

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

WEDNESDAY, 25 MAY 2022

hansard.parliament.vic.gov.au

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

The Honourable LINDA DESSAU AC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable JAMES ANGUS AO

The ministry

Premier.	The Hon. DM Andrews MP
Deputy Premier, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop and Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery	The Hon. JM Allan MP
Attorney-General and Minister for Emergency Services	The Hon. J Symes MLC
Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education and Minister for Agriculture	The Hon. GA Tierney MLC
Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Trade	The Hon. TH Pallas MP
Minister for Planning.	The Hon. EA Blandthorn MP
Minister for Child Protection and Family Services and Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers	The Hon. CW Brooks MP
Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention and Minister for Racing.	The Hon. AR Carbines MP
Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Industry Support and Recovery and Minister for Business Precincts	The Hon. BA Carroll MP
Minister for Energy, Minister for Environment and Climate Action and Minister for Solar Homes	The Hon. L D'Ambrosio MP
Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events and Minister for Creative Industries	The Hon. S Dimopoulos MP
Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government and Minister for Suburban Development	The Hon. MM Horne MP
Minister for Education and Minister for Women.	The Hon. NM Hutchins MP
Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support and Minister for Fishing and Boating	The Hon. S Kilkenny MP
Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy and Minister for Veterans .	The Hon. SL Leane MLC
Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services and Minister for Housing	The Hon. DJ Pearson MP
Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business and Minister for Resources	The Hon. JL Pulford MLC
Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development and Minister for Equality	The Hon. H Shing MLC
Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Community Sport and Minister for Youth. . . .	The Hon. RL Spence MP
Minister for Workplace Safety and Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep	The Hon. I Stitt MLC
Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services.	The Hon. M Thomas MP
Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Treaty and First Peoples. . .	The Hon. G Williams MP
Cabinet Secretary	Mr SJ McGhie MP

Legislative Council committees

Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee

Mr Finn, Mr Gepp, Dr Kieu, Mrs McArthur, Mr Quilty and Mr Tarlamis.

Participating members: Dr Bach, Ms Bath, Dr Cumming, Mr Davis, Ms Lovell, Mr Meddick, Mr Ondarchie, Mr Rich-Phillips, Ms Vaghela and Ms Watt.

Environment and Planning Standing Committee

Dr Bach, Ms Bath, Dr Cumming, Mr Grimley, Mr Hayes, Mr Meddick, Mr Melhem, Dr Ratnam, Ms Terpstra and Ms Watt.

Participating members: Ms Burnett-Wake, Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Dr Kieu, Mrs McArthur, Mr Quilty and Mr Rich-Phillips.

Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee

Ms Burnett-Wake, Mr Erdogan, Dr Kieu, Ms Maxwell, Mr Ondarchie, Ms Patten and Ms Taylor.

Participating members: Dr Bach, Ms Bath, Ms Crozier, Dr Cumming, Mr Gepp, Mr Grimley, Ms Lovell, Mr Quilty, Dr Ratnam, Mr Tarlamis, Ms Terpstra, Ms Vaghela and Ms Watt.

Privileges Committee

Mr Atkinson, Mr Bourman, Mr Davis, Mr Grimley, Mr Leane, Mr Rich-Phillips, Ms Shing, Ms Symes and Ms Tierney.

Procedure Committee

The President, the Deputy President, Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Mr Grimley, Dr Kieu, Ms Patten, Ms Pulford and Ms Symes.

Joint committees

Dispute Resolution Committee

Council: Mr Bourman, Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Ms Symes and Ms Tierney.

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

Electoral Matters Committee

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

Assembly: Ms Hall, Dr Read and Mr Rowswell.

House Committee

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

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

Integrity and Oversight Committee

Council: Mr Grimley.

Assembly: Mr Halse, Mr Maas, Mr Rowswell, Mr Taylor, Ms Ward and Mr Wells.

Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee

Council: Ms Crozier and Mr Erdogan.

Assembly: Mr J Bull, Mr Eren, Ms Kealy, Mr Sheed, Ms Ward and Mr Wells.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Council: Mrs McArthur and Ms Taylor.

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

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Council: Mr Gepp, Ms Patten, Ms Terpstra and Ms Watt.

Assembly: Mr Burgess, Ms Connolly and Mr Morris.

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: Ms T Burrows

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

President

The Hon. N ELASMAR (from 18 June 2020)

The Hon. SL LEANE (to 18 June 2020)

Deputy President

The Hon. WA LOVELL

Acting Presidents

Mr Bourman, Mr Gepp, Mr Melhem and Ms Patten

Leader of the Government

The Hon. J SYMES

Deputy Leader of the Government

The Hon. GA TIERNEY

Leader of the Opposition

The Hon. DM DAVIS

Deputy Leader of the Opposition

Ms G CROZIER

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Atkinson, Mr Bruce Norman	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	McIntosh, Mr Thomas Andrew ⁹	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Bach, Dr Matthew ¹	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Maxwell, Ms Tania Maree	Northern Victoria	DHJP
Barton, Mr Rodney Brian	Eastern Metropolitan	TMP	Meddick, Mr Andy	Western Victoria	AJP
Bath, Ms Melina Gaye	Eastern Victoria	Nats	Melhem, Mr Cesar	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Bourman, Mr Jeffrey	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	Mikakos, Ms Jenny ¹⁰	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Burnett-Wake, Ms Cathrine ²	Eastern Victoria	LP	O'Donohue, Mr Edward John ¹¹	Eastern Victoria	LP
Crozier, Ms Georgina Mary	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Ondarchie, Mr Craig Philip	Northern Metropolitan	LP
Cumming, Dr Catherine Rebecca	Western Metropolitan	Ind	Patten, Ms Fiona Heather	Northern Metropolitan	FPRP
Dalidakis, Mr Philip ³	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Pulford, Ms Jaala Lee	Western Victoria	ALP
Davis, Mr David McLean	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Quilty, Mr Timothy	Northern Victoria	LDP
Elasmar, Mr Nazih	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Ratnam, Dr Samantha Shantini	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Mr Enver ⁴	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Rich-Phillips, Mr Gordon Kenneth	South Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Finn, Mr Bernard Thomas Christopher ⁵	Western Metropolitan	DLP	Shing, Ms Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Garrett, Ms Jane Furneaux ⁶	Eastern Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Mr Adem ¹²	South Eastern Metropolitan	Ind
Gepp, Mr Mark	Northern Victoria	ALP	Stitt, Ms Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Grimley, Mr Stuart James	Western Victoria	DHJP	Symes, Ms Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Hayes, Mr Clifford	Southern Metropolitan	SAP	Tarlamis, Mr Lee ¹³	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Jennings, Mr Gavin Wayne ⁷	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Taylor, Ms Nina	Southern Metropolitan	ALP
Kieu, Dr Tien Dung	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Terpstra, Ms Sonja	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Leane, Mr Shaun Leo	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tierney, Ms Gayle Anne	Western Victoria	ALP
Limbrick, Mr David ⁸	South Eastern Metropolitan	LDP	Vaghela, Ms Kaushaliya Virjibhai ¹⁴	Western Metropolitan	Ind
Lovell, Ms Wendy Ann	Northern Victoria	LP	Watt, Ms Sheena ¹⁵	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
McArthur, Mrs Beverley	Western Victoria	LP	Wooldridge, Ms Mary Louise Newling ¹⁶	Eastern Metropolitan	LP

¹ Appointed 5 March 2020

² Appointed 2 December 2021

³ Resigned 17 June 2019

⁴ Appointed 15 August 2019

⁵ LP until 24 May 2022

Ind 24 May–2 June 2022

⁶ Died 2 July 2022

⁷ Resigned 23 March 2020

⁸ Resigned 11 April 2022

Appointed 23 June 2022

⁹ Appointed 18 August 2022

¹⁰ Resigned 26 September 2020

¹¹ Resigned 1 December 2021

¹² ALP until 15 June 2020

¹³ Appointed 23 April 2020

¹⁴ ALP until 7 March 2022

¹⁵ Appointed 13 October 2020

¹⁶ Resigned 28 February 2020

Party abbreviations

AJP—Animal Justice Party; ALP—Labor Party; DHJP—Derryn Hinch's Justice Party;

DLP—Democratic Labour Party; FPRP—Fiona Patten's Reason Party; Greens—Australian Greens;

Ind—Independent; LDP—Liberal Democratic Party; LP—Liberal Party; Nats—The Nationals;

SAP—Sustainable Australia Party; SFFP—Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party; TMP—Transport Matters Party

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Wednesday, 25 May 2022

The PRESIDENT (Hon. N Elasmarr) took the chair at 9.33 am and read the prayer.

Announcements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The PRESIDENT (09:33): On behalf of the Victorian state Parliament I acknowledge the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of this land which has served as a significant meeting place of the First People of Victoria. I acknowledge and pay respect to the elders of the Aboriginal nations in Victoria past, present and emerging and welcome any elders and members of the Aboriginal communities who may visit or participate in the events or proceedings of the Parliament.

Papers

PAPERS

Tabled by Clerk:

Independent Review Panel—Report on the Keno Licensing Project, May 2022, under section 10.2A.11 of the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 (*Ordered to be published*).

Planning and Environment Act 1987—Notice of Approval of an amendment to the Golden Plains Planning Scheme—Amendment C100.

Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008—Documents under section 165AQ of the Act in relation to the making of pandemic orders implemented on—

12 April 2022.

22 April 2022.

Land Tax Act 2005—Treasurer's Report for 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021 of Land Tax Absentee Owner Surcharge Exemptions, under sections 3B and 3BA of the Act.

Members statements

HEALTH SERVICES

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (09:36): Reports today of whistleblowers coming forward and speaking out reveal the extent of Victoria's health crisis yet again. Years of mismanagement and underfunding have contributed to what is now putting the lives of too many Victorians at risk. Constant ambulance ramping, failures in getting through to 000, regular code oranges being called within the ambulance system and code yellows in regional hospitals—this crisis extends across the state, and now administrators and doctors are saying there is not enough money or staff to open all their beds. It is a mess, and one of the Premier's own making. He has got us into this mess; he is not the man to get us out of it.

CARMEL RAFFERTY

Ms CROZIER: If I can just raise another important issue, former Catholic primary school teacher at Holy Family School, Doveton, in the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne Ms Carmel Rafferty lost her career in 1993 over clergy sexual abuse and subsequently gave evidence to the Victorian Parliament's Family and Community Development Committee in January 2013 as part of its inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations. I was very privileged to have chaired the inquiry, which led to the royal commission, and our report, *Betrayal of Trust*, went around the world.

I saw and chatted to Carmel at the De La Salle, Malvern, commemoration prior to COVID. Carmel has subsequently contacted me. The committee report unfortunately contained an error relating to Ms Rafferty's evidence. On page 415 another witness, Graeme Sleeman, testified to having received ongoing payments from Peter O'Callaghan QC for eight years followed by a lump sum payment with

a deed of release. The error regarding Ms Rafferty appears at the top of page 416, giving the impression that she too received ongoing payments. However, she only received one payment—(*Time expired*)

BLACKBURN CYCLING CLUB

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (09:38): Today I want to give a shout-out to the Blackburn Cycling Club. On budget day this year I had the pleasure of announcing \$200 000 for new lights at the East Burwood Reserve for the Blackburn Cycling Club. This is on top of last year's investment by the Andrews Labor government of \$700 000 to upgrade their clubrooms.

The Blackburn Cycling Club has produced some of the finest cyclists to come out of Victoria. To list some of their members' recent achievements, Alistair Donohue secured two medals at the recent Tokyo Paralympics; two junior riders are currently representing Australia at world level, Jack Ward and Harvey Brooks; two riders are in selection contention for the upcoming junior world track championships, Sophie Marr and Tarun Cook; and 30 per cent of the Victorian track cycling team which recently competed at the national championships in Brisbane came out of this club. There have been four national titles awarded to Blackburn riders at recent national competitions, in addition to over 30 podium positions. Five riders recently represented Australia at the Oceania Track Championships, achieving 11 medals. I could go on.

It is an amazing achievement from a club out in Blackburn, to produce so many champions for Victoria and Australia, and I want to acknowledge the great work that they do. They recently increased their female membership by 30 per cent. They are a great club, and it is great to be associated with them.

CARMEL RAFFERTY

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (09:39): (*By leave*) The error regarding Ms Rafferty appears at the top of page 416, giving the impression that she too received ongoing payments. However, Ms Rafferty received one payment only, as a lump sum, with a deed of release through Archbishop Denis Hart and Peter O'Callaghan in 2010. I wish to advise the house of this error and thank Ms Rafferty and other witnesses for their courage in coming forward.

