for South-West Coast that she suggested that perhaps we were not doing enough. There is always more that we can do, but I was a little distressed to hear the suggestion that perhaps the royal commission had not got it right and that a collective of lawyers might be better placed. I, for one, absolutely applaud the work that the royal commissioners did, and the recommendations they have come up with are extraordinary. This government is implementing absolutely every one of them. Very sadly, Ballarat, my home town, has higher than average family violence statistics, and they are very distressing. I met with our new superintendent recently and we talked about what sorts of issues face police in Ballarat, and very, very sadly, this is one of the main call-outs that they are involved in. So for me, you know, on a very localised level, the work that this government and the royal commission put in first to identify how we can try and really change this is very close to home and very fundamental.

There has been a lot done across the state around family violence, but in Ballarat, for me, one of the really, really fabulous moments was seeing the Orange Door network open in October last year. That was a \$6 million investment from this government. It is really quite an extraordinary model, the Orange Door. Meeting all of the service providers that work within it, I saw their commitment to women and families, to providing a safe space and to providing all of those wraparound services—because we know domestic violence does not just stand alone. A woman trying to leave with her family in those circumstances is faced with a whole array of different issues that need resolving, be it housing or be it support in funding or medical—all of those things—and the Orange Door model, which brings those together and really wraps around someone in those situations, is really crucial support in our area and a very significant outcome of the royal commission. So I am very glad that the Orange Door network is going to be rolled out across 17 regions by 2022. And I would say to all of my colleagues that it makes a real difference having one in your area; you will be very delighted to see it come.

So of course we are really getting back to the substantive nature of this bill. In some way I hope it honours Karen Williams. She was subjected to the worst form of domestic violence, and the thought that in some way her family have to continue to live in pain with the notion that they did not have the right of interment and the thought that perhaps her killer might rest beside her or indeed have any say over what is on the tombstone is just unfathomable. And so I am very, very glad that this bill has come into being, and I am very glad that all sides of the house support this bill. I think, as the member for Shepparton said, most of us probably were not aware that this gap existed, and I struggle to imagine

that anyone would in any way object to this gap being closed. I know that the family were very thankful for this. If I may quote the brother, Stephen Williams:

I'd like to thank the Victorian government and in particular the ... health department who I first approached two years ago.

...

No longer will perpetrators get to have the final say, as that belongs to the families of the victims who are left behind.

Future unnecessary pain and suffering can now be avoided.

This is for those families, for all of those families, that have suffered so much already. This bill is really for them, and I commend it to the house.

Mr KENNEDY (Hawthorn) (15:54): I rise to speak on the Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Bill 2021. I suppose someone of my own advanced years does not like talking about cemeteries and crematoria as a normal discussion point. However, I was certainly moved in the preparation by what this is about, and I particularly also join with the member for Buninyong in thanking the member for Shepparton. I think, just as an aside, the house often benefits from people who have got experience in these fields, and this is a good example here in regard to family law—just as in regard to medicine I am always interested to hear what the member for Brunswick has to say.

So, you know, when I am looking at any particular bill—I am into mantras—I adopt a sort of a mantra that says, 'Experience; what is the experience? Reflect on that experience. What is the reflection on it?'. And then you take action to remediate, to expand, to develop and so on. And then you conduct an evaluation. And then time passes and you start it all over again. Well, this is a good example of something that does not really bear much reflection, or actually it is almost a sort of a statement of the obvious. But it is also very easy I think sometimes, when you move into the statement of the obvious, to think, 'Oh, well, this'll solve that one' et cetera. This is just such a tiny, small part of the issue of family violence. It is a no-brainer, I suppose.

The bill will make Victoria a fairer place to live by amending the act. It is another step taken by the Andrews Labor government to ensure all Victorians have equal access to power, resources and opportunity and are treated with dignity, respect and fairness. The bill will give the Secretary of the Department of Health the power to direct the surrender or variation of a right of interment. This amendment is really what you might call a no-brainer, as I just said. I am sure that no-one in this house would argue that a convicted killer's reach and influence should continue to haunt their victim in their final resting place. There they deserve to be appropriately memorialised and left in peace. The bill will guarantee that this is the case.

The case of Karen Williams has dominated the discussions, and rightly so. Having been murdered by her spouse, she faced the prospect of eventually being buried in the same grave as him. Thanks to Ms Williams's family, this travesty never came to pass. The government was notified, and that is why we are here today, to fix this loophole in the state legislation so that no victim's family ever have to suffer the indignity of enduring further harm and distress after losing a loved one. No killer deserves the right to decide how their victim should be memorialised.

The spectre of family violence has a long, sad history in this country. The amendments in this bill come in the wake of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence, a world first. While this bill does not explicitly address one of the recommendations, it nonetheless adds to the government's response to the royal commission's findings. This bill provides further protection for women, children and families who have been victims of family violence.

It is a sombre fact that we still live in a society where more than one woman loses their life every week at the hand of a partner or former partner. Family violence is still the leading cause of death, disability and illness for women aged 15 to 44 in Australia. We recognise these shocking facts, knowing that the

Andrews Labor government's commitment to ending family violence is unwavering and that bills such as the one we are debating this afternoon need to be passed to make a difference.

This government has already acquitted two-thirds of the 227 recommendations that came out of the royal commission, and progress on the remaining recommendations is well underway. This will amount to an investment of \$3 billion to address family violence, a commitment unmatched by the other states and the commonwealth combined. We are taking family violence seriously. One death in a family context is quite simply one too many—and quite unacceptable in any shape or form.

So what will this bill do? To grant victims the respect in death they deserve, the proposed amendments will include discretionary powers for the Secretary of the Department of Health to direct the modification or surrender of a right of interment. These powers will only be activated in the event that coronial findings, indictable offences or situations of murder-suicide can be proven.

Unfortunately many victims never see the justice they deserve manifest in a conviction. By adding coronial findings as an alternative trigger for these powers, affected families will be able to exercise their entitlements in the absence of an indictable offence. No-one should suffer in silence. Once this bill has passed, a victim's family will be able to lodge a written application to change or remove the right of interment that applies to the victim if the current holder of the right is in fact responsible for their demise. The secretary of the department will assess the application based on a range of criteria, and these include the circumstances of the indictable offence or the coroner's findings about the death and the nature of the guilty person's responsibility for the death, the opinions of the affected person or persons, the opinions of the responsible persons or their associates, whether or not remains have already been interred, along with consideration of the person's human rights in accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006. If the secretary determines that a variation or removal is required, they will be required to take the least restrictive approach. If a variation of the right of interment is sufficient to adequately prevent further significant harm, pain or suffering for the loved ones, then it will be the preferred option over a forced surrender. The secretary's decision will also be subject to judicial review in the Victorian Supreme Court.

If passed, these powers will apply retrospectively to all convictions following 1 July 2005. This is to acknowledge that the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003 came into force at that time. The department will monitor the function of this legislation during the initial stages of implementation and should a significant amount of applications come through for offences prior to 2005, this retrospective provision may be extended. So we are back to what I started with, that mantra of experience, reflection, action and evaluation, and hopefully that is what it should be with all legislation, including this bill.

In conclusion, in summary this bill is desperately needed to address a gaping hole in our legal framework. It will remove a killer's undeserved power to determine the nature of their victim's burial and memorialisation. Instead these powers will rightly be reassigned to the victims themselves and their families.