HORSE-DRAWN VEHICLES

Mr MEDDICK (Western Victoria) (09:40): Most wins for animals are hard fought and won. The campaign to ban horse-drawn carriages from Melbourne's CBD was no different. For 10 years now Melbourne Against Horse-Drawn Carriages has been protesting on the streets and documenting cruelty, traffic infringements, carriage flips and sadly even horse deaths only a few blocks from this place. Their work showed that the romanticised idea of a horse-drawn carriage ride is nothing more than animal cruelty. It has been an honour for me to bring their messages and stories into the Parliament to advocate for change. It has not just been animal advocates speaking out against the trade. For too long horse-drawn vehicles have been hindering emergency vehicles and interfering with trams. It is no surprise horses and busy streets simply do not mix.

Last week the Minister for Roads and Road Safety announced that horse-drawn carriages would finally be banned in Melbourne's CBD. It comes after a roundtable process, which Melbourne Against Horse-Drawn Carriages and the Animal Justice Party took part in, was finalised, and the regulation takes effect next month. I want to thank everyone who played a part to make this happen, taking us one step closer to a kinder world for horses.

METRO TUNNEL

Ms WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (09:41): Last week I accompanied the Premier alongside Minister Allan and Minister Carroll for a visit to the site of the future Parkville train station in my electorate. Parkville will be one of the five new stations that will be part of the Metro Tunnel, which will slash travel times by up to 50 minutes per day and create capacity for more than half a million

extra passengers each week in the peak. The visit was to mark an important milestone in the project, which is that we are now recruiting more than 100 new train drivers to operate additional train services when the new Metro Tunnel opens a year ahead of schedule in 2025. The new drivers will undertake an intensive 44-week training program to ensure that they are ready to operate the 65 new and bigger trains that will run through the Metro Tunnel and to get them up to speed on project features such as the next-generation signalling system and the platform screen doors. During my visit I was pleased to see construction on the Metro Tunnel progressing well, with crews preparing to lay tracks on the new twin tunnels in the coming months. For those interested, if a life as a train driver is for you, why not apply and head to bigbuild.vic.gov.au for all the details.

U CAN CRY

Ms MAXWELL (Northern Victoria) (09:42): It gives me great pride and pleasure to speak about Project 365's U Can Cry and the performances of an incredible group of 15 musicians over the Mother's Day weekend to raise awareness for mental health and funds for Wangaratta's Into Our Hands foundation. Pete Rourke wears his heart on his sleeve, and 12 months ago he decided to publicly share his own battles with mental health and bring together 15 musos to deliver a message of hope and encouragement, and that he did. COVID restrictions limited the rehearsal opportunities of the band to only 13 gatherings over 12 months, and what they produced in this period was quite simply remarkable. As someone said on the night, 'U Can Cry is a group completely absent of ego and full to the brim with talent'. More than 800 people enjoyed the project's performances across two shows, and it left the community feeling uplifted and wanting more. Project 365 was supported by the Wangaratta Grit and Resilience project and some proactive locals. They raised more than \$33 000 for the Into Our Hands foundation and delivered the most important message that it is okay not to be okay and that you are not alone. Congratulations to everyone involved. Your community is very proud of you—I sure as hell am. And thank you, Pete Rourke, for getting this off the ground.

DINGLEY RECYCLED WATER SCHEME

Dr KIEU (South Eastern Metropolitan) (09:44): Last week I was delighted to join Minister Lisa Neville and Minister Martin Pakula in announcing the Andrews Labor government's \$24.83 million budget 2022–23 investment in the Dingley recycled water scheme. We are keeping world-class golf courses, gardens and local sports ovals green with the Dingley recycled water scheme. The 42-kilometre pipeline will start delivering recycled water to 46 sites from 2024 onwards, supporting over 240 jobs in local parks, golf courses, sports ovals, market gardens and nurseries across South Eastern Metropolitan.

BUDDHIST CELEBRATIONS

Dr KIEU: On another matter, recently I had the privilege of attending the Light It Up opening ceremony at the Buddha's Day and Multicultural Festival 2022, hosted by the Buddha's Light International Association of Victoria. Last weekend I also celebrated Vesak Day at the Quang Minh Temple. I am truly delighted to be a part of these auspicious celebrations of the birth of Buddha, and I rejoice in the light of his eternal teachings. The past two years have presented many Victorians with great hardship, particularly for our multicultural community. In the words of Buddha, 'No matter how hard the past, you can always begin again'. Indeed this sentiment was realised by our community's resilience, faith, hope and strength in the face of recent adversity.

INTERNATIONAL FACE EQUALITY WEEK

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) (09:45): Last week was International Face Equality Week, and this year's theme was 'Face equality is a human right'. I was really fortunate to meet with Carly Findlay OAM, writer, speaker and appearance activist, who highlighted the Face Equality International report, and I would encourage all members to have a read of it. The report shows that the global experience of disfigurement and facial difference is one of inequality, marginalisation, being hidden away and human rights violations. Wherever in the world someone with facial difference might

be, the impact of stigma and prejudice towards facial difference can have a profound impact upon mental health and wellbeing. Change can start with the language we use—‘facial difference’ instead of ‘disfigurement’—and this goes to the heart of the anti-vilification bill that I introduced into this house in 2019 that would have protected people from vilification based on gender, sexuality or disability. The bill was referred for a parliamentary inquiry. The inquiry made favourable recommendations, including that the government will carefully consider extending anti-vilification protections to additional groups of people, including all those groups protected by the current Equal Opportunity Act 2010. So on behalf of Carly and many others, I urge the Attorney-General to hasten on that reform.

EDUCATION WEEK

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) (09:47): This week is Education Week, and it has been such an honour to recognise the many teachers, staff, instructors, volunteers and support crews for education systems right across the state. We have invested a record amount of funding into every part of our education system to provide a lifelong opportunity for people to learn—and learn in a way that benefits them throughout their entire working lives and right through to the very activities that they enjoy within community. From free TAFE through to universal access to three-year-old kinder and from the support that we have provided to schools, including in this year’s budget for specialist schools, to the upgrades and the uplifts to the investment in teacher education, recruitment and support, we have seen not only that our schools, our staff and student bodies have risen to the challenge of some exceptionally difficult circumstances in the course of the pandemic but also that they have continued to excel in the results, inclusivity and future opportunities across the board.

GIPPSLAND PRIDE GALA

Ms SHING: I wish to make a very brief mention of Gippsland Pride Initiative’s Pride Gala, which is taking place this Saturday night. The gala is an exceptionally important opportunity for hundreds of people to come together to celebrate LGBTIQA+ communities. I really look forward to this weekend. I thank everyone involved, and it is such a wonderful celebration of diversity, particularly after the demonisation of recent weeks in the federal domain.

AGAPI CARE

Mr TARLAMIS (South Eastern Metropolitan) (09:48): I would like to acknowledge and thank Agapi Care for the critical role they play each and every day, providing much-needed support and assistance to those in our community who are vulnerable and most in need. The dedication and commitment of their management team and staff are second to none, and the difference they make in the lives of those they come into contact with cannot and should not be underestimated. By engaging the way that they do so diligently with their clients, their families and carers to ensure that they are treated equally and with dignity and respect, Agapi Care never lose sight of the goal to get the best outcomes for everyone that they provide a service for. I know that during the challenges of the pandemic Agapi Care went above and beyond yet again, adapting to meet the increased safeguards and procedures so that they could continue to provide a much-needed support without interruption.

Recently I had the pleasure of attending their facility in Preston to support their annual radiothon, where I had the opportunity to also meet some of the many amazing volunteers, staff, supporters and clients. Can I say what a truly inspiring, dedicated group of people they are. Donations from this year’s radiothon will go towards renovations to their new property in Oakleigh, which will support respite and short-term accommodation services for people with disabilities in the local community.

I would like to thank Agapi Care’s management team, led by CEO Mary Gakopoulos, and all of their staff and volunteers for their care, dedication and commitment, for supporting so many vulnerable Victorians to access more options and opportunities for a more normal life and for assisting them to overcome disability, discrimination and disadvantage. I would also like to thank all of those who

support Agapi Care in so many ways, ensuring that they can continue to provide their important services to make such a profound difference to the lives of so many.

FEDERAL ELECTION

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan)

Incorporated pursuant to order of Council of 7 September 2021:

Congratulations to Anthony Albanese and the Australian Labor Party on their victory in Saturday's federal election. This victory is a great thing for the people of Australia and especially for the people of Victoria.

The Albanese Labor government will end the attacks on our healthcare system by making it easier to see a doctor. They will establish 50 medical urgent care clinics, which will be critical in taking pressure off emergency departments. The maximum cost of medications on the PBS will be reduced to \$30 per script.

Federal Labor will invest in the skills that Australians need to gain meaningful employment, building on the great work of the Andrews Labor government. This will include 465 000 free TAFE places, 20 000 additional university places and an increase in the number of apprentices and trainees on public projects.

An expansion of the childcare subsidy rate and eligibility will reduce the cost of child care for working families. Childcare costs put significant strain on families and discourage parents, particularly women, from entering the workforce. This policy will increase access to child care, while also boosting the economy.

An Albanese Labor government will also make Australia a country that makes things again. The coronavirus pandemic highlighted the consequences of the Liberals abandoning our local manufacturing industry and capabilities. Federal Labor will invest \$15 billion of capital into local projects for more local jobs.

Federal Labor will also get serious in the fight against climate change. Australia will reduce emissions by 43 per cent by 2030 by upgrading the electricity grid, making electric vehicles cheaper, and investing in renewable energy alternatives. This plan will lower emissions, while creating good jobs and cutting power bills.

And, importantly, an Albanese Labor government will ensure that Victoria is no longer short-changed on federal infrastructure funding. Mr Albanese's pledge of \$2.2 billion for the Suburban Rail Loop will help make this massive project, which will revolutionise public transport in Melbourne, a reality.

I look forward to seeing this new government improve the lives of Victorians.

Bills

FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022

Statement of compatibility

Ms MAXWELL (Northern Victoria) (09:50): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation Legislation Amendment Bill 2022.

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (the Charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 (the Bill).

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

Overview of the Bill

The Bill extends presumptive rights for firefighters for the purpose of claiming compensation under the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013*, to include certain female-specific cancers to the existing schedules in the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Act 2019 and the Forests Amendment (Forest Firefighters Presumptive Rights Compensation) Act 2021.

Part 1—Human Rights issues

In my opinion, the human rights under the Charter that are relevant to the bill and consistent with the statements of compatibility for other Bills put to this Parliament that relate to presumptive cancer rights, are:

- The right to equality and protection against discrimination under section 8;
- The right to privacy as protected by section 13;
- The right to protection of family by section 17;

For the reasons outlined below, I am of the view that the Bill is compatible with this Charter because, to the extent that some provisions may limit human rights, those limitations are reasonable and demonstrably justified.

Right to equality and protection against discrimination

Section 8(3) of the Charter provides that every person is equal before the law and is entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination and has the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination.

The term ‘discrimination’ referred to in section 8(3) of the Charter is defined as:

Discrimination (within the meaning of the Equal Opportunity Act 2010) on the basis of an attribute set out in section 6 of that Act. “Sex”, “disability”, “employment activity” and “industrial activity” are identified as attributes within section 6 of the Equal Opportunity Act 2010.

This bill promotes the right to equality. The additional benefit to this cohort is justified based on associated evidence that attending fires is associated with an increased risk of developing cancer and is consistent with emerging similar rights in other international jurisdictions.

This bill improves access to compensation benefits for female firefighters to ensure they are not discriminated against or disadvantaged from accessing presumptive rights for female-specific cancers as a firefighter because research to otherwise prove a conclusive link between occupational exposure and disease is limited because female data sets are not of sufficient size to provide for epidemiological studies.

These provisions limit the ability of certain firefighters from accessing the rebuttable presumptive right to compensation by virtue of being female-specific and having defined qualifying periods, which therefore may limit the rights to equality and protection against discrimination. However, I consider these limitations to be reasonable and consistent with other qualifying periods and sex-specific cancers within the existing presumptive rights scheme.

Right to privacy

Section 13 of the Charter states that a person has the right to not have their privacy unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with and the right not to have their reputation unlawfully attacked. This includes a right to privacy of information that relates to a person’s health and/or exposure to disease.

The presumptive rights scheme to which this Bill relates includes consideration by an advisory committee of a firefighter’s eligibility to the scheme. Access to information in the course of this process may give rise to an interference with an individual’s privacy, however there are parameters within which information is accessed and the role of the advisory committee is important to maintaining the integrity of the scheme. The presumptive rights scheme is not compulsory and an individual can choose to not apply for the scheme if their personal desire to protect their privacy overrides their desire to access the scheme. Therefore I consider any interference with privacy that may arise to be neither arbitrary or unlawful, and balanced against the positive promotion of other rights to equality.