This work is not only necessary to correct isolated injustices but forms part of the Andrews Labor government's broader initiative started by the Royal Commission into Family Violence to achieve greater gender equity in the state of Victoria. This bill will put provisions in place to better protect women, children and families. Of course we recognise that it is never sufficient just to have a whole string of individual, small amendments like this that might only apply to a very small number of people. We have to be all the time seeing this as part of a bigger picture of doing everything we can to limit the amount of violence. Violence will never be stopped like that, but to keep limiting it and keep reducing it, and this is a step in the right direction. I therefore commend this bill to the house.

Mr HALSE (Ringwood) (16:04): It is a privilege to be speaking in this chamber this afternoon on this bill following a number of fine contributions, just then from the member for Hawthorn and from others in this chamber this afternoon. This is yet another bill that shows the Andrews Labor government is taking action to support Victorian families who become unwitting victims of violent

crimes so that they are protected from further harm or distress after losing loved ones. It is a bill that comes to the floor of the house in an important week, when women were marching in the streets just days ago to protest against all forms of violence.

At present the law technically provides for a situation, as a number of my colleagues have noted, that any reasonable observer would see to be unacceptable: that a perpetrator of family violence could have the right to make decisions about what type of memorial their victim should have, what words should be inscribed on their memorial and even who buries the victim of their crimes. It is horrifying to contemplate the trauma that could cause to victims and their families, and it is clearly unacceptable. That is why the changes outlined in this important bill to ensure that all Victorian families affected by indictable offences or by a death due to murder-suicide have the right to make decisions over their loved one's grave and memorial after their death are so, so important. In line with the Victorian government's gender equality strategy this is a bill informed by a principle that we must reinforce: that all Victorians should have access to equal power, resources and opportunities and be treated with dignity, respect and fairness. The fundamentals and the justifications for it are clear and simple, but I will cover some of the details of the changes outlined right now.

The right-of-interment holder is the person who can authorise the burial or interment of cremated remains as well as the establishment of a memorial, such as a headstone or plaque, as has been covered earlier. They are usually the next of kin or family members, and the right can also be jointly held by multiple parties. At present the role is rigidly set and difficult to legally change, but this bill will give new powers to the Secretary of the Department of Health, as the member for Hawthorn just noted, to vary or remove a right of interment following an application by someone who is being directly or adversely affected by an indictable offence and where the perpetrator has been convicted. Under the system outlined an application can also be made by someone who has been directly affected by the death of a person where there has been a coronial finding that a person is responsible for that death and that responsible person is themselves deceased—for example, in the tragic circumstances of a murder-suicide.

These changes will apply to all convictions, coronial findings and rights of interment purchased or transferred from 1 July 2005 to line up with the implementation of the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003. Indictable offences and coronial findings or the equivalent from all jurisdictions will be considered to ensure an equal application of the new laws. This bill is not about further punishment for the perpetrator or the associates of perpetrators following the commission of a serious crime. Rather, it is about protecting and preventing people affected by that crime from enduring further pain, hurt and suffering. Losing a loved one in these tragic circumstances is hard enough without having to be further subjected to pain by the exercise of a right of interment by or in favour of an offender.

This bill was initiated in response to the high-profile conviction of a person found guilty of the killing of their spouse, as has been documented in this chamber this afternoon. That killer continues to have a right over the victim's place of burial because they are the holder of that right of interment for this grave. There is currently no power in the act to address this matter or similar situations. The family of Karen Williams deserve the right to make decisions about how she is remembered, including where she is laid to rest.

This bill does go further than just this one case, however. And because of the courage of Karen's brother, Stephen, and her family, this gap in the legislative framework will be closed to stop killers and convicted offenders from wielding power and control over a victim's place of rest. These amendments are a critical step in protecting the rights and dignity of victims of family violence and their families. In Australia more than a woman a week loses her life at the hands of a partner or former partner. Family violence remains the leading cause of death, disability and illness for women aged between 15 and 44 in Australia. Family violence is endemic across our country, a pandemic that riddled our community long before COVID-19 arrived.

The Andrews Labor government's commitment to ending family violence is unwavering. Five years ago this government embarked upon a world-first Royal Commission into Family Violence. We took a bright light to our state's and this country's darkest secret and committed to rebuilding a broken system to better support victims, to assisting perpetrators to change their behaviour and to ending family violence in our state for good. We have acquitted more than two-thirds of the commission's 227 recommendations, as has been noted, and all of the remaining recommendations are well underway, with over \$3 billion of investment, more than any other state and the commonwealth combined, an indication of the seriousness to which this state treats this issue. One death in a family violence context is one too many, and we are doing everything we can to stop these entirely preventable deaths. In the meantime, we will do everything we can to ensure that victims of family violence are granted the dignity, control and respect in death that they deserve.

There is absolutely one thing for sure: no perpetrator should have the right to make any decisions about their victim's grave or memorialisation, and under the amendments in this bill they will not. The families who carry the ongoing pain and suffering of losing a loved one will no longer have to face the retraumatising process of negotiating with the perpetrator about the memorialisation of their loved one, and that includes families who do not have an indictable offence conviction. The proposed amendments, to include a discretionary power for the Secretary of the Department of Health to direct the modification or surrender of the rights of interment on the basis of coronial findings alongside indictable offences and situations of murder-suicide, are an important step in acknowledging the rights and dignity of victims of family violence. Coronial findings as an alternative threshold trigger will allow affected family members of victim-survivors of family violence to exercise their right-of-interment entitlements in the absence of an indictable offence conviction. Indictable offences vary between jurisdictions, which will result in varied results for similar cases.

But more importantly we know that too many victims of family violence suffer in silence. Many victims never see that justice they deserve manifest in a conviction. Hopefully one day provisions in law just like this one are not necessary, because we hope one day we do not lose a single person—another person—to family violence. So I commend this bill to the house and thank the minister for the work in preparing it for this chamber.

Mr BRAYNE (Nepean) (16:14): I also rise today to speak on the Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Bill 2021, following a long line of speakers, including obviously the member for Ringwood just then, the member for Hawthorn before and of course the member for Shepparton a bit earlier. The Andrews government has been a consistent supporter of addressing systemic unfairness in society, and this bill is no exception. All Victorians should feel they are treated with dignity, respect and fairness, and it is through actions such as this legislation that we will move closer to the goal of equality, regardless of gender, sexuality or identity.

This legislation has been initiated in response to a high-profile conviction which highlighted a gap in the existing legislative arrangement regarding the rights of victims. Under the existing framework a person convicted of the unlawful killing of their spouse retains control over the right of interment for this grave. This means that a killer has the right to make decisions around the memorial service, where the victim is buried and what words should be inscribed on the memorial. This legislation therefore will provide the Secretary of the Department of Health with the power to direct the surrender or variation of a right of interment. This change will ensure that the rights of all victims and other persons directly and adversely affected by serious crimes are given appropriate respect and a say in what happens to the remains and resting place of their loved ones.

The result of this reform is that the holder of a right of interment who has been convicted of an indictable offence or who has been identified by the coroner as a responsible person can have their right of interment forcibly surrendered or varied in order to prevent further harm and suffering for those affected. Under the new regulatory framework an affected person can make a written application to the Secretary of the Department of Health for the variation or forced surrender of the right of interment. An affected person is defined as being someone who has been directly and adversely

affected by an indictable offence or by the death of a person where there is a coronial finding that a person is responsible for that death and that responsible person themselves is deceased.

The new legislative framework will further require the Secretary of the Department of Health to consider a range of matters to inform the decision. These matters may include the nature and seriousness of the indictable offence and the coroner's findings about the circumstances of the death and the nature of the responsible person's responsibility for that death. In addition, the secretary must also take into consideration the impact that this decision has on human rights in accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

If it is determined by the secretary that there are grounds for the right of interment to be varied or surrendered, the bill requires the secretary to take the approach which is least restrictive. This is enforced in the legislation by limiting the power of the secretary to forcibly surrender the right of interment to only be exercised in the event that variation would not prevent further significant harm, pain or suffering to an affected person. A crucial component of these reforms is that the powers outlined in this bill can be applied retrospectively to coronial findings and convictions on or after 1 July 2005, ensuring that historic cases where harm has occurred can be corrected.

This change might be small, but it is a crucial step towards achieving the goal of equality in Victoria, which this government has made a cornerstone of its agenda. This reform, like so many which have been pursued since this government took office, is about giving power back to victims. It is about ensuring that perpetrators of violence no longer have power over their victims, even after they have passed away. It is about giving back agency to the loved ones of victims of family violence, so that they can choose what is written on a grave and where the funeral is conducted.

This reform also comes from the same vein as the massive overhaul of the way that the government approaches the issue of family violence. The Andrews government has made a clear commitment to implementing all 227 recommendations of the landmark Royal Commission into Family Violence, which shone light on the countless failures of the system to protect the most vulnerable in our society. The sad reality which was highlighted by the royal commission is that family violence is widespread and fundamentally gendered. The majority of victims of family violence—75 per cent—are women, and this is a key driving factor behind gender inequality in Victorian society.

The Andrews government has shown a clear commitment to implementing all of the findings of the Royal Commission into Family Violence through the rollout of Victoria's gender equality strategy. This legislation to address the legislative gap which allows convicted killers to retain the rights of interment of victims is firmly in line with the gender equality strategy, which seeks to correct the systemic issues. Other key reforms which have been outlined in this strategy to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence include strategies to increase the accountability of perpetrators and shift the burden away from victim-survivors. This is particularly relevant to the legislation in front of the house today, because the case which acted as the trigger for the reforms to this legislative framework was in fact a tragic case of family violence.

Some of the other actions being taken to stamp out family violence include the rollout of 31 family violence investigation units across the state to improve the safety of victim-survivors through police responses, as well as the opening of five specialist family violence courts which will provide a safe and secure environment for victim-survivors and families. Additionally, the Andrews government has rolled out a 10-year industry plan which seeks to expand support for victims in the workplace. The fact is that there are thousands of people working across various industries, from the community sector, health, education and training, and the justice system, who have contact with people experiencing the effects of family violence. As such, it is absolutely essential that all workers in these areas feel they are equipped with the skills to fulfil their role to prevent, identify and respond to family violence.

This government is also taking steps to stamp out the risk of family violence before it can occur so that tragedies such as that which occurred to prompt this legislation with Karen Williams can be

avoided. To achieve this the Victorian government has established Respect Victoria, an independent statutory authority which has been established for the purpose of providing education to the community in order to change cultural attitudes and social norms which allow for violence and abuse to occur.

To this end, Respect Victoria has launched the Respect Women: Call it Out campaign. The purpose of this campaign is to raise awareness of the irreversible damage which can occur as a result of sexual harassment, sexual assault and of course domestic violence. This entails educating Victorians on the signs to look for and what to do in the event that they witness an incident occurring, in recognition that the community as a whole has a responsibility to end the normalisation of domestic violence and sexual assault. The campaign also highlights the fact that violence is fundamentally caused by a power imbalance, which is usually driven by gender inequality, discrimination and marginalisation.

This campaign has been particularly important as we have navigated our way through the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has seen widespread disruption to society over the past 12 months. One of the tragic consequences of COVID-19 has been a rise in domestic violence caused by the stresses of stay-at-home directives and the financial toll of the disruptions to the economy. The Respect Women: Call it Out campaign therefore seeks to educate the public on the importance of looking for signs that domestic violence may be occurring and highlighting that as a community it is our responsibility to be active bystanders and act in an appropriate manner to minimise harm to all parties.

Nowhere has the issue of gender equality been highlighted in recent times more prevalently than through the March 4 Justice around Australia, which saw 100 000 people in cities all around the country march in protest of sexual assault and harassment, which women continue to face. Additionally, a significant March 4 Justice was held in Rosebud, with a tremendous turnout of close to 400 people, including mayor Despi O'Connor, deputy mayor Sarah Race and Cr Kerri McCafferty taking the stage to address everyone.

This bill is important. Families of the deceased deserve the right to make decisions about how they are remembered and where they are laid to rest. No longer should killers have the right to wield power and control over their victim's place of rest. The Victorian government has taken a leading stance on delivering reforms which address the systemic issues which continue to drive inequality, and this bill follows that pattern. I commend it to the house.

Mr HAMER (Box Hill) (16:24): I too rise to speak on the Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Bill 2021, and I would like to start my contribution by thanking the Minister for Health for bringing this important bill to the house and also members who have briefly contributed before me, the member for Ringwood and the member for Nepean. This bill puts in place necessary measures so that Victorian families who become the unwitting victims of violent crimes are protected from further harm or distress after losing a loved one. Anyone who has lost a loved one before can understand it is a time of deep grief, stress and sadness to make decisions about the grave or memorial of the person, let alone having the person who caused their death make that decision. I am so proud to be part of the Andrews Labor government—a government that listens and a government that takes action. More importantly, we listen to those who need us most, and in the case of this legislation it is the grieving and heartbroken families of victims.

I think it is really interesting that the debate for this bill has come up in this week. Particularly we saw the huge number of people who turned out for the March 4 Justice on Monday right across the country to demand an end to gender-based violence, particularly in the workplace but right across the spectrum. I think it is interesting in the context of this bill that we are in a situation here in 2021 that we even need to consider this. We still need to see how the impact of gendered violence, particularly in terms of when it causes death, goes beyond the actual incident of the death itself and continues in perpetuity in the context of a tombstone and a gravesite where control continues to be exerted by the perpetrator. If there is any week we are considering what this means and how important this change is, it is this week.

The bill itself will provide the Secretary of the Department of Health with the power to direct the surrender or variation of a right of interment and ensure that the rights of all victims and other persons directly and adversely affected by serious crimes are given appropriate respect and a say in what happens to the remains and resting place of their loved ones. The bill also makes minor technical and other amendments to clarify ambiguity and address inconsistencies, improving the administration and the sector's understanding of the act, and these amendments are a critical step in protecting the rights and dignity of victims of family violence and their families.

In Australia at least one woman dies per week at the hands of a partner or a former partner, and that is why this government is taking every possible step to end family violence. Five years ago this government embarked on the world-first Royal Commission into Family Violence. We took a bright light to our state's and this country's darkest secret and committed to rebuilding a broken system, better supporting victims, assisting perpetrators in changing their behaviour and ending family violence in our state. We have acquitted more than two-thirds of the commission's 227 recommendations, and all those remaining are well underway, with over \$3 billion of investment—more than any other state and the commonwealth combined. The establishment of the royal commission was an acknowledgement of the seriousness with which the Victorian community has come to regard family violence and its consequences for individuals and families. It reflects our growing awareness of its scale, a recognition that existing policy responses have been insufficient to reduce the prevalence and severity of the violence, and the priority the community is prepared to accord it to address the problem.

We have committed to the rollout of the Orange Door network in an additional five areas of the state, including in my electorate of Box Hill. Orange Door is about providing every family with the specialist support they need, regardless of where they live, from workers across family and child services, Aboriginal and men's services, along with emergency and crisis services. Since the Orange Door opened in 2018 over 100 000 Victorians have been referred to it or have directly sought help from it with family violence. The government has invested, as I said previously, more than \$3 billion to prevent family violence and to implement each of the royal commission's recommendations. Unfortunately to this day family violence remains the leading cause of death, disability and illness for women aged 15 to 44 in Australia, and any one death in a family violence context is one death too many.