The right to protection of family

This bill supports the State in providing protection to families by ensuring that families of female firefighters can access presumptive rights for female-specific cancers and those families will not be deprived of reasonable support.

Second reading

Ms MAXWELL (Northern Victoria) (09:50): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to bring the Firefighters’ Presumptive Rights Compensation Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 to this Parliament, a bill to extend presumptive cancer rights for firefighters to include certain female-specific cancers.

Presumptive cancer rights were provided as a workplace injury compensation provision for firefighters when fire reforms were legislated in 2019. The debate over these fire reforms was very controversial, heated and, at times, divided. In the midst of that divide was the strong and bipartisan support for presumptive cancer rights that delivered a rebuttable compensation scheme for firefighters diagnosed with certain cancers.

Firefighters across this state—whether they are career firefighters, forest firefighters or the incredible network of CFA volunteers that our regions rely so heavily on—face enormous risk every time they respond to a fire. That risk is not limited to protection of our local communities; our teams travel interstate and even internationally to fight fires in times of catastrophic emergency.

The risks are intense and wideranging: smoke inhalation; exposure to chemicals, extreme heat, ultraviolet radiation, noise, dust; and the risk of crush injuries from collapsing structures.

Exposure is not just at the fireground. Contaminants remain on firefighting equipment and need to be thoroughly cleaned. There has been a real shift away from the image of gear caked in soot as a status symbol and a greater understanding of how chemical leaching can affect a person's health.

The United States and Canada have led the charge on presumptive cancer rights for firefighters. Of the firefighters named on the Fallen Firefighter Memorial Wall of Honor in Colorado, more than half of those firefighters died from cancer. Much of the evidence base for delivering these rights has come from studies involving male firefighters, not because they are male but because they represent around 95 per cent of the overall firefighter cohort. The evidence is clear that there is elevated risk of cancer for firefighters compared to the general population.

So far, female firefighters have been too low in numbers for research to be able to determine conclusively the risk of developing female-specific cancers from exposure to fire. Female firefighters make up less than 5 per cent of the overall workforce. They are greater in number in the forest firefighter industry in Victoria—I am told 25 per cent—and while participation rates will grow, it will still be some time before they are in sufficient numbers to provide researchers with reliable study sets.

International medical oncologist Dr Kenneth Kunz has been a longstanding advocate for a focus on the health impacts of firefighting on women and he has predicted that female firefighters get a minimum of 20 per cent more cancers than the general population.

In 2019, the US Federal Emergency Management Agency published a paper *Emerging Health and Safety Issues Among Women in the Fire Service*. This reports states that the incidence of cervical cancer is more than four times higher in female firefighters and suggests that elevated incidence and mortality could be associated with exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals in the firefighter population, which could elevate the incidence and mortality of reproductive cancers among female firefighters.

The most recent study specific to female firefighters was released in December 2021. The Women Firefighters Biomonitoring Collaborative examined exposure to fire retardants and the association with thyroid function and breast cancer among female firefighters. The study found these levels were much higher among female firefighters than in women office workers and evidence that fire retardants may affect thyroid function in humans. Breast cancer is on the list of cancers included for presumptive rights, because this cancer can affect both males and females.

Another study by this collaborative confirmed that female firefighters are exposed to higher levels of some PFAS compared to office workers. Just this year in the United States, a lawsuit was lodged claiming that PFAS in protective equipment is associated with adverse health effects, including cancer. In a massive study of 70 000 people living in the Mid-Ohio Valley, where the drinking water was contaminated with one type of PFAS chemical near a Teflon-manufacturing plant, elevated levels were associated with a greater risk of numerous cancers, including testicular and ovarian cancers.

So, while the findings are sobering, it is certainly positive that there is more attention being focused on the health of female firefighters and that research is being done where the opportunities present.

Australian research is limited, but the Australian firefighters health study conducted by Monash in 2011 emerged from several overseas studies that identified elevated cancer risks, again, in firefighters. This study found the cancer mortality risk for paid firefighters was comparatively higher than the risk for other major causes of death, although that risk was actually reduced when compared to the rest of the Australian population. This was suggested to be because working populations tend to be healthier than the population from which they are drawn and this is probably more pronounced for paid firefighters because of the strict fitness standards they have to meet. Increased risk was statistically proven in a number of cancers through this study, including overall cancer incidence for the group as a whole and for those who had worked for longer than 20 years.

This bill seeks to add three female-specific cancers to the existing list of cancers that are afforded rebuttable presumptive rights. My strong view is that in the interests of fairness and equality, we should take a precautionary approach to include these cancers and not wait for conclusive evidence.

When I first brought this proposition to the Parliament, through an amendment to the presumptive rights bill for forest firefighters, I recognised that Victoria prides itself on being progressive in its approach to gender equality.

At that time, there was broad support for my amendment but I negotiated in good faith with the government to work with them on progressing this reform. As the government said at the time, we all share an aspiration to ensure the scheme is supportive of women. We have had discussions since then, they have done some work in the background and I have too. This work will continue irrespective of this bill.

I have spoken with various fire services and their workers, both formally and informally. The United Firefighters Union support this push, as do the Volunteer Fire Brigades of Victoria and members of both Fire Services Victoria and Country Fire Authority.

We should not delay in bringing this change to the presumptive rights scheme until there are enough female firefighters to provide the evidence that exists now for men. That evidence could be years, decades away and in the meantime will deny equality to those female firefighters, those trailblazers, who serve us now and who might need this now.

Gender equality is about creating a level playing field. This sometimes requires putting in place measures that are ahead of the curve to deliver equality and ensure women are not left behind. As I have said before and I say again, we should not wait years for data to confirm what we can reasonably conclude now—and that is that the elevated cancer risk we see in male reproductive organs is probably going to be the same tragic fate for women.

If we have the enviable scenario in the future that our female participation rates grow enough to have standalone research, on this basis this Parliament can make legislative amendments to the scheme. There might be other changes in times to come, as occupational risk of other cancers may very well diminish as equipment and processes improve and drive down exposure. We should take the precautionary approach and provide the support while we shore up the science.

Ultimately, presumptive cancer rights is a scheme we want very few firefighters to access because we don't want them developing cancer. But if they do, female firefighters should not be denied support because their participation rate is so low as to make conclusive evidence unachievable.

There are some provinces in Canada who have delivered these rights since 2019, and more have followed. Oregon in the United States has recently added female productive cancers to their presumption, and Phoenix and Arizona are pushing to follow. It's happening.

Let's join this charge and be the trailblazers for our female firefighters that they are for us. Let's be ahead of the curve, Victoria, and give them the rights they deserve.

I commend this bill to the house.

Ms TAYLOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:01): I move:

That debate be adjourned for two weeks.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

Motions

EMERGENCY SERVICES TELECOMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:01): I rise to speak to my motion 773 regarding the very real crisis that has been plaguing our 000 system or, as it is known now, ESTA. I move:

That this house:

(1) notes:

- (a) the Ashton review into the capabilities of the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA) and its call-taking failures does not adequately grapple with the serious, urgent and life-threatening issues at ESTA, appearing to not seriously or properly engage with deaths caused, in whole or in part, by ESTA's failings;
- (b) that the Ashton review instead provides a set of recommendations focused on 'cultural reform', 'rebranding', 'partnerships', 'strategic road maps' and 'management plans', which is management speak that fails to grapple with the life and death issues involved or to provide an urgent solution to ensure that the 000 call-taking service meets all benchmarks, provides adequate services and stops unacceptable delays and the unnecessary deaths of Victorians; and

(2) calls on ESTA to publicly release weekly performance reports from 1 July 2022.

I know that the government will say, 'We've got the inspector-general for emergency management looking into the serious number of deaths that have occurred because of the 000 crisis', but as the Ashton review points out in the executive summary:

For some time now, there has been significant concern around the effectiveness of ESTA's capability and capacity to deliver consistent Triple Zero (000) services across Victoria.

We know that to be true because in 2016, when there was a thunderstorm asthma event and tragically so many Victorians died, there were concerns around the capacity of ESTA. What Victorians were told when COVID hit in January 2020, and then of course the numbers grew in February, was that Victoria could cope, that our health system was world class and it would be able to withstand what was coming our way. I grant that nobody could foresee what was to happen, but we were watching pictures from around the world and we knew that COVID was a very serious disease. At that point in time there were no vaccines, and it is quite remarkable how far the world moved and how quickly to get those vaccines developed.

I digress, because I make the point here that in the weeks after that the government put us into lockdown. Everybody understood the reason for that: we needed to prepare our health system. But over the last few years Victoria has gone into lockdown after lockdown—six lockdowns—with Melbourne being the longest locked-down city. We were constantly reminded that we needed to prepare our health system, but they did not prepare our health system. They failed to recognise that ESTA is a part of that system and came out saying, 'Well, we didn't foresee the modelling from the omicron wave'. They were relying on the modelling for COVID, but they did not foresee the omicron wave. You cannot use that as the excuse. The lockdowns, as I said, have caused so many issues across the system where people who have got health conditions are going to get sicker. Our elective surgery delays are going to cause people to get sicker. They are going to need emergency care, and that involves ambulance, that involves emergency departments, that involves hospital admissions and it involves, sadly, 000. Yes, there were some cases of people ringing 000 for trivial matters. That has

always occurred, and I understand that frustration for many of the ESTA call takers. By no means, may I say, is this motion reflecting on those people that work within ESTA and 000 taking the hard calls and listening to people desperate: ‘When is the ambulance arriving?’. I have raised this in this house and through questions in the other house in terms of these Victorians who need an ambulance who cannot get through. They are ringing 000. They say, ‘We’ll ring back’, but they never do. They ring 000 again; they are ringing out.

The whole system has been in absolute crisis for not just the last few weeks or months, where the government has finally decided to put some money in and look at what needs to be done, but it has been in crisis for years. As I said, in 2016 there were issues identified. The government went ahead and had dozens and dozens of reviews and reports, costing \$15 million. I mean, the consultancy reviews into ESTA are just extraordinary. I have raised that again. I have got a list here; it is pages and pages long of reviews and all sorts of things. The government, I might add, defies the house in refusing to release those reviews as per a motion that was put in here by me a few weeks ago to have those reviews. They refused to do it. I think that is a disgrace. This government is shrouded in secrecy the whole time. Why can’t we see these reviews? That is what the house voted on, yet the Attorney—well, somebody in place of her—said, ‘No, you can’t have them’. We need those reviews. I think the house and Victorians need to see those reviews.

This review that Graham Ashton, the former police commissioner, did looked at many of those issues and looked at the key challenges. We know that people are dying, for heaven’s sake. We have had too many Victorians that have died. The stories from people that have spoken out, spoken to me, spoken in public. Their distress and questioning of whether their loved one could have been saved if they could have got through, I think, is so telling about the extent of the failings. The government will say, ‘Well, those issues will be looked at by the inspector-general,’ and that report is due out later this year. This report that we got dumped on us Thursday—shamefully just two days before a federal election; I mean, really, this government knows no bounds in terms of trying to cover up its failings—is very telling. It is damning about some of the issues that it raises, and it does talk about some of those issues, the call taking and dispatch, and it makes recommendations:

working collaboratively with AV to ensure the required level of clinical input into the CTD system, including active involvement in ambulance CTD of resources

That is talking about these life-saving issues. That is talking about people who are desperate to get through, to understand the clinical nature of these needs. And this report acknowledges the work of the staff:

The Review noted that there are mental health projects underway at ESTA, however the mental health of CTD staff was portrayed as a prominent issue throughout the Review.

They are hearing about these very critical issues. I do not want to trivialise it too much, but the report goes on to talk about things around planning:

Small things matter in this regard, including replacing chairs when they are not fit-for-purpose and removing boxes from hallways and pedestrian traffic zones.

When we are talking about people dying and they are talking about things like that, surely that just says it all. These issues that this report looked into did not grapple with the serious nature of what is going on—that is, Victorians dying; that is the mental health impacts on the staff; that is the lack of preparation to have enough staff, enough surge capacity. At the first briefing—the only briefing I actually ever had from the chief health officer back on 6 February 2020; I remember it clearly, the date—I asked him about the surge capacity. ‘Where are we going to get the surge capacity?’. He said, ‘I don’t know’. The minister at the time—who has now left because she could not work with the Premier because of the Coate inquiry and all of those issues that came out of that—said, ‘We will have enough workforce in place’. That is what I was talking about when the government said, ‘We need to go into lockdown to prepare our health system’. The government was talking it up big—‘We’ll get retired doctors, we’ll get retired nurses, we’ll get retired paramedics into place to deal with this’. But

they did not do any of that, and they did not prepare ESTA as part of that health response. This is an indictment of the gross mismanagement and incompetence, quite frankly, of this government's handling of the whole COVID response, and we will be talking about that later in another motion this afternoon.