I want to take a moment to recognise the work of some of the incredibly hardworking family violence service providers and agencies in my electorate of Box Hill: Eastern Health's Strengthening Hospital Responses to Family Violence initiative; the Migrant Information Centre in Box Hill; the Eastern Community Legal Centre; the Eastern Domestic Violence Service, EDVOS, which although based in Ringwood services all of the eastern catchment; Victoria Police's domestic and family violence investigations team; EACH, in Box Hill; Carrington Health; and of course Women's Health East. I have met with each of them, all since being in this house, and they all do incredible work. They change the life of each individual that approaches them, and I thank them for that.

The proposed amendments in this bill include a discretionary power for the Secretary of the Department of Health to direct the modification or surrender of a right of interment based on coronial findings alongside indictable offences and situations of murder-suicide, and this is an essential step in acknowledging the rights and dignity of victims of family violence.

Now, in relation to the case that has been documented by previous speakers, the case of Karen Williams, the newspaper reports talk about this as being bizarre not only in terms of the perpetrator having control over the siting of the burial and providing for the plot next to the victim but also in terms of what was actually written on the tombstone. It was as if they were two completely separate beings and entities, actually, from the perpetrator to the victim, with not even a recognition of other members of the family. I really want to call out and thank Stephen Williams and the members of the Williams family for what they have done and for bringing this to the attention of the minister and to the government, making sure that laws such as these can be changed to better reflect the needs and wishes of victims and victims' families rather than retaining the power of the perpetrators.

For the families who carry the ongoing pain and suffering of losing a loved one, under this legislation they will no longer have to face the retraumatising process of negotiating with the perpetrator about the memorialisation of their loved one. That includes families who do not have an indictable offence conviction. Today marks an important day. This bill marks a day where we cut the perpetrator of family violence and their control and their manipulation—a day where perpetrators get no control of how a victim is memorialised and remembered and where it is given to the victim's loved ones, where it belongs. Victims of family violence deserve dignity, they deserve control and they deserve respect when laid to rest. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (16:34): This is a very important bill that we are concluding the week on, particularly in a week where much discussion has been had about misogyny and gendered violence and a range of very, very serious matters. I said in my members statement earlier today that I consider that we are in the middle of a great social reckoning, and that is a very good thing. I am pleased that in a week when there have been a lot of other things happening this bill is being supported right across the house, particularly because it is a bill that has been drafted essentially in response to a particular set of domestic violence circumstances.

We often in this place cite statistics in support of an argument. One of those statistics that I think is often cited and still registers in me horror every time I hear it is that every week in Australia a woman dies at the hands of her intimate partner, a man—every week. That to me is just a horrifying statistic, a statistic that speaks to the absolute truth of how much work there is to do in this space, because until we can say that that does not happen there is just so, so much work to be done. This bill was introduced in response to a particular circumstance—I am not going to name the perpetrator; his name does not bear being brought into this place—a particular murder that saw the perpetrator holding a set of essentially property rights regarding interment and some additional rights, kind of post-mortem rights, if you like, that are wildly inappropriate for the perpetrator of family violence to hold, most particularly when those rights are held in relation to the victim of that family violence.

This bill seeks to amend the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003 to ensure that the secretary of the relevant department, the Department of Health, can make any necessary change to ensure that victims of serious crimes are given appropriate respect, and that they have a say in what happens to the remains and resting places of loved ones. So the families of those victims will have a say in that and we will avoid the horrific potential set of circumstances where a perpetrator from prison can theoretically—and might have, but for the passage of this bill—dictate a whole range of arrangements relating to their victim.

As the law currently stands, the person who holds any right of interment can exercise it in a way that is harmful to other people or creates further suffering. By curtailing that right, yes, we impinge, arguably, on a property right, we impinge on a particular freedom held by people. But if ever there were a set of mitigating circumstances, if ever there were a set of extenuating and justifying circumstances, they are the circumstances that sit behind the drafting of this bill.

We do not pretend for a moment that this is a big step, that it is a measure that is going to transform the thinking in this space, that it is going to do wonders in relation to redress for victims and their families. But it does take that critical piece, that ability for people to effectively either profit from their offending or to continue to terrorise family members of their victim well after their victim has died. To the extent that we shut down that albeit fairly narrow potential set of circumstances, I think it is entirely appropriate to take this action and to take this response.

My electorate is one of a number of electorates that contain a cemetery. I think a number of my constituents perhaps do not have it front of mind but are certainly conscious of the role that cemeteries play. There are of course some technical amendments that are before us here in this bill as well. One of the ones that I was horrified to find on the statute books was a provision—happily not enforced—that has allowed for funeral expenses to be recouped from associates of the deceased if the estate could not meet those funeral expenses. Now, the notion that some sort of government official would knock on the front door a week after you have buried your mate or your son and say, 'Oh, by the way you

owe us 1200 bucks’—I am pleased that the section was not enforced, but clearly the section ought never have been on the statute books. I regret I cannot enlighten the house about when that section made it onto the statute books or at whose behest, but it was clearly not the Parliament’s proudest moment, I would have thought. If a person dies penniless or with so little in the way of assets that they cannot meet their own funeral or cremation expenses, well, one can hardly expect the state to start knocking on the doors of their family and friends seeking to recover those expenses.

There is another technical amendment regarding the perpetual rights of interment for cremated remains rather than 25-year rights. It is not a problem that is unique to our jurisdiction. All over the world there is pressure, frankly, on the space required for interments. Quite obviously for bodily interment you need perpetual rights, or in the ordinary course of business you would expect that to be the case. With cremated interments you can potentially hold an option where people might say that after 25 years they will notify everyone they have got on the contact list and determine what happens to them. That is potentially a cost reduction to the bereaved family that I am sure will be welcomed in some quarters.

The Burwood Cemetery has been around for a very long time. It was in 1858 that it first operated and it went through until the early 1980s. There are still some openings, I am told, for cremations, but there are not any new sites being sold. This is one of those cemeteries that has hit its capacity constraints. But I note with interest that Sir Charles Powers, who was a member for Burrum in Queensland, is buried there. He put forward in the Queensland Parliament in 1894 a bill for women’s suffrage. The bill failed of course because, one, it was Queensland and, two, it was 1894. But in the context of the debate we have been having about gender this week I was pleased to discover that one of the early proponents of the women’s suffrage movement is in fact buried in the cemetery that is in my electorate. We did try to determine which party he was from. I am going to hazard a guess—Queensland at the turn of two centuries ago—that he was not necessarily part of the progressive left—

Mr Wynne interjected.

Mr FOWLES: I do not know. Actually he was a member of the opposition party so maybe he was.

But this has been a week where we have grappled in many ways with a whole range of issues relating to gender, relating to the rights of women and relating to misogyny. It has been a week I hope that has given many people reason to pause—it has certainly given me reason to pause—to reflect upon conduct that continues to perpetuate a whole range of really, really challenging and awful behaviours by not all but certainly some men in our society. Whilst this bill addresses, as I think I said at the start of my contribution, a very narrow set of circumstances, nonetheless it speaks to some of the horrors that are perpetuated by those who seek to exercise positions of power over women in the very, very worst of ways.

The case that sits at the heart of this bill is but one example of that. But, sadly, when one woman dies every week at the hands of her intimate male partner, we know that there are all too many examples of people behaving in this way. I hope that over the course of the break, after we rise tonight, everyone in this place has an opportunity to reflect on that and think about how we can and must do better. I commend this bill to the house.