The critical issue here about this report and what it states in terms of some of the recommendations—rebranding it from ESTA to Triple Zero Victoria and looking at various things—is that it is not grappling with the serious nature of what has gone on. It is scathing about the government not being able to meet any of the metrics, and that is, again, no reflection on those who are working in it, even though the government would like to portray that, as I and others have said. No, it is not. It is not a reflection on them. Quite frankly, they did not get the support they needed from government, because they did not get the preparation. They did not get what was required. The government was asleep at the wheel. This is a part of the health response. This government has not understood that.

Of course you are going to get more people who are going to get sicker when they cannot be seen, when they cannot have their surgery, when they cannot get into their primary carer, when they cannot get their chronic disease monitored. People are going to get sick and they are going to die, and they have. They have died waiting for an ambulance—getting through to 000—which is why this motion is so important. They have died in the back of ambulances. The government cannot tell us how many have died coming off the elective surgery waitlist, but they have died, because family members have rung me and told me. Their family member has died because they could not get their elective surgery or they could not get transferred to a Melbourne hospital in time.

These failures are significant and profound. These failures are a direct result of the government's incompetence and mismanagement. We have seen that in reports today where clinicians and hospital administrators have said that this issue has not been caused by COVID. It is years of mismanagement. It is years of underfunding. This government has been in power in this state for nearly two decades—nearly 20 years. They have not got it right—no-one has got it right; I acknowledge that—but they have never acknowledged the fact that they got it so wrong. No-one has taken responsibility for the tragic loss of lives. Now we have got legal action, a class action, taking place. I know. People have rung me and said, 'Good. We're joining that because the government won't listen to us'.

David Edwards—the minister's own constituent—Graham Ashton did not speak to him. He said yesterday that he had spoken to people affected. Well, he did not speak to him. He is one of those statistics, one of those Victorians whose father died because they could not get through to 000. Why did Graham Ashton not speak to them to understand from that aspect, from the very people that had been affected, how some of this could have been managed? The inspector-general has not spoken to them either, so what is he doing? These are the people that are affected, and they are very upset. They feel not heard, they feel so let down, that the government has not understood. As he said, 'I don't know if my father would have survived or not, but the fact that I couldn't get through and the fact that the government hasn't listened and hasn't contacted me is so distressing'. So the pain—

Ms Symes interjected.

Ms CROZIER: Not by you, Minister. The minister interjects and says he has been spoken to by the government. Yes, I know he has been spoken to by Stephen Leane, but not by the minister. You have not picked up the phone and spoken to him. Again it goes to the dismissal, the arrogance, the hurt and the retraumatisation that these people are feeling because of the government's lack of action. This is why this motion is so important.

Mr Ondarchie: The lack of accountability.

Ms CROZIER: Mr Ondarchie says, 'The lack of accountability'. It is true, it is a gross lack of accountability.

Ms Symes interjected.

Ms CROZIER: Minister, under the Westminster system you probably should have resigned, and I have said before you should have resigned. You have washed your hands of it. None of you have taken responsibility for the gross failings.

Ms Symes interjected.

Ms CROZIER: That is ridiculous. People have died.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem): Mr Ondarchie! Can I just remind everyone to go through the Chair and not to have that engagement across the chamber. Ms Crozier to continue her contribution, but through the Chair.

Ms CROZIER: I think it is extraordinary. I understand that the minister is very sensitive and testy about this because of the failings. There are so many mistakes. The government failed to prepare our health system. They failed to prepare ESTA. They have spent millions of dollars on reviews and consultancies. They will not even release that to the house; they are so arrogant. They have not spoken directly to those that are affected. That is the case. Putting money in just a couple of weeks ago is not going to take away from the lack of accountability that has happened over many, many years. In 2016 it was highlighted that there were problems. They put in a review that is going to rebrand it. It is going to have partnerships, strategic road maps, management plans, cultural reform—that is all very good, but it does not take away from the loss of those Victorians who have sadly lost their lives and those family members who are still traumatised by the lack of action and acknowledgement by the government.

I say transparency with this government is non-existent; it just does not happen. We need the information. We have not had that throughout the whole COVID crisis. We have asked for all the health advice to be released. We have never got that. The government says, ‘You have; it’s in the pandemic orders’. Well, we have never had it. We have never seen the advice. This is why it is important that ESTA, as it is now rebranded, publicly releases the performance reports from July 2022. We need to track and see the improvements that the government say are happening. The minister just interjected a few moments ago how good she is: ‘I’m doing it. I’m standing here. You’re not listening. You’re saying, “We don’t like what you’re doing”’. I mean, this is not about me. It is actually not about the minister. It is about the Victorian people and those poor Victorians who have lost their lives and those family members who want to see a greater degree of accountability. Transparency is important. That is why this motion calls for greater transparency. We need to see that weekly reporting.

There is so much more I could say about transparency, but in the interests of time I will conclude there. I know that those that have tragically lost children, lost parents, lost husbands and lost loved ones and friends want answers. Cover-up, spin and secrecy will not deliver that to them. There are far too many Victorians who have suffered as a result of the gross mismanagement and ongoing incompetence of the Andrews government.

Mr ERDOGAN (Southern Metropolitan) (10:20): I rise to speak against the motion before the house at the moment. Reflecting on the previous speaker’s contribution, I will add that there was quite a considerably inaccurate description of what is happening in the ESTA system and ESTA space and a poor reflection of the hard work that has clearly gone into the Ashton review and the steps taken by our government to support this vital service.

Obviously last week our government publicly released the ESTA capability and service review final report, as we committed to, alongside a clear response which sets out the government’s implementation plan to deliver a stronger, faster 000 service to all Victorians into the future. Today’s motion calls into question the work done by former police commissioner Graham Ashton and criticises a number of the recommendations that report makes. It was particularly unhelpful that Ms Crozier trivialised some of the improvements suggested in that report. She said she would not trivialise it, but

that was exactly the way it came across, sitting where I was. So it is disappointing, because they were very important recommendations. Unlike those opposite our government thanks Mr Ashton for his work and supports in principle all the recommendations his report makes. The other suggestion in the motion is that the government is ignoring the current surge in ambulance call demand. I think anyone in this Parliament who has been paying attention will know that the pressure the pandemic has put on our health system, including ESTA, has been the primary focus of our government.

At the outset I would also like to make the point, as the minister has on many occasions, that this report is not an investigation into specific incidents or adverse outcomes. These matters are the subject of reports being undertaken by the inspector-general for emergency management and the coroner. The inspector-general will provide his report in the second half of this year, and this will also inform the coroner's important work as well. I make this point because those opposite continue to be either confused or deliberately ignorant about what this report is about.

I feel as though, unfortunately, there is a politicisation of this—and it has been quite consistent for the last two years during my time in this chamber—and of our response to the global pandemic and the health measures we have taken to protect Victorians. Our emergency services have also been a victim of the same mischaracterisation by the opposition, but this government have not wavered on this report to take action to support ESTA, and we are taking action right now. In fact in the 2022–23 budget just a few weeks ago we delivered a budget that was about putting ESTA staff first. Our response to the Ashton report builds on the commitment and on the record \$360 million investment in ESTA since October last year. Our focus is firmly on giving Victorians the confidence that when they call for help in an emergency we have an organisation and system in place that will ensure they get it. We know the stories of Victorians who have been impacted by the pressure of this pandemic on our health system. The minister and the Premier have also listened, alongside our ESTA call takers and dispatchers, as they do their very best to respond to the rising number of calls.

I want to make that point because Ms Crozier reflected on lockdowns and all the public health measures that we took to protect people and again mischaracterised them, which is very unfair because she seems to have forgotten that in 2020–21 we did not have vaccines. Our vaccine rollout was actually quite slow when you compare it to other developed nations, thanks to our federal government, who said it was not a race. They said it was not their job, but obviously the Australian people are smarter than that and they knew it was their job and it was a race to protect people, and they failed to do so. So in that climate our government had to take public health measures that restricted the spreading of this virus, which protected our most vulnerable and protected our health system.

So I think, again, to try and put a lens on today, when we have had such a great vaccination uptake by Victorians, to pontificate about what could or should have been done is very unfair and very unfair to the minister, because our minister is working very hard to improve this service. Before the pandemic the service was a well-run service, and in time it will quieten down, but obviously the global pandemic has affected our health system considerably. I think it is an important message that we do send to our dedicated call takers, dispatchers and other staff at ESTA, who work tirelessly for Victorians in the face of sustained, unprecedented pandemic-related call volumes.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr ERDOGAN: Mr Ondarchie is asking me if I believe the pandemic has had an effect on ESTA. Of course it has. It has had an effect on ESTA; it has had an effect on our health system. I think we cannot ignore the impact of the global pandemic on the system. I think all the systems, all the issues with our infrastructure, like I said, have been exacerbated by the global pandemic.

But I think it is important to understand that we value the call takers and the work that they are doing. It is difficult work. It is high-pressure work, and it is fantastic to see that our government is investing in real-time frontline workers. The minister most recently announced the amount of money we are putting into the system, and also obviously you can reflect that she has provided the breakdown of

where the staff will be allocated—and I will touch on that a bit later. But the establishment of the review also acknowledged that there has been no major structural change to ESTA for nearly 20 years, and obviously the speed at which the funding has moved is quite a challenge.

Since Mr Ashton commenced his work we have obviously seen significant pandemic-led pressures come upon ESTA and its critical workers, as we have seen right across our system. The report does not look at specific incidents but does identify measures to address service and capability gaps impacting on ESTA's service delivery, which become even clearer in consideration of pandemic pressure points. The report and our government's response, which accepts all 20 recommendations, will help transform our 000 system for the future.

These are major structural changes that will deliver better support and training and stronger governance of the organisation. As part of these reforms ESTA will be guided by a new board of advisers, which includes members of ambulance, police and emergency services and our fire services, drawing on expertise from across the emergency services sector and strengthening the partnership between these agencies. ESTA will be brought into government, with the form and structure to be agreed as part of the work to be progressed in 2023. The proposed structural change will be subject to detailed consultation and legislative change; it is critical that we get it right. This will mean ESTA will be better supported and integrated into our emergency services sector to deliver a truly connected response. ESTA will also undergo a major rebrand, becoming Triple Zero Victoria, to better reflect its call-taking and dispatch function and build a more positive organisational culture right across its workforce.

The motion today seems to oppose these changes, which is strange given that the shadow minister, Mr Battin, claims that the opposition supports the implementation of all 20 recommendations. It is interesting that they have brought this motion in light of those statements by Mr Battin. Mr Davis has even called into question the integrity of Mr Ashton himself, which just shows the depths that they will go to to politicise this issue. I am not going to talk about the politicisation of our public health response, because I think I have reflected upon that a number of times in this chamber—and it has been quite consistent throughout the last two years—but it is important to show that as a government we are not just shutting shop. We are not waiting around, we are getting on with the job—and as soon as the report was handed down and the government response was ready we released it the same day. So I think the timing last week—that is when the response was prepared and ready, and so we released it on time. We did not wait around, we just got on with the job. I think it is important to understand that a report without the context of the response would not have the same value. I think it is important that people understand that this is the report and this is the response, that they know what we are doing.

Obviously as a government we have acknowledged that any delay is unacceptable, so I think it is important to note that we have taken that feedback; we have seen the devastating consequences that can have, and we are acting. It is not like we are just saying, 'Oh, something's gone wrong, and we're just going to hide from it'. We are saying, 'No,' front on, 'this is the investment we're making. We're going to fix the system. We're going to make it better, better than it's ever been'. I think that is what we are taking on.

I think it is a complex area, so I would not rush into making decisions. We need to be considered in our response. And I think with Mr Ashton's report, you need to review the findings; you need to make recommendations that address the gaps and make the improvements that are suggested. And I think there is real investment—over \$300 million.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr ERDOGAN: Mr Ondarchie would be aware of that. You would have seen the budget, Mr Ondarchie, a few weeks ago. It is a fantastic investment, and the fantastic thing is the minister has done an amazing job in outlining specifically where the extra staff are going.

The opposition calls for more detail. We will give the detail: 142 extra call takers, 103 leaders and trainers, 44 corporate and supervisor positions, 21 centre managers and incident responders, plus a number of additional training and mentoring support positions. The minister provides the detail, and then the opposition just says, 'Oh, we want more detail'. Well, the minister has provided that to you. So I will not be supporting the motion before the house.