Mr WYNNE (Richmond—Minister for Planning, Minister for Housing) (16:44): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

**WORKPLACE INJURY REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION AMENDMENT
(ARBITRATION) BILL 2021***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Ms HORNE:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr TAK (Clarinda) (16:44): As I said yesterday, we are lucky to have a number of options for resolving disputes without recourse to litigation. I would like to also take this opportunity to thank the honourable member for Altona for her hard work and for making sure that this bill is here today.

The Dispute Settlement Centre of Victoria has been an example of a great resource for many of my constituents. If a dispute cannot be resolved through discussions between two parties and the DSCV, they also offer a free mediation service. The dispute assessment officers there will explain the process to each party and conduct a meeting with a trained and accredited mediator, who is impartial. The process is confidential, and participation is voluntary for all participants. Things are probably a little complicated at the moment given COVID-safe arrangements but, from experience, mediations can usually be arranged within a fortnight, depending on availability of all parties. So this is really a fantastic service.

This bill utilises some of our great alternative dispute resolution process, namely, binding arbitration. This is achieved by amending the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013 to enable workers with a genuine dispute certificate following unsuccessful conciliation to have the Accident Compensation Conciliation Service (ACCS) determine their dispute by arbitration. As mentioned, arbitration provides a timely, low-cost and informal pathway as an alternative to court, providing injured workers with an effective means of achieving a resolution to a workers compensation dispute.

I would like to point out key features of the arbitration function, which include: any dispute can be determined by arbitration but with compensation determinations limited to \$20 000 in medical and like expenses and up to 52 weeks in weekly payments; hearings will be separate to conciliation and will be conducted informally, without adherence to rules of evidence; arbitrators may request, but cannot compel, evidence; and appeals of arbitration decisions are limited to questions of law only, to the Supreme Court, as a means of avoiding parties using arbitration as a trial run for a future court case.

Some subsequent confidential consultation was undertaken with key stakeholders following approval in principle, including WorkSafe and ACCS, which informed the particulars of the bill. So this is a really important bill. It was an extensive and broad process and one which has resulted in broad support for this bill.

I said before this bill is all about fairness for all workers and to avoid lengthy, costly and stressful court processes, as we have heard many other speakers before me say on this bill. So I am very happy to support this bill, and I commend it to the house.

Ms SULEYMAN (St Albans) (16:48): I too rise to speak on the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Arbitration) Bill 2021, and I echo the sentiments of my fellow colleague, the member for Clarinda. He adequately contributed toward this bill and spoke so passionately. I am very proud to be part of the Andrews Labor government. Not only are we investing in jobs but we are also protecting jobs and protecting Victorian workers. Our government is focused on delivering key supports for injured workers but most of all putting in place frameworks, which make it important for working families. Most importantly, this bill will deliver a new, timely and cost-effective process for complex compensation claims. We all know the good work of WorkSafe and the incredible job they do in prevention and occupational safety, making Victorian workplaces safe for employees so that workers can come home safe to their loved ones.

In St Albans I get to hear, unfortunately, some horrific stories of workplace injuries. I am always extremely saddened to hear these stories, where loved ones go to work to make ends meet, pay their mortgage off and do the right thing. Unfortunately due to a workplace not being safe at times we see some horrific stories of loved ones who have not returned home. Not only do they sustain an injury, but they are left in tragic circumstances. We need to make sure that the appropriate protections and compensations are in place so workers can get that support and are able also to recover during that process. That is why the changes in this bill are absolutely integral to that, because they will help more injured workers access the support they need and deserve.

In particular in my community, where English is not the first language, it is not easy to navigate the legal system; it is absolutely a challenge. When I have had to navigate the legal system I have found it extremely challenging, so I can only imagine that for someone for whom English is not their first language, you do not understand your rights, you do not understand the system and you are trying to make a living, trying to pay off a mortgage and raise your family, and then on top of that you are injured at work and you do not understand what support you can get. That is why it is absolutely integral to this that WorkCover claims following an injury are straightforward and effective and disputes can actually go through a satisfactory process. Claims processes should not make it much more difficult for the worker and their families. This only causes stress, not only for the worker and their family but it also starts a chain reaction.

Workers at times can face a long and costly dispute—a cost they cannot afford—and most people, as I said, cannot navigate the legal system and cannot navigate the court system as well. It is worse still, when you do not have English as your first language. In my electorate more than 70 per cent of the community come from a non-English-speaking background and are working physically pretty intense jobs. This sort of bill makes a difference to their lives, because we are making sure we are protecting their livelihoods, but most importantly we are introducing a new, inexpensive and timely pathway for them to get a resolution without going through a longwinded process that could take many years and during which their livelihoods could be destroyed.

These changes deliver on the commitment to improve the process of making a complaint. Sometimes for some workers—and I have heard these stories—it is a challenge to even make a claim. That is why this bill is about making it effective and giving confidence to workers so they can take that first step, knowing that there will be no repercussions in making their complaints.

As we know, and as we have heard from this side of the house, the Victorian Ombudsman recommended a new process for injured workers in 2019 to deal with complex claims. It recommended that WorkSafe do a follow-up investigation into the management of complex workers compensation claims. It really extensively dealt with a number of issues that were outstanding. To sum it up, this bill brings the process into line with the recommendations in that report. There have been extensive consultations over these changes with the union movement, government agencies, law firms and the institute, and other professional associations and stakeholders.

Can I thank the previous Minister for Workplace Safety, the member for Altona, and also the outstanding work of the current Minister for Workplace Safety in bringing this bill to this place that will make a difference to workers and, in particular in my electorate of St Albans, to families and to the workforce. Our government, as I said previously, has a commitment to support workers throughout, and we know the extra support that we have provided over the COVID-19 pandemic. Just this week I noted there were new Jobs Victoria advocates announced in the member for Essendon's electorate, with the Acting Premier and the Minister for Employment. They are employing the first of 450 new job search workers and, most importantly, support workers, who will be on the ground in libraries, community halls and shopping centres.

We are also investing in important infrastructure. Just yesterday I had the great honour to officially join the Minister for Health and Acting Premier and open the new emergency department at Sunshine Hospital, again delivering on our health commitment but most importantly creating those jobs. That

is important to us—creating jobs but providing protection and safety for all workers. We will continue to invest and make sure that we support workers in this state. That is our job, and that is what we will continue to do through important reforms like this one or through creating employment and skills opportunities. This is what is needed to stimulate the economy and stimulate Victoria and continue the economic recovery.

This is good legislation which will support workers facing tough times—and, we know, not only for tough times now but also for the future—but most importantly it will put proper processes in place for those who most need them, and they are the Victorian workers. We need to support and we need to protect every single worker so they come back to their loved ones, they feel safe, they understand the system absolutely when they need it most and they are able to access fair compensation when they are injured at work. This is a must. This is integral. This is the fabric of our society.

So I am very proud of the Andrews government. As I said previously in my contribution, I wish to thank the minister for this bill and for bringing forward a bill that will last, not only delivering on important reform but also setting things up to ensure long-term social and economic benefits for all workers. It is absolutely integral, as I keep saying, that my community, in particular in St Albans, regardless of their postcode and regardless of whether English is their first language, are able to navigate a system, to make a claim if they are injured at work and go through an effective, easy system, a system that will protect and support them during their toughest time in the workplace, and are able to support their family during important times. When I say ‘important’, it is important to be able to care for and look after your family. As the breadwinner of a family you need to be able to know that you will be okay in times of need. And this bill is about exactly that—protecting workers in times of need and making it effective and making it easy. As I said, this is down to Labor government values, and I echo the bill to the house.

Debate interrupted.

Rulings by the Chair

STOPPING THE CLOCK

The SPEAKER (16:58): At the end of yesterday’s grievance debate the Deputy Speaker referred to me a point of order from the member for Burwood. The member sought clarification on the circumstances in which the Chair can stop the clock so that a member does not lose speaking time while points of order are resolved. I remind the house that the discretion to stop the clock rests entirely with the Chair, and there are many factors to take into account. It is not normal practice to do so other than during question time. Chairs are reluctant to stop the clock, as while this restores time to the member speaking at the moment, in reality time is taken away from a member speaking later in debate. I refer members to rulings on pages 150–51 of the June 2020 version of *Rulings from the Chair* about this.

Bills

WORKPLACE INJURY REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION AMENDMENT (ARBITRATION) BILL 2021

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Mr CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (16:59): 1985 was a huge year for the trade union movement and indeed for the Cain government. That was the year in which we legislated a WorkCover scheme for this state, and that was a great moment for workers across Victoria, because for the first time, if workers got injured in the workplace, there would be a compensation scheme. And it was a huge year.

Business interrupted under resolution of house of 16 March.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2021

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Mr PALLAS:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIA AMENDMENT BILL 2021

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Mr FOLEY:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

RINGWOOD TRAINING

Mr HODGETT (Croydon) (17:01): (5821) I wish to raise a matter with the Minister for Training and Skills, and the action I seek is for the state government to provide funding to Ringwood Training, which would allow for the expansion of their highly popular automotive training facility. Ringwood Training is a government registered training organisation—an RTO—located at the Ringwood Secondary College. They deliver vocational education and training qualifications to post-school and school-based students in three industry areas: automotive, engineering fabrication and information

communication technology. I had the pleasure recently of visiting Shayne van der Heide, the manager of the set-up. Shayne proudly showed me around the site, which features industry-standard training facilities and high-tech machinery and equipment. The demand on the high-quality teaching offered has attracted a keen interest from prospective students, with student numbers in the past three years tripling, causing Ringwood Training to be in a position where they are growing out of their space. They currently have 542 students registered.

As a solution to space constraints, Ringwood Training would like to redesign the current automotive building, extending it towards Bedford Road, adding student amenities and approximately 300 square metres of floor space. They are seeking approximately \$2 million to see this come to fruition. This would open the opportunity to provide additional future program deliveries of heavy vehicle training, a diploma in gaming and certificate IV engineering. Ringwood Training, like many other organisations, was greatly impacted in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic. Although a government RTO, they are recognised as a private facility and therefore cannot access the same funding opportunities available to other state government facilities. This has put them in an extremely difficult financial position.

The government is spending millions of dollars on free TAFE courses; however, Ringwood Training seem not to fit any of the funding models. They are seeking a level playing field when it comes to financial opportunities and therefore seek support from the state government. The minister as well as the member for Ringwood have visited with Ringwood Training, acknowledging within the Parliament the fabulous facility they have and noting their winning the Small Training Provider of the Year award at the 2019 Victorian Training Awards. This acknowledgement has been all well and good; however, there has been no funding support offered to ensure their continued success. I call on the Minister for Training and Skills to provide this much-needed funding and ensure the continued success and expansion of Ringwood Training.

ONLINE GAMING REGULATION

Mr FREGON (Mount Waverley) (17:03): (5822) My adjournment item this evening is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. The action I seek is for the minister to update the house on how the Andrews Labor government can raise awareness of gambling-like gaming which is available to our children and young adults. Yesterday in the house I raised the issue of loot boxes and my concerns around their gambling-like design and the overall lack of regulation and consumer protections across the video and online gaming industry. Particularly concerning is the ability of children or those under 18 to access these games without restrictions, classifications or warnings that might let parents know what is in them despite mounting concern that the mechanics of loot boxes are encouraging gambling-style behaviour among kids, potentially leading them to addiction later in life.

There is compelling data showing that when you expose children to gambling tendencies they can develop gambling problems as adults. To put this in perspective I would like to provide some statistics to give indication as to the reach and scope of this issue. In 2020, 91 per cent of Australian households owned a video game device and 81 per cent of children aged between five and 14 years played video games. Australians are among the highest per capita spenders on video games in the world, with the total gaming and eSports revenue hitting \$3.175 billion in 2019 and \$3.403 billion in 2020. The in-game digital purchase segment grew a staggering 190 per cent year on year. As I mentioned yesterday, over a dozen industrialised countries around the world are investigating and regulating loot boxes. The Netherlands and Belgium have banned them entirely because of their gambling-like design. Yet in Australia there is zero regulation and federal classification does not do anything about them. The industry has failed to sufficiently and efficiently self-regulate by implementing ethical game design principles. Whilst jurisdiction falls largely in the federal sphere, at a state government level surely we can raise awareness and look into steps to safeguard our Victorian children from being exposed to this potentially harmful virtual content. I look forward to the minister's response on this very important issue.

AMBULANCE SERVICES

Mr McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (17:06): (5823) My adjournment is for the Minister for Ambulance Services, and the action that I seek is that the minister immediately intervene in and withdraw a charge that has been made by Ambulance Victoria to a family in my electorate for a recent ambulance ride. Jason Reeves and his family live in Wangaratta. He has contacted me to voice and escalate his concerns regarding the conduct and performance of Ambulance Victoria with regard to obtaining a membership for his family. Having recently returned to Australia from living overseas, on 9 February Jason's wife attempted to obtain a family membership with Ambulance Victoria through the AV website online portal. As a consequence of the website being unable to facilitate that membership, she followed the directions and sent an email to the membership team requesting a family membership, of which I have a copy. They still had not received a reply when on 26 February their son Jensen Reeves broke his arm at school and was transported by ambulance to the Wangaratta base hospital, Northeast Health, for emergency treatment. Still not having been responded to by AV, they became concerned.

After making inquiries with St Bernard's Primary School staff, they were unclear about their position with regard to the cost and Jason therefore attempted to raise a query with the senior management of Ambulance Victoria. He has since received a call from the customer service manager, who understood the unfortunate timing of the situation and assured the family that the invoice would be placed on hold and a staff member from the membership team would contact him. Sure enough, they were contacted on 10 March, advising them that they were prepared to implement a family membership, but the coverage would not be backdated and an invoice for the ambulance ride on 26 February would still be sent for payment. I believe this is absolutely unacceptable. The Reeves family tried to take out a subscription, but due to inadequacies of AV they could not complete the membership. But their intentions were made clear—they wanted coverage from 9 February 2021. I seek that the minister intervene and have AV withdraw the invoice for a trip that should have been covered by their membership.

MENTAL HEALTH REFORM

Mr McGuire (Broadmeadows) (17:08): (5824) My adjournment request is to the Minister for Mental Health. The action I seek is a briefing on the benefits to the constituents of Broadmeadows from the final report of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. Mental health is a shadow pandemic. Almost half of all Victorians will experience mental health issues and illness in their lifetime. That is why the Andrews Labor government has invested an historic almost \$870 million into mental health. The funding includes the HOPE service, the hospital outreach post-suicidal engagement initiative. Broadmeadows will play a pivotal role in helping to provide this new service. It is part of a statewide rollout of services for mental health so individuals can rebuild their lives. This government has invested more than \$60 million in the program so far, and it will become part of a series of other investments as the Victorian government begins to rebuild the entire mental health system.

Part of the last budget was for the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing, a new centre dedicated to bringing together the experts in our system, from researchers to academics, and those who have experienced mental health issues firsthand. This is another \$16 million to help Victorians with new training positions, education and opportunities for employment and more funding to connect all of these initiatives for better positions for graduate nurses, postgraduate mental health nursing scholarships and improving the rotations of junior medical officers and psychiatrists. Put together, these initiatives will rebuild the mental health system. This is another groundbreaking reform that will define cultural, generational and systemic benefits and will be one of the key legacies of this government.