Ms MAXWELL (Northern Victoria) (10:30): I would like to just make a couple of quick comments about this motion. The challenges faced across our health system at the moment are serious and deeply concerning. It is affecting the level of care that people can expect and affecting the level of care that our dedicated healthcare workforce can deliver. It must be extremely difficult for those healthcare workers to operate in such a stressful environment, whether they are an ESTA call taker, a paramedic, a nurse or a doctor in our hospitals. We also need to ensure that there is further consideration moving forward as these emergency workers take leave due to stress and fatigue.

I first raised concerns about ESTA when Tony Hubbard from Seymour lost his wife, Gayl, while waiting more than 40 minutes for an ambulance. Mr Hubbard told Ambulance Victoria that if ESTA had told him that they would have to wait so long, he may have chosen to drive his wife that very short distance to their local hospital as she lapsed in and out of consciousness. Tony Hubbard stood at the Seymour expo in 2020, gathering more than 1000 signatures for a petition to increase ambulance resources in the community, and we encouraged ESTA to review its script and give callers a better understanding of wait times. Back then I noted that our health system was under strain, before the pandemic. This was before the dramatic surge in calls.

We recognise that the terms of reference of the review initiated by the government and undertaken by Graham Ashton were quite specific and focused on ESTA's operating model and capabilities. There needs to be ongoing, thorough examination of ESTA's operation and service delivery. It is our understanding from the discussions with the government that this is happening—that it will be ongoing and it will be transparent. We certainly hope that is the case.

Data is imperative to understanding and improving the system, and transparency is critical to public confidence. The motion calls for weekly performance reports, which the government has indicated is just not practical. But we think that quarterly reporting of data is reasonable and should be achievable, and we hope the government will move quickly to provide this in a similar way that ambulance response times and crime data are published.

Raising problems is one thing. It is an important part of the work of a member of Parliament and something that constituents expect. But the community also wants to be part of the discussion about solutions. We have put some of these suggestions to the government previously. They have come directly from the community and include utilising services such as HMS Collective, whose workforce includes registered paramedics and nurses who treat people with minor ailments at home instead of them needing to be hospitalised. HMS Collective estimate their service of just 20 workers saves 90 hours of ambulance transport every week and reduces the burden on hospital beds. They want to expand and be part of this solution, but they do not qualify for state funding.

Since 2008 there has been an agreement in place between Ambulance Victoria and the former CFA, now FRV, for integrated stations to provide emergency medical response. The Kiewa CFA want to become a pilot as first-aid responders so they can support their local community and save lives. I brought this to the government in June last year. Kiewa CFA is ready and waiting, and I am sure other regional brigades would be happy to consider doing the same.

We recognise the health system is complex, and whether it is ESTA capability or service delivery, ambulance response times, hospital ramping or the call from communities such as Wodonga, Swan Hill or elsewhere for investment in their hospitals, we will continue to advocate for our communities and try to work with the government on delivering solutions. We would like to see extended home care, which could and should be a practical consideration towards a solution to these concerns.

Ms TERPSTRA (Eastern Metropolitan) (10:34): I also rise to speak on this motion brought by Mr Davis, and before I go to—

Mr Ondarchie: It's Ms Crozier.

Ms TERPSTRA: Well, it is standing in his name according to the paper I have—all right, Ms Crozier. But before I speak about the specifics of the motion, what I want to do is just extend my deepest condolences to the families who are dealing with the loss of a loved one. What has been particularly disappointing about this debate is the politicisation of the loss of loved ones throughout this process. It is really inappropriate to politicise the loss of a loved one in this way. I have been in this house on a number of occasions when those opposite have continued to prosecute their political agenda in regard to this matter. I have heard the minister continue to explain and offer responses to the questions raised, but those opposite do not want to hear them. What they are interested in is just a continuation of the politicisation of this, and it is really, really disappointing because there are people and families that are connected to this. The lack of sensitivity with which Ms Crozier has prosecuted this issue is of extreme concern—and I note the minister has expressed exactly this sentiment. I just would like to remind everybody who is debating these matters to be mindful that there are people who have lost loved ones and to continue to politicise this in such a way is actually really poor form.

What everybody wants is to get to a solution where we can improve things. I note that, again, there has been a common theme, with Ms Crozier attacking the government over this, and the minister has said time and time again the appropriate organisation to investigate causes of death is the coroner. A number of times Ms Crozier has been reminded by the minister of that, and it has fallen on deaf ears. So shame on Ms Crozier for that because, again, there are people who might be watching this debate and families who might be watching this debate who are connected to this issue, and I think we need to all be mindful of that. We are politicians standing in this chamber debating the matter, and the lack of sensitivity with which this matter has been dealt with by those opposite is shameful—absolutely shameful.

I will go to some of the specifics. This motion that has been brought—and I will just point out this sentence in subsection 1(a), where it talks about the Ashton review—

Ms Maxwell: On a point of order, Acting President, I would just ask Ms Terpstra to withdraw some of those statements about those sitting opposite. I am sitting opposite, and I felt that my contribution to that motion was incredibly balanced. I have not continued to reiterate things that Ms Crozier has said, so if that terminology could just change, please.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem): Ms Maxwell, thank you for your point of order, but it is a debate. While I do not think Ms Terpstra pointed to a particular individual or individuals on the opposite side, you made your point on *Hansard*, and I think that should be the end of it. There is no point of order, but I understand that Ms Terpstra might have been referring to perhaps the opposition but not necessarily everyone sitting there. But it is a debate, and no individual has been named.

Ms TERPSTRA: Yes, I would like to do so uninterrupted, thanks. I will get back to pointing out what the issue is with the motion.

A member interjected.

Ms TERPSTRA: Sorry, can I be heard in silence? For example, what is in this motion, which I find particularly egregious, is that an allegation is made that the government appears not to:

... seriously or properly engage with deaths caused, in whole or in part, by ESTA's failings.

I will just reflect on the comments that I made before and again reflect on the comments that the minister has made time and time again in regard to this debate—that the appropriate authority to determine a cause of death is the coroner. Again, it is shameful that we have to participate in and listen to this sort of debate conducted in such a shameful way. There are a range of issues that the Ashton

review looked at, but again, I reflect on Mr Erdogan's earlier contribution, where he pointed to, in a very systematic way, the way in which the Ashton review looked at a range of things. But there are also a number of other government task forces that have been created to look at this, and I might just flip to those, because again those opposite do not want to listen to this. Ms Crozier says this all the time when the minister tries to give a response. We get questions asked in this house all the time in question time, and Ms Crozier asks the question—

Ms Maxwell: On a point of order, Acting President, the reference was to 'those opposite' as opposed to 'the opposition'.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem): Ms Maxwell, I have ruled on that. It is those opposite. I do not see any issue with that reference. I made the clarification earlier that an individual member might be sitting on a particular side, but that does not mean everyone opposite is named or referenced by the comments. That is in order.

Dr Cumming: Further on the point of order, Acting President, just to be clear, we would normally say 'the government' and then we would say 'the opposition', and obviously we are here on the crossbench. There must be a ruling to say that when you are being disparaging to others not to say 'those opposite'. It is very clear to just say 'the opposition' if that is what the member is talking about.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem): Thank you, Dr Cumming. There is no point of order.

Ms TERPSTRA: As I was saying, there are going to be three task forces established to look into this. Okay? Again I will go to great lengths to explain, but I know those opposite will not listen to this. I will go to great lengths to explain it again. The minister has now come into the house, and the minister has explained this in great detail. I have been listening to the debate. This includes the establishment of three task forces. A governance task force will be chaired by the Department of Justice and Community Safety and ESTA and will include all critical stakeholders. An operational task force and a workforce task force will specifically include our emergency services organisations and unions to provide advice as to how the reform will impact operational service delivery and support the workforce.

I will reference what the Ashton report says. The minister has talked about the inspector-general for emergency management and all these other bits and pieces to this, but the point is that the surge that has been experienced by ESTA has been found to be caused by COVID, by the responses to COVID. That is something that is in the report. Again, there is a surge that has happened, but that is not to say that this is not something that needs to be addressed. Nevertheless there will be that operational task force that will be established and a workforce task force. The ESTA workforce will be at the centre of this reform. ESTA employees are dedicated and compassionate and committed to the critical work of responding to and supporting our communities and emergency services organisations. That is critical. As I have said this before in this house when I have spoken on this issue, I cannot imagine what it must be like to be an ESTA call taker and to receive a very distressed phone call from a parent or anybody who is worried about their loved one dying and they are calling for an ambulance. That is an incredibly stressful job, and I know that members on the government benches will always back our ESTA call takers because they do an amazing job. Our ESTA call takers are fundamental to how ESTA will continue to work into the future, and we will continue to work with them in partnership along the way.

In terms of funding, the government has invested more than \$360 million in ESTA to support improved service delivery and meet the demand pressure on call taking and dispatch. It is a record \$333 million as part of the 2022–23 budget. Mr Erdogan touched on this earlier. The additional investment will deliver an additional 400 staff to increase 000 services for ambulance, police and fire. This will include 142 call takers and dispatch positions, 103 leaders and trainers, 44 corporate and supervisor positions, 21 centre managers and incident responders plus a number of additional training and mentoring support positions. This is something, again, the minister has gone to great lengths to

explain. You just cannot pull people off the street and put them on to become an ESTA call taker. There is a lot of training involved, there is a lot of mentoring. It is not a position that you can just get anyone from anywhere to do. It is important that the structural supports are built to facilitate people being trained and stepping into the role.

Again, those opposite want to establish a falsehood that the pressure is not driven by the pandemic, and I just simply again reference the inspector-general for emergency management, whose job it is to specifically monitor and oversight the non-financial performance of ESTA. The IGEM has said it very clearly: during the past five-year period ESTA met or exceeded its benchmarks in every month from December 2015 to November 2020. He said that this is an indicator that the extent of the current performance—

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem): Thank you, Ms Terpstra.

Ms TERPSTRA: We oppose this motion.

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (10:45): I do rise for the opposition's motion on ESTA and the Ashton review into capabilities of the emergency services. For me, I wish to start with some of Daniel Andrews's words of 2014. In 2014 Daniel Andrews said this in ads for the government:

Ambulances take longer to arrive than ever before, and people are dying. I'll end the war on our paramedics.
I'll work with them to save the minutes that save lives.

These are Daniel Andrews's own words in 2014. We are in 2022. So to say that this government did not know what this problem was is ludicrous. In 2014 this is exactly what Daniel Andrews said in ads:

Ambulances take longer to arrive than ever before, and people are dying. I'll end the war on our paramedics.
I'll work with them to save the minutes that save lives.

So here we are in 2022. In 2020, when the pandemic hit, at that time did this government not think it would be a great idea to invest in our ambulances, to put more money in? This government has just said, 'We looked at this in October last year', October 2021. Are you kidding me?

The Victorian ambulance union wrote to the government six years ago explaining the exact problems that we have today. There are more than 12 Victorians that have died waiting for ambulances just recently—all of their deaths preventable. The union has also said, as the government has just said talking about the 000 dispatch, that they are literally hearing people die over the phone. This is because of this government's mismanagement of our health system, this mismanagement of the health crisis and this mismanagement of not putting funds into our ambulances immediately, as soon as this pandemic hit, if not in 2018 when they got into government. But 2019 would have been a great time for this government to have spent the money that it should have spent before the pandemic hit. But then once the pandemic actually hit: what, wait another two years before you put money into ambulances? Are you kidding me? You needed a report? Hilarious. You knew in 2014. You knew six years ago when the union wrote to you, and you waited for a report to drop and then sat on it at the start of this year—total contempt of Victorians.

Do not come in here saying that you sympathise and you feel for the people who have died during this time. You have showed nothing, because actions speak louder than words, actions that you could have put in place in 2019 and that you chose not to in 2020. You got rid of a good health minister, Jenny Mikakos, who wanted to get more beds. And in 2021 what did you do? You still sat on your hands—2020, seriously. Do not pretend that you did not know about this. You did. You knew about this a long, long time ago, Mr Andrews. These words came from out of your mouth.

And I will quote them again for the third time in this speech. These are Daniel Andrews's words in 2014, just in case anybody here in the government forgot their leader's words:

Ambulances take longer to arrive than ever before, and people are dying—

these are your words, Mr Andrews—

I'll end the war on our paramedics. I'll work with them to save the minutes that save lives.

2014, Mr Andrews: we will make that ring in your ears.

For the people who have lost loved ones during this time it goes to show that this government could have and should have spent money on our ambulances and they chose not to. Who knows what they chose to spend their money on. We will never know, because there has never been an inquiry—they will not allow it. And when we do have inquiries, they are shut down. They make sure that the government has enough numbers that the recommendations that come out of those inquiries are watered down to a point that you would be completely embarrassed about what was actually brought in front of those inquiries and what the recommendations end up becoming. We need proper inquiries, and we need to actually have it enshrined that the government of the day cannot have the numbers in those inquiries so that the truth can actually come out.

What the government does not understand is what these call takers are going through. You should understand. You should understand from the number of emails we are receiving, the number of phone calls that we are receiving, the number of Victorians that are ringing up radio stations and talking to media outlets about their problems, the amount of people that are waiting in ambulances, ramped, plus people waiting on footpaths out the front of hospitals in the cold, in the rain. Children, as I brought up yesterday, are in emergency departments without blankets. Apparently there is a blanket shortage in some of the hospitals in Werribee. Are you kidding me—you cannot even put a blanket on a four-year-old?

Victorians at the moment know that their health system is in total crisis, and it is not because of the pandemic, it is because of the mismanagement of this government—the way that they have chosen not to put money where it is needed, in our ambulance system, in our hospitals, in actually having more beds, in making sure that the hospitals that are needed are built as a matter of urgency, not just promises, such as Melton, not taking years. Hurry up. Throw the money there. Get them built immediately. Pretend it is a tunnel or a level crossing. Just pretend for a little moment that a hospital is more important than a level crossing or a tunnel. Could you just do that? Because that is what Victorians would love, for you to actually put the money into our health system and end the problems that we have got. More people are dying, and these are preventable deaths. If the ambulance turned up, if they were actually able to see a doctor at the hospital—these are preventable things.

For me, November cannot come quick enough, because under this government we will see no change, just more talk, more empty promises, like in 2014, Daniel—2014. It is all in your control. You never did it, and people are dying. This is on your head. It is completely yours. You could have stopped it; it is preventable. For me, knowing that these 000 dispatch call takers have to hear people dying over the phone—yes, smile, government. Check with your department behind you. Have a look. Okay, come on, bring me in, because that is exactly what was happening.

Ms Symes: On a point of order, Acting President, I would just like to put on record, Dr Cumming, that I was having an exchange with my adviser in the box on a separate matter. To imply that a member of the government was reflecting on your contribution in an inappropriate manner is incorrect, so I just want to correct the record. I think it is unfair for anybody in this chamber to reflect on non-members when they are doing their job.

Ms TAYLOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:55): What I believe is reflected in this motion is some confusion about the purposive nature of the Ashton report. Also it is very clear that the opposition—I think the motion was brought forward by Ms Crozier today—are also confused as to their position on this report. It has been mentioned that the opposition purport to be opposing the changes that have been brought about by the Ashton report, but that is strange given that the shadow minister, Mr Battin, claims that the opposition support implementation of all 20 recommendations, so I am not sure where they sit with this. They are condemning and undermining the credibility of former police

commissioner Graham Ashton, which is completely unfair but consistent with the disrespect that we have seen all the way through the pandemic, I must say, for officials and authorities, whether it be healthcare professionals or otherwise. This seems to be their go-to political tactic.

The other matter that is suggested in this motion is that the government is ignoring the current surge in ambulance call demand, and we clearly refute this as well. Nothing could be further from the truth. I did want to rebut straight up one contention: that is, that there is no money being put into this situation. Just a few weeks ago we delivered a budget that is all about putting ESTA staff first. We are backing them all the way. Our response to the Ashton report builds on that commitment and on the record \$360 million of investment in ESTA since October. So to suggest that \$360 million is not significant or not helpful or not supportive is questionable at best, and I would say a cheap political scoring point.

I want to go back to that issue of confusion with regard to the purposive nature of the report. At the outset I would just make the point, as the minister has done on many occasions, that it is shameful that the opposition are forcing us to have to raise this point so many times. As has been suggested, quite rightly, when we conduct this debate over and over again, in spite of the factual exchange being delivered by our government with regard to what is an extremely sensitive issue, the opposition continually raise questions and concerns which reflect their lack of understanding of what it takes and what is required and in the delivery of the report proper. I should make the qualification that this report is not an investigation into specific incidents or adverse outcomes. I will go into what the report is actually about and the purposive nature of the report. These matters are the subject of reports being undertaken by the inspector-general for emergency management and the coroner. The IGEM will provide his report in the second half of this year, and this will inform the coroner's important work.

So as I am sure you can appreciate, we do respect those authorities that have the responsibility for undertaking reports which they are qualified to undertake and addressing the specific issues that need to be addressed under the current circumstances, rather than us—and can I say, the opposition—making flippant remarks and assumptions that are not based on factual assessments. At best—and I am not putting that in terms of a positive—they are actually playing politics in a space that actually plays with the emotions of those directly impacted in a very negative way, and I think that that is irresponsible in and of itself.

There was a complaint raised by the opposition with regard to the timing of the report. Therefore the inference is that we should have sat on it and waited for the vote count to conclude, noting a vote count can take days—it can take weeks. I am not sure where and on what planet they think it gives them some kind of moral authority to suggest that sitting on a report till the end of a vote count is somehow a preferable and honourable position to take. So you can see why, and I think it is quite clear for the purposes of the chamber and perhaps those who may be watching, that we have not sat on this report and instead we have delivered the report as promised and are not waiting.

I am sorry, we do not want to adhere to their preferred time lines for the sake of some debate in this chamber when in fact it is the community and it is the ESTA staff at the end of the day who we need to be prioritising and thinking about in this debate and not some, again, political cheap point about when and where a report should be delivered because it is deemed by those opposite that it would be preferable to wait for a vote count to conclude. I would suggest that that is certainly not a tenable argument. We did commit to the house and to the Victorian public to release the report as soon as the government response had been finalised, and we did exactly that. So I hope that that clears up some of the interesting arguments that were put by the opposition with regard to that matter.

Further to the issue of process, I should say with regard to this request for weekly—I might just quote exactly:

calls on ESTA to publicly release weekly performance reports from 1 July 2022.

Can I suggest this is another indicator of confusion on the part of those opposite as to the precise role of the inspector-general for emergency management. So let me put this to the chamber so everyone is

absolutely clear about the role of IGEN. IGEN conducts year-round assurance activities to assess ESTA's non-financial performance of emergency call-taking and dispatch services, including monitoring all adverse events and daily performance reporting. The IGEN reports directly to the Minister for Emergency Services in relation to significant issues requiring response, and ESTA, as with other emergency service agencies, reports on its performance against IGEN benchmarks through its annual report.

In addition, the IGEN is currently undertaking a review of emergency call answering performance during the COVID-19-related surge. Yes, those opposite appear to have never fully understood or grappled with what a pandemic is and the significant impact it has had not only in Victoria, not only across Australia, but around the world. So that is further reflected in the debate today, and it is actually a sad fact, I should say.

IGEM is an independent body that reviews performance data. It simply is not appropriate for them to release the data unverified on a weekly basis and, may I make the point, for the political purposes of the opposition—sorry about that, but not sorry. So thank you very much. Let us let ESTA get on with the job that they are employed to do—that they do so very well—and let us back them in and support them all the way, as we are doing on this side.

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) (11:05): I rise to speak to Ms Crozier's motion 773 today, which talks about the capability and service review final report into the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority, ESTA, commonly known as the Ashton report. Ms Crozier said in her motion that this house takes note of the report and the government's inadequacy in grappling with the serious issues at ESTA. It also talks about the fact that the recommendations are focusing on things other than what we deem to be the core things and calls on ESTA to publicly release their performance reports from July 2022.

I want to start by saying the call takers do a wonderful job under a lot of pressure, and clearly there are not enough of them. They do a wonderful job, and I have had personal experience talking to them in the last couple of years. Equally the ambos do a great job as well. The ambulance paramedics do a wonderful job. I have had personal family experience, which I choose not to go into at this time for obvious personal reasons, but when they attended my house for a family matter they were just brilliant. Similarly we thank our first responders, who turn up to emergency situations. When people are running out, they are running in. We also thank members of Victoria Police, some of whom are very close friends of mine. So we are not talking about those individuals and those very energetic and committed workers, we are talking about the problems with the system here.

There is one very simple measure that needs to come out as a result of this report, commonly known as the Ashton report, and the measure is: when somebody calls for an ambulance the jolly thing should turn up on time. That is not happening right now. It is a basic human right that when people call for an ambulance in an emergency situation it should arrive. The phone should be answered in an appropriate time and the ambulance should arrive in an appropriate time. I am not qualified to make judgements about why people have passed away, but sadly, it seems some people have died because an ambulance did not get to them in time. Let us just think about the families and the loved ones that have been affected by this. What a tragedy that in 2022 we are talking about that. What a tragedy it is that we are talking about that a phone was not answered on time, the ambulance did not get there on time and somebody passed away. As I said, I am not qualified to make a judgement on why they passed away. But when you add those things together, it is an absolute tragedy for those families and loved ones.

I had a conversation with a constituent in the last couple of months who on a weekend while doing some work at home received a spider bite. They did not think much of it at the time, but it started to swell on their hand and they were a bit worried about it. This particular constituent said to their partner at the time, 'If this gets bad, drive me to the hospital. Don't call an ambulance, because one won't turn up'. What a frightening thing for a Victorian to have to say: 'If this goes bad, can you drive me to the hospital because an ambulance won't turn up'. Such is the worry for Victorians. We have had babies

being born on the side of the road in a car because an ambulance did not get to them on time. I have heard colleagues talk about that in this place. It is a basic human right, and it should be in Victoria in 2022 that when somebody calls for an emergency they are appropriately responded to by way of answering the phone and dispatching the appropriate vehicle.

How does the Andrews government respond to the capability and service review report, commonly known as the Ashton report? Well, they said in their media release of 19 May that they are going to transform our 000 system. What will they do? They said:

ESTA will also undergo a major rebrand—becoming *Triple Zero Victoria* ...

I have to say I have been honoured and privileged in my career to have spent a great deal of it working in a corporate career. I have had experiences across a number of organisations and got to observe them both directly employed and also supporting them in some of their management decisions. I will tell you what my experience tells me over a long period of time. When an organisation is in trouble, if the first thing they do is change the logo, repaint the walls and change the uniform, they are stuffed already, because that is not the priority. The priority should be for Victorians that when someone makes a phone call in an emergency situation they are appropriately responded to in an appropriate time. But not this government. This government decides the best thing it should do is rebrand. Call it a different name. Get a new logo; maybe paint the walls a different colour; maybe get a consultant in to do some team building. Maybe they can play dominoes or something in the lunch room. Maybe they could get a new uniform, and maybe we could do a survey amongst all the employees about what the colour of the uniform should be and what the logo should look like and award them with a KitKat at the end. That is the focus of this government? You have got to be kidding me.

Let us not forget when this government came to power they rebranded Victoria with a new logo, a new logo which is an upside-down triangle with the word 'Victoria' in it. And how much did this government spend on that rebranding? \$20 million. Yes, I know—Ms Burnett-Wake looks shocked by that—\$20 million on the new, upside-down triangle with the word 'Victoria' in it, \$20 million on that new logo for this state.

Ms Burnett-Wake: It's crazy.

Mr ONDARCHIE: Picking up that interjection, that is crazy—\$20 million. Imagine what that \$20 million could have done for health in this state. Imagine what that \$20 million could have done for improving the quality of call takers and ambos in this state. And I wonder how much money they are going to spend on the new logo and the new rebranding of ESTA to Triple Zero Victoria—well, this will fix it! This will fix it, won't it? Get a new brand, get a new name and suddenly everything is going to turn around. This government is all about spin and diversion, and it goes to the integrity of this government.

They have known about this problem for years. And those on the government benches today talked about the fact that this was a result of the pandemic. It was not. This happened long before the pandemic, and they have known about this for years. Let us not forget that Daniel Andrews has been either the Minister for Health or the Premier for 12 out of the last 14 years. So who takes responsibility? What it should have said in the Ashton report is, 'Daniel, this is your fault'. And rebranding, changing the logo and painting the walls is not going to fix it. So how did the government tackle this? Their first matter in tackling this problem was to blame Victorians for ringing the wrong number. So you have got an emergency, and it is your decision—it is your personal situation that you deem an emergency—so you ring 000. And the government will say 'Well, that overloaded the system' and 'Victorians rang the wrong number. They should have gone to the hospital; they should have gone to their doctor'.