CHILDERS STREET–WARRIGAL ROAD, MENTONE

Mr Rowsell (Sandringham) (17:10): (5825) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, who I note is in the chamber this evening. The action that I seek is the

immediate installation of traffic lights at a pedestrian crossing at the intersection of Childers Street and Warrigal Road in Mentone. Thousands of families and students cross this busy thoroughfare each week as they make their way to Mentone Childcare & Kindergarten, Guardian Childcare & Education Mentone West, Mentone Primary School, Mentone Preschool and St Patrick's Parish Primary School, yet they do so at great risk to their own safety. Drivers exiting Nepean Highway commonly approach this intersection at speed. They have dangerously little awareness of the little people walking just a little distance away from them. In coming days I will be conveying to the minister letters which I have received from each of these five education providers. Principal Tim Noonan of St Patrick's writes that:

Each day most of our families use this intersection—
and that:

... a crossing with a supervisor is not enough to protect our families ...

On that point, assistant principal Ken Bergen of Mentone Primary School rightly notes that:

... due to the crossing's inherent danger, Council can only use highly skilled ... crossing supervisors ...

This in turn places crossing supervisor Denise Davis, a real champion who has helped spearhead the campaign for a pedestrian crossing, in a state of 'constant risk'. Kingston council wrote to me. Acting chief executive officer Paul Franklin said:

Council supports the proposal to implement a pedestrian operated signal or similar pedestrian safety improvement measurement ... Council is also happy to work with the Department of Transport and local residents to explore options to improve pedestrian safety at the location.

There are plenty of residents who would be interested in this. Bec Schmidt of Guardian Childcare & Education, Mentone West, wrote:

Our centre ... has limited parking, so we encourage our families to ... stay fit and healthy by walking ... to child care ...

To this end Bec notes that a safer crossing at the intersection is 'essential'. What this really comes down to is a simple question: does the government value the safety of young lives more than the cost—the negligible costs, arguably—of installing the infrastructure that is needed at that site? Mentone Childcare & Kindergarten educator Celeste Hull put it best, in my view, when she said:

We're sick of a 'wait and see' approach. Waiting to take action until someone's Mother, Father, or child is tragically injured or killed in an accident is not acceptable.

She is right. When lives are at stake, not taking action is just not good enough.

NORTHCOTE ELECTORATE EMPLOYMENT

Ms THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (17:12): (5826) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Employment, and the action I seek is that the minister meet with me to discuss opportunities to grow local jobs in Northcote. Over the years the inner north has changed and transformed. Many of our dense industrial and manufacturing zones have been gradually replaced with residential infill development. The kinds of jobs that used to dominate our suburbs, such as textiles, automotives and brickworks, have shifted in favour of service industries, creative industries, small boutique retailers and social enterprises as well as science, tech and innovation. Many of these industries have been heavily impacted by the pandemic.

In the September quarter Darebin saw unemployment reach 6.4 per cent, a higher rate on average than greater Melbourne or Victoria. Feeling the brunt of this were key sectors like hospitality, retail, entertainment and the creative industries. As we steam ahead with our economic recovery, retaining and growing jobs in the inner north is an absolute priority for me. Part of that is making sure that we are creating pathways to jobs that align with Victoria's future needs and growth industries. Thornbury High School will soon become home to a state-of-the-art STEAM centre, and I am working with Northcote High on a similar proposal. It is so important we foster a pipeline of talent in these fields.

At the same time, Melbourne Polytechnic in Preston is home to a dedicated skills and jobs centre, a fantastic Victorian government initiative helping people access training and employment opportunities. More recently we have been thrilled to see new jobs supported through investment in local school upgrades and our upcoming big social housing build. We have benefited from the creation of almost 300 jobs through our Working for Victoria program across community services like Your Community Health, Bridge Darebin, the Alphington farmers market and Free to Feed as well as in local government. The Northcote electorate will soon receive a new local jobs advocate as part of our Jobs Victoria plan, who will be placed at the Aboriginal Advancement League in Thornbury and work on the ground to support people on JobKeeper impacted by the pandemic and people who have been long-term unemployed. But it is important we keep the momentum going and think strategically about how best to facilitate jobs growth in our unique suburbs.

A number of our suburbs are being serviced by co-working spaces, and there is growing demand for innovation and start-up incubators. The opportunity exists to create genuine pathways for makers and innovators as a means of attracting new jobs to the inner north. There are some wonderful models of this, both overseas and more locally. The FAB9 makerspace in Footscray is a fantastic model, with engineers and designers of all skill levels able to access training and high-end prototyping equipment. Flexible workspaces which co-locate child care are another great example of supporting jobs growth in a way that suits our modern lifestyles. These are just a few examples of how we can augment and amplify jobs creation in the industries of the future. I look forward to speaking with the minister about how we can continue to support people on JobKeeper, businesses and workers in our suburbs.

COVID-19

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (17:15): (5827) My adjournment is for the Acting Premier, and the action I seek is for the state Labor government to prove it has a plan to roll out COVID-19 vaccinations across our state and to advise our community how, when and where that vaccination program will be delivered. The vaccination of 25 million Australians will be one of the biggest operations the nation has ever undertaken, and the states are responsible for the practical rollout. Victorians know that vaccinations are an effective way to protect against infectious diseases. They help strengthen your immunity and act to protect the broader community. Two of the most important factors in the vaccination rollout will be, firstly, that the program will need to be competently implemented, with logistics being carried out well and delivery being prompt, and, secondly, that details on the program must be communicated thoroughly. Good communication will assist with take-up of the voluntary vaccine. It will also allay the concerns that many in the community have.

For the benefit of my constituents, the vaccination program is being staged in a fivefold way. Phase 1A will ensure that almost 680 000 Australians in the areas of quarantine, border, frontline healthcare workers, and aged-care and disability-care staff and residents will receive the vaccine. Under phase 1B, 6.1 million Australians, including those 70 years of age and over, other healthcare workers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults over 55, adults with a specific medical condition or a disability, and critical and high-risk workers, will receive the vaccination. 6.5 million Australians under phase 2A will be vaccinated. This phase will cover adults over 50 years of age, adult Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and other critical and high-risk workers. Under phase 2B, the remaining 6.6 million people in Australia will be vaccinated. Finally, under phase 3, 5.6 million young people under the age of 18 years of age will be vaccinated if it is recommended.

Recent figures show 164 437 vaccinations have been delivered across Australia. New South Wales has delivered 37 553 vaccinations, with Victoria some way behind, on 31 808. A former Victorian and national Australian Medical Association president recently observed that we have to get more and more people vaccinated and have to pivot from one-on-one vaccinations to mass vaccine type set-ups. Victorians are now rightly asking: what is the state Labor government actually doing about the rollout of the vaccination program in our state? Does the government have a plan, and will the Acting Premier advise our community how, when and where the vaccinations will be delivered? I look forward to the Acting Premier's response.

SUNSHINE PRIVATE HOSPITAL

Ms SULEYMAN (St Albans) (17:18): (5828) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health. The action that I seek is that the Minister for Health join me at the Sunshine private hospital site to mark the commencement of the new \$140 million Sunshine private hospital. This will be an innovative, state-of-the-art facility for our booming west. The new Sunshine private hospital will be built across the road from our fantastic Sunshine Hospital and the Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital on Furlong Road in St Albans, forming part of the Sunshine health, wellbeing and education precinct.