The government have failed to take responsibility on so many things in this state, and that is why this motion is so important to the house today—that we note the problems with the response to this report. I am not making a judgement here. I am not making a judgement about the quality of the report. I am not making a judgement about the problems that exist in our system other than that they need to be

fixed urgently. I am making a judgement about the government's response to this. And I have to tell you, Victorians would be shocked today and probably not surprised that the government's response to this is to create a new brand, create a new logo, create a new uniform, create a new colour—because that will not fix the fact that someone could ring 000 today and not get an appropriate response. This pack of amateurs have been in government for too long. In November this year we should chuck them out. It is the appropriate thing to do. I support Ms Crozier's motion.

Mr BARTON (Eastern Metropolitan) (11:14): Members will know that the inspector-general for emergency management, IGEM, monitors ESTA's performance against the determined standards for ESTA's call-taking and dispatch operations, including a primary benchmark of answering 90 per cent of emergency ambulance calls in 5 seconds and a secondary benchmark of answering 95 per cent of emergency ambulance calls in 30 seconds. We know from the IGEM's statements that until the COVID-19 pandemic ESTA had met or exceeded the performance benchmark monitored by the IGEM every year since 2015 and earlier. It is also no secret that since the COVID-19 pandemic ESTA has not met these benchmarks, and as a result there have been a number of high-profile incidents where families have been impacted by call taker delay at ESTA. It is extremely important that these incidents are appropriately investigated and that there is accountability and oversight in relation to these issues.

Unfortunately this motion misunderstands the role of appropriate oversight and who should be providing that accountability. Instead of supporting the statutory and independent oversight that IGEM already provides, the motion suggests that a consultant, being former police chief commissioner Graham Ashton, should be providing this oversight. The motion is essentially asking for a consultant to replace the statutory independent role of the IGEM and the important role of the coroner in relation to these specific incidents. Indeed only the coroner can determine cause of death, certainly not Mr Ashton. I also continue to be appalled by the statements of some members in this chamber that time after time try to lay the blame for the death of individuals at the feet of our very brave and hardworking paramedics and ESTA call takers.

Today's motion also calls into question the work done by Mr Ashton and criticises a number of the recommendations the report makes. This report is not an investigation into specific incidents. It would not be appropriate for it to fulfil that function. The government and the IGEM have made it clear that these specific incidents are the subject of an investigation currently being conducted by the IGEM. I understand that the IGEM will provide his report to the government in the second half of this year and that this report will also inform the coroner's work. I have sought the government's commitment that the IGEM report will be provided to this Parliament and publicly released, and I have been provided that assurance. This is the appropriate oversight of these matters and the appropriate role of this Parliament to ensure that this reporting is undertaken and provided to the community in an open and transparent way.

Today's motion would also appear to duplicate the already established statutory reporting process that ESTA has with the IGEM. The motion would require ESTA to divert resources away from what should be its only focus of making sure they can answer calls from people who need immediate support. At this time it does not seem appropriate to be asking ESTA to allocate precious resources to developing, compiling and reporting to Parliament on data that will likely change from week to week and it may not even be final or validated when the motion requires it to be provided.

As already noted, the IGEM already conducts year-round assurance activities to assess ESTA's non-financial performance of emergency call-taking and dispatch services, including monitoring all adverse events and daily performance reporting. The IGEM and ESTA, alongside other emergency service agencies, already publicly report against the IGEM's benchmarks. The IGEM is an independent body that reviews the performance data and investigates matters where appropriate. That is the appropriate oversight of these matters at this time. There are proper processes that need to be followed. Critically, if the opposition's motion were successful, it would place undue strain on ESTA's resources that are better used to support its ongoing performance uplift.

These are important matters, and they require appropriate and important oversight. This is the very least that these families that have been impacted by the pandemic pressures on the health system deserve. I will continue to hold this government to account on these matters. The independent statutory oversight provisions review currently being undertaken by the IGEM into specific matters and the role of the coroner are the appropriate places for this accountability, not political interference. If the government fails to respond to these reports and fails to do what is needed to support our paramedics and ESTA call takers, then further action will be required, and I will not hesitate to take this action.

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (11:20): I will be very quick in my summation. I know that there are multiple reviews going on into this crisis. There are multiple reviews going into the failures and what has gone on with the numbers of Victorians that have died, the children that have died, as a result of not being able to get through to 000. But this fundamentally means that we need greater transparency to see what is going on within what is now going to be known as Triple Zero Victoria, formerly known as ESTA. This is an important motion that goes to the heart of understanding what those Victorians have suffered as a result of gross incompetence and failures. The report from the inspector-general is not due out for months. We need to have this now. We need to have greater transparency, and that is why it is important to have that data coming in from 1 July.

I know that the government has been furiously lobbying the crossbench, but think of those Victorians who have died. Think of their families. Think of their loved ones. Think that we need to get this right and we need greater transparency. I urge all to support this very important motion.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 14

Atkinson, Mr
Bach, Dr
Burnett-Wake, Ms
Crozier, Ms
Cumming, Dr

Davis, Mr
Grimley, Mr
Hayes, Mr
Lovell, Ms
Maxwell, Ms

McArthur, Mrs
Ondarchie, Mr
Quilty, Mr
Rich-Phillips, Mr

Noes, 19

Barton, Mr
Elasmar, Mr
Gepp, Mr
Kieu, Dr
Leane, Mr
Meddick, Mr
Melhem, Mr

Patten, Ms
Pulford, Ms
Ratnam, Dr
Shing, Ms
Stitt, Ms
Symes, Ms

Tarlamis, Mr
Taylor, Ms
Terpstra, Ms
Tierney, Ms
Vaghela, Ms
Watt, Ms

Motion negatived.

INTEGRITY AGENCY FUNDING

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (11:28): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

- (a) Ms Harriet Shing MLC, chair of the Integrity and Oversight Committee, has now twice intervened to block testimony to the Integrity and Oversight Committee from independent officers of the Parliament, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission's (IBAC) Commissioner, the Honourable Robert Redlich AM, QC, and the Victorian Ombudsman, Ms Deborah Glass OBE;
- (b) this occurred concurrently with the Victorian Ombudsman's inquiry into the politicisation of the Victorian public service and with the following three IBAC corruption investigations into the Andrews Labor government:
 - (i) Operation Watts;
 - (ii) Operation Sandon;
 - (iii) Operation Richmond;

MOTIONS

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- (c) the Andrews Labor government has failed to adequately fund IBAC and the Victorian Ombudsman, with funding increases for IBAC being conditional on the completion of a review of their office and the Victorian Ombudsman only being provided with an additional \$700 000 through a one-off Treasurer's advance; and
- (2) calls on the government to provide an immediate injection of funds for IBAC and the Victorian Ombudsman to ensure a lack of funding does not prevent the completion of these inquiries prior to the November 2022 state election.

This is a very serious matter that has developed over this recent period, and it is clear that the state government has turned the tap off on IBAC funding. It has screwed IBAC and the Ombudsman down, and frankly this is occurring deliberately and in a strategic sense to slow down the investigations of these independent agencies. They have caused grief for the government. They have caused very serious grief for the government, and the government is now in a position where its most senior person, the Premier, has actually been interviewed twice at least, and possibly a third time—we cannot quite get the truth of the matter out of the Premier, but at least twice—by the IBAC. We know that in fact the IBAC has undertaken those interviews. The Premier has not been clear about whether it is him as a witness or whether he is a person of greater interest than that. It is not actually clear—nobody knows. The importance of this is that the community needs to have confidence in where the Premier is and where these matters progress from here.

We need to make sure that funding is not a problem for IBAC or the Ombudsman. They made commentary on their websites and in their annual reports in recent times about the issues here. When you read budget paper 3 you can see—it is explicit in fact—that the completion of a review of the IBAC office is a precursor to any funding increase. This is actually the government holding the IBAC Commissioner in a very difficult position, a position where he will not get the funding increase unless the review is completed to the satisfaction of the government. I think that this is concerning on a number of levels. The independence of the Commissioner can be threatened by these matters, and certainly there is an appearance of the government holding this funding over the head of the Ombudsman and the IBAC Commissioner.

Budget paper 3 is a very interesting document, but it does make it clear that the funding for the IBAC is dependent on the review. It is actually instructive, I think, to look at the actual Appropriation (Parliament 2022–2023) Bill 2022 and to look at the schedule. What it shows is that the IBAC had \$53 294 000 appropriated in 2021–22, and \$54 896 000 is proposed to be appropriated in the appropriation of Parliament bill at schedule 1 on page 12—for those who want to go and look at it. It is clear that that is not a sufficient increase in funding to enable the IBAC to do the work that it needs to do. So there is no guarantee that the IBAC will get the money; there is no guarantee at all. In fact the Treasurer or the Premier or the cabinet may hold that money over the IBAC as a threat—as an indication that, ‘Unless you play ball, unless you do what you are told, unless you wind back your investigations, unless you curtail your activities, you will not get the funding that you seek’.

The same is true and the risk is the same and the appearance of the same issue can occur with the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman, as we have said in the motion, is undertaking a number of inquiries, assisting the IBAC with Operation Watts but also undertaking an inquiry into the politicisation of the public service, a very important inquiry that comes from a reference from this chamber. But when you look at schedule 1 again and see the department of the Victorian Ombudsman on page 13 of schedule 1 of the appropriation of Parliament bill, you see that the 2021–22 funding was \$19 550 000 and \$20 177 000 is proposed. That is a modest increase proposed for the Ombudsman in funding, and indeed we believe that there should be a greater increase. There should be \$10 million provided as a clear injection into the IBAC, and there should be a \$2 million immediate injection into the Ombudsman. That is our proposal, and that is what we have said publicly.

Now, the government is talking about a potential \$7 million for the IBAC, and that has not been provided to the IBAC. If the government is sincere in providing those additional funds, it would in fact be prepared to put that in the budget now. I do not know the exact reason that the government has

not put this clear funding in the budget, in the actual schedule—not in budget paper 3 but the actual appropriated amount in the budget schedule. It is clear that there is not a substantial increase for the Ombudsman proposed in the government's own bill. So these are important points to understand.

I also want to make the point today that without that increase in funding there is a risk that both of these agencies and a number of their inquiries will in fact be in a position where they will not be able to complete all of their work in the timescale and the schedule that I think the community would want. They have their own timescales and they have their own schedules—they are independent agencies—but if they are starved of funding, if the money is turned off, it slows down their capacity to do the work at the pace they should be able to do the work. I say that providing them with sufficient funding enables them to work at the fastest pace their inquiries allow and indeed is likely to see more of the inquiries completed or partially completed prior to the state election in November this year.

The concern, frankly, is with the government turning off the taps, with the government clamping down on the independent scrutiny agencies, there will be less of these reports able to be completed or even partially completed—interim reports—prior to the state election. The truth is that the state government is deeply embarrassed by these matters. The state government does not want these reports in the public domain before the state election. The fear is that with this clamping down on these agencies people will not see the extent of the corruption in this government—the corruption in the senior levels of the government, potentially with the Premier. The Premier will not be honest or direct with these matters.

Ms Shing says, 'I intervened at the inquiry because that's what I'm required to do'. This is simply not right. The IBAC Commissioner is more than capable of knowing the line, of knowing whether his responses at an inquiry in an open hearing would in some way compromise an investigation or in some way lay out a matter that he does not want to or ought not to discuss. He is very experienced in this. With respect to the members of that committee, I would argue he is more experienced than most of them. I do not believe it should have been a judgement for Ms Shing to close down these inquiries.

This is a protection racket that is being run at the inquiry. Ms Shing is doing that for the purposes of assisting the government and assisting the Premier. She is blocking questions that are inconvenient or awkward—questions that go to government corruption, questions that Ms Shing does not want exposed in the public domain. I say that the government ought to have not acted in this way through Ms Shing. The government ought to have allowed those questions to proceed. It is clear that the IBAC Commissioner wanted those questions to proceed. I believe it is very unfortunate that that process happened there. I think the committee is diminished by this process. There needs to be a very significant rethink by the government and an openness and a preparedness to open itself up to scrutiny in a wider framework. I have confidence in the IBAC Commissioner that he will know where the line is on these matters.

I also have confidence in the Ombudsman. She is a very experienced woman and understands the matters around the legislation here. We saw the government, with the red shirts inquiry, take the Ombudsman all the way to the High Court and spend a million dollars of public money to block the investigation. The truth is that in that investigation into the red shirts the government did not cooperate with the investigation. Members of this house at the time did not fully cooperate. Members of the other house, claiming some spurious exclusive cognisance argument, did not cooperate. In fact the government did not even cooperate with the police on that red shirts inquiry. Talk about Labor corruption through and through—not cooperating with the police. The truth is if the police come knocking, your job is to give them an honest answer and to assist them with their inquiries in full, and that is what the Labor Party members should have done. That is not what they did. There was a cover-up, and the cover-up continues through this process. Operation Watts is clearly a very inconvenient inquiry for this government. The Ombudsman and the IBAC are working on that. It is looking at Labor corruption through and through.