I would like to thank Australian Unity and their partners, who are funding this project, and also Unitas Healthcare, who will also be part of this partnership in running the Sunshine private hospital on behalf of Australian Unity. This investment really shows confidence in our region. Recently I joined Australian Unity and of course Western Health and Unitas for an evening information session at Western Health. This was an opportunity for stakeholders and also our healthcare workers to hear about the exciting project.

The first stage of this six-storey facility will include a 30-bed medical and surgical ward, but most importantly it will be delivering other medical services and key procedures. This is about providing options for St Albans but more importantly for the west. The construction of this new hospital is planned to commence in 2023, the next stage, but as I said, in the next couple of months we will see the first sod being turned for this exciting project. Future expansion is on the cards. More importantly, this is about a boost in healthcare services for the west and also creating important jobs during construction and after construction. We know the value of first-class healthcare options, and we understand that this will complement existing services and work hand in hand with Western Health to create a first-class healthcare service precinct at Furlong Road in St Albans not only for the electorate of St Albans but also across the west. I look forward to the minister's response and to him joining me at this important event.

GREATER SHEPPARTON SECONDARY COLLEGE

Ms RYAN (Euroa) (17:21): (5829) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Education, and the action I am seeking is for the minister to address a dire teacher shortage at the Greater Shepparton Secondary College. As if things were not bad enough at the Shepparton super-school after everything that the students, teachers, families and staff have been through, we now have a teacher shortage. Yesterday morning 13 classes at the Mooroopna campus and 11 classes at the Wanganui campus were without teachers. That is 24 classes across years 9 to 12 that did not have teachers at the start of the day. The school actually put out an email asking for teachers to volunteer to take up extra classes because they could not get enough casual relief teachers to fill the gaps. In the end some classes had to be broken up and divided among other classes, some year 12 classes were left unsupervised and one class was supervised by the school nurse. This is not good enough for Shepparton students, and it is not good enough for the staff and teachers. The pressure that is on existing staff to fill gaps is immense and is creating a difficult, stressful working environment. Why would any new or casual relief teachers want to subject themselves to that? The super-school has now lost 82 teachers, and to make things worse at least 12 teachers are on stress leave.

Shepparton resident Jenny Houlihan said that the minister assured the Greater Shepparton Voice 4 Choice Public Education group that the super-school would attract and keep teachers and that new staff would be flocking to be part of the new school. That is not the case. The super-school is losing teachers to Notre Dame, Rushworth P-12 and other surrounding schools. It cannot attract new teachers, and it cannot obtain casual relief teachers. What does this mean for Shepparton students and teachers? How can year 12s be expected to learn, be motivated, be inspired and succeed if no-one is there to assist them? And how can teachers be expected to continue working in unsupported, stressful environments? Now is not the time for the minister or the government to just let the days pass by. The forced amalgamation, the uncertainty, the lack of support and the lack of resources are punishing

Shepparton students, families, teachers and staff. I ask the minister to step up, to take control and to urgently work with the department to address this teacher shortage in Shepparton.

BAYSWATER ELECTORATE VETERANS

Mr TAYLOR (Bayswater) (17:23): (5830) I wish to raise a matter with the Minister for Veterans in the other place, Shaun Leane. The action I seek is that the minister join with me to visit some of our local veterans' community in Boronia. We owe a great deal to our—

Members interjecting.

Mr TAYLOR: I am here to talk about the veterans community in Boronia. We owe a great deal to our veterans community and their families, and we can never forget the great sacrifices made by the many service men and women who have served and who still continue to serve.

Locally I am very proud to have several veterans organisations who support veterans, their families and the community. The Veterans Advocacy Centre in Boronia offers veterans welfare and financial help, food and fuel vouchers, and guidance in navigating the often complex system of gaining compensation through the commonwealth Department of Veterans Affairs. I have had the privilege of being down there to meet the team but also sadly listening to some of the tragic stories and lengths that many unnecessarily have to go to to receive support. The centre is doing amazing work in helping veterans to get the assistance they need and is also supported by the Aussie Veterans op shop, with proceeds from that local success story helping to provide funding to the centre. The op shop is also run by more than 50 dedicated volunteers. It is just amazing stuff.

Of course just a stone's throw away from the op shop there is also a social enterprise, the Aussie Veterans Coffee Co. Their business is run by advocates and welfare officers with the goal of providing employment opportunities for the most injured and ill veterans and their families and helps to support the advocacy centre as well.

It has been great to meet the teams at the Aussie Veterans op shop and the advocacy centre as well as the Aussie Veterans Coffee Co, but I am keen to get the minister out to meet them and to hear firsthand the experiences of local veterans communities in my area and of course the issues they are currently facing. These vital ex-service organisations are also at the forefront in calling for a federal royal commission into veteran suicide and the system that is set up to support veterans and their families. I know the minister has been extremely proactive in calling on the federal government to listen to veterans and implement a royal commission, and I would like the minister to hear directly from the veteran community in my electorate how important this is. I thank the minister for his consideration of my request. I am looking forward to welcoming him to Boronia. I thank the veterans community for their service, and I also acknowledge their families.

RESPONSES

Mr CARROLL (Niddrie—Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (17:26): I will first begin by acknowledging the member for Croydon's matter for the Minister for Training and Skills. He has had to leave, but it does concern the expansion of Ringwood Training, which currently has 542 students and is in urgent need of an expansion. He made the case very strongly. That will be passed on to the minister in the other place.

The member for Mount Waverley, who is very passionate about this subject matter, has a matter for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation concerning young children, video gaming and their exposure to harm, particularly when it comes to online gaming and eSports. I will ensure that his matter is passed on to the minister as appropriate.

The member for Ovens Valley has also had to leave but did have a matter on behalf of a local family in his electorate concerning essentially their ambulance services membership and the charging of a ride for a family member, seeking if that matter could be looked at.

The member for Broadmeadows had a very contemporary matter for the Minister for Mental Health concerning the outcomes of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and the statewide rollout of services and what it means for his electorate and his community.

The member for Sandringham had an important matter for me in relation to road safety. I thank the member for Sandringham for his advocacy on this matter, particularly for young people and what it means to install the traffic lights and pedestrian crossing at Childers Street and Warrigal Road in his community. I thank the City of Kingston for their advocacy and the member for the correspondence he has provided to me on behalf of local school principals. I should say we are at 50 lives lost so far this year. That is 50 lives that will not be around for Christmas, 50 lives too many. Every death is preventable when it comes to road safety, and as a matter of urgency I will get back to the member for Sandringham on that matter.

Can I also thank the member for Northcote for her matter for the Minister for Employment. We had the benefit of the member for Northcote's social enterprises and community at the This Girl Can launch this morning. It is a very important matter for the jobs minister concerning the transition of the member's economy locally and what it will mean with the ceasing of JobKeeper going forward as well.

The member for Brighton had a matter for the Premier concerning communications and more broadly the rollout of the vaccine, and that important advocacy will also be passed on to the Premier.

The member for St Albans—very close to her heart—had a matter for the Minister for Health concerning the Sunshine private hospital and that broader precinct for Melbourne's west and particularly the growing Melbourne west.

The member for Euroa had a matter for the Minister for Education concerning the Greater Shepparton Secondary College, particularly the two campuses, Mooroopna and Wanganui, and the shortage of teachers. I will ensure that the education minister gets that as a matter of priority.

Can I finally thank also the member for Bayswater for his matter for the Minister for Veterans in the other place asking him to please come out and visit the ex-service organisations he has in and around Boronia—particularly, as he outlined, the op shop and the social enterprise—that we know are very important. I think those are all the matters that have been raised for ministers this evening.

The SPEAKER: The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 5.30 pm until Tuesday, 4 May.