And if you look at the Sandon inquiry—I mean, this is obviously a very difficult inquiry that has seen some very significant public evidence, and there is involvement of councillors and others—nobody

should resile or step back from that. But we know the Premier has been taken to that inquiry. We know the Premier has had to answer questions at that inquiry. We do not know if he is merely a witness to matters or whether he is a person of deep interest to that inquiry. We know he has a long background and history with Mr Woodman. We know that they are mates going back into the past. We know that there are a whole series of questions around that. So you wonder why a Labor MP might intervene to close down questioning about a matter that is near to that inquiry, that is touching matters that are not necessarily about witness evidence, and not provide the IBAC Commissioner with the elbow room to explain his own actions. And he was clearly wanting to explain his own actions. I say I trust the IBAC Commissioner to make those decisions rather than a government MP that has the interests of the government and wants to close down difficult questions about corruption at the heart of Labor. A cover-up of corruption at the heart of Labor—that is what we are talking about here. And we are talking about a corruption inquiry when it comes to Richmond. We do not know whether the Premier has visited the Richmond inquiry or not—he will not tell us. And we do not know the nature of the Watts inquiry and any evidence that he has given there; we do not know exactly what the nature of his evidence was there. But either way, the Integrity and Oversight Committee has got a very important role, and the questioning should not have been summarily closed down in the way that it was. I make that point very clearly up-front, and I make the point about the funding.

Frankly, what is going on here is Labor is attacking independent agencies. It wants to close them down. It wants to slow their inquiries. It wants to nobble these independent agencies, and it wants to do that for its own political interests. It is corrupt at its core—that is really what is going on here—and this cover-up is corrupt to the core as well. I say that what is required here is the light and the brightness of openness and transparency, and I say they need to be properly funded to do their work. I say that the Labor members of the committee should not seek to nobble those independent agencies, and I say that the people of Victoria deserve to see these reports, they deserve to have honest answers about them and they deserve to see them in a timely way, not in a way that is crimped, where the government has crammed the tap right off, taken the money away and made it hard for the agencies to do all the work that they need to do in the time they need to do it.

So let us let the agencies get on with it. Let us give them the money that they need, the \$10 million straight into the IBAC to let it go and the \$2 million straight into the Ombudsman to let them go. Long-term reform is a separate point, but at the moment they need to be able to proceed and at the moment Labor members and the government will not let them do that. I say it is corrupt at its core, and I say that this is a very simple and straightforward motion for the house to support.

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) (11:44): There are a number of things that I want to address in relation to Mr Davis's contribution here today and a number of things which Mr Davis has inferred and implied but is too gutless to say. Mr Davis stood up last sitting week and made a number of claims around the functions and the powers of the Integrity and Oversight Committee as they are set out in the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003. He did so in relation to a report that he had not read, that he did not understand, that he had no regard for and that he made absolutely no comment about when he was on his feet. He did so in order to use that opportunity to comment on a report that in fact has nothing to do with what we are here to talk about today but which was effectively shoehorned by Mr Davis into a neat political narrative.

And the very tabling of this particular motion, the moving of this particular motion by Mr Davis, achieves the very end that he set out to achieve—a cheap political point which has no regard for the reality of the legislative framework within which we operate. I would ask that Mr Davis have a look at the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003. I asked him to do that last sitting week. He has clearly not had any regard for the framework within which committees operate. I would ask Mr Davis on the question of funding to have a look at what was said by the Ombudsman and by the IBAC Commissioner when they appeared at hearings of the Integrity and Oversight Committee and addressed their satisfaction with funding as it has been allocated in the 2022–23 budget.

I would in fact invite Mr Davis to amend the embarrassing components of his motion which ignore or are in fact completely unaware of the funding announcements which have been confirmed in the budget, which have been confirmed, as the Ombudsman indicated in the public hearings, in writing from the Treasurer. Mr Davis has missed the point entirely in relation to the substance of the Integrity and Oversight Committee's framework to conduct reviews on the systems and frameworks that exist for integrity agencies, and he has missed the point entirely because he sought to make an altogether different and altogether grubbier point. It was not those opposite who voted in 2020 for including 'serious misconduct in public office' as part of the remit of the IBAC. Those opposite, for all of their posturing around integrity, opposed those measures. They did not want to see the very sunlight that Mr Davis now claims to be so important.

In relation to the review of the performance of integrity agencies for the 2020–21 period, I remind Mr Davis and indeed anybody else who is interested in understanding the way in which parliamentary committees operate to have a look at the statement that I issued, which is on the parliamentary committees website, and which I hope Mr Davis has read, to understand the fundamentals of the rules within which we as a committee operate. It is absolutely essential that integrity agencies be equipped to do their work without interference or the perception of interference from any member of Parliament or indeed any committee. Section 7(2) of the Parliamentary Committees Act makes this abundantly clear. This is not to gag or to nobble or to crimp or to engage in any other creative verb that Mr Davis might come up with in this place because he would rather read a thesaurus than the way in which the act operates; this is about making sure that the boundaries and frameworks that exist between the necessary independence, the inviolable independence, of integrity agencies is not compromised or seen to be compromised by the way in which the parliamentary committees operate. This is not new, nor is it unique to parliamentary committees such as the Integrity and Oversight Committee. It applies to all parliamentary committees. It applied to the committee when a predecessor from the coalition chaired this particular committee. It applies now.

A member interjected.

Ms SHING: Well, that is right. That previous chair operated under the framework which Mr Davis now claims is being used as an excuse by which to shut down hearings or indeed nobble the democratic process. Let us recharacterise that if we can. Mr Davis in fact, if we follow his reasoning through to its logical conclusion, would like to see a parliamentary committee being empowered to reach into the investigation inquiry or review of decisions of integrity agencies. That is what Mr Davis is saying. That is nothing short of a complete abrogation by those opposite of any responsibility for integrity in the state. That speaks volumes. That says that this yet again is another cheap political stunt to achieve the ends of a quick grab, a headline, a random tweet or allegations that I am corrupt or indeed that this government is corrupt.

One of the things that I think we need to be very, very aware of is that integrity agencies must be able to do what they do without interference, whether actual interference or perceived interference. These are obligations that I take extremely seriously as chair of this committee. It might be open to argue that in fact I am vulnerable to being influenced in the way in which I do my work. It would be someone who does not know me particularly well who would make such a claim. It would be somebody who perhaps might wish to pay lip service to the way in which women in particular in positions of elected responsibility are able to speak their own minds. That in and of itself might speak to the fact that the Liberal Party has got a lot to learn about basic respect for the independence and independent thought of women, given how wiped out they were in the federal election and given how wiped out they have made women and diversity within their own ranks, such that they have all but eclipsed any divergent views from within their own group in favour of the blokes who sit on their front bench and the blokes who occupy their party rooms and the blokes who are using this as an opportunity to distract from the shambolic, dilapidated state of their own party. What better way than to shift the saga and the opprobrium—now you are seeking to shut me down. What a curious paradox.

Mr Davis: On a point of order, President, it is quite a narrow motion on IBAC and on the matters around the Ombudsman. We are out into much wider terrain now.

The PRESIDENT: Ms Shing has been very relevant to the motion.

Ms SHING: I just want to pick up on what Mr Davis has said, because what he has effectively just done now is demonstrate the relevance of the standing orders, the very system within which we as a chamber must operate to comply with the rules. Mr Davis has just stood up and said this is a very narrow motion and asked that the member be drawn back to the motion itself. Is that not, Mr Davis, an embarrassing acknowledgement that the work of the Parliament, and by extension parliamentary committees, must be confined to the terms within which they operate? You have just snookered yourself, Mr Davis, and you know you have snookered yourself, because what you are saying is that certain things cannot be discussed within the operation of particular motions because they fall foul of the standing orders.

What a joke to come here and seek to intervene on a question of relevance when it is precisely this rationale which has guided the application of section 7(2) of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003. What an embarrassment that in seeking to make sure that the front page is vacated of the shambolic internal trauma of your own party not only are you not in a position to understand the way in which the act works but you are also, correspondingly and curiously, in a position to raise an argument under the standing orders in this very place that I am overstepping the mark and not being relevant. Mr Davis, you have just illustrated precisely through your point of order that in fact these rules are relevant and important.

Section 7(2) has a role to play. Section 7(2) requires and demands that integrity agencies be in a position to undertake their work without interference. The IBAC Commissioner, the Ombudsman, the Victorian Inspectorate and the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner are well within their rights, as they should be, to say whatever they would like in relation to the matters that are within their remit. Parliamentary committees must operate within the framework which exists in the Parliamentary Committees Act. It is a curious thing that Mr Davis has fallen on his own sword here today, and I hope that this is not a learning opportunity lost on Mr Davis when we look at the fact that he has conveniently shoehorned this idea of truth into an allegation that funding has not been provided in the terms sought, which it has, in relation to the fact that the Parliamentary Committees Act has not been applied as it should.

Mr GRIMLEY (Western Victoria) (11:54): I rise to speak on the opposition's motion before the house today that essentially centres around the chair of the Integrity and Oversight Committee intervening to block testimony to the IOC from certain heads of integrity agencies. The motion goes on to state that:

- (c) the Andrews Labor government has failed to adequately fund IBAC and the Victorian Ombudsman ...

and that it:

- (2) calls on the government to provide an immediate injection of funds for IBAC and the Victorian Ombudsman to ensure a lack of funding does not prevent the completion of ... inquiries ...

As a member of the IOC, can I begin by saying that the members of the IOC from both sides of the chamber and both houses, and importantly the office of the secretariat, do an incredible job under intense scrutiny and often within incredibly tight time frames. I have seen this firsthand, and with the team effort in collaboration the IOC has maintained a high level of effectiveness and ethics.

In relation to the first point within the motion—that the chair of the IOC shut down the IBAC Commissioner—this followed questions posed by opposition members that may have resulted in answers provided by the IBAC Commissioner that may have been in breach of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, specifically section 7. Within this section there was a significant risk of a breach

of the provision because the questioning of the IBAC Commissioner in a public hearing was about specific matters, including possibly naming witnesses and complainants that are currently under the investigation of IBAC or another legal process. Such questioning and discussions involve a significant risk of breaching section 7 of the Parliamentary Committees Act by potentially investigating a matter currently being investigated by IBAC; reviewing findings, recommendations, determinations or other decisions regarding a particular IBAC investigation; disclosing or facilitating the disclosure of any information which may prejudice a criminal investigation, an IBAC investigation or a criminal or any other criminal proceeding; and breaching a secrecy or confidentiality provision in any act. During the public hearing it became apparent that the risk of a breach was heightened, as the public hearings were broadcast live and being recorded by Hansard. It is for those reasons that we do not support this portion of the opposition's motion.

In terms of the funding for the integrity agencies, in February 2021 we opposed a similar motion by the opposition regarding funding, and the reason for this was that if any of the integrity agencies have concerns with the adequacy of current and future funding then they have the means to bring this to the attention of the Integrity and Oversight Committee. It is then up to the committee to address these concerns in a way in which they see fit and respond accordingly.

As a member of the committee, like I said, I can say that it is my belief that the IOC and the chair are fulfilling and discharging their duties in accordance with their responsibilities. Given these reasons, we will not be supporting this motion.

Ms BURNETT-WAKE (Eastern Victoria) (11:57): I rise to speak on Mr Davis's motion and the need for transparent and democratic processes at the joint Integrity and Oversight Committee. The Integrity and Oversight Committee exists to do exactly what the name suggests: it is meant to uphold principles of integrity and accountability and acts as an oversight mechanism of independent investigatory bodies. It therefore came as quite a shock when the chair of that committee, Ms Shing, made orders to cut the feed when questions were asked about the Premier's involvement in IBAC. This was the first chance for the public to gain some answers around why the Premier was—

Ms Shing interjected.

Ms BURNETT-WAKE: President, could I please make my contribution in silence? I am respectful to everybody else in this chamber, and I do not interject.

Members interjecting.

Ms BURNETT-WAKE: I am allowed to make my contribution.

Ms Shing: The rules are important, aren't they?

Ms BURNETT-WAKE: They are important. They are, Ms Shing. So, as I was saying, it was the first chance for the public to gain some answers around why the Premier had been attending IBAC for secret hearings. We know that he has been questioned behind closed doors at least twice, but what we do not know is whether he is under investigation or whether he is attending in a witness capacity. When a member of the opposition asked why the Premier was privately examined as part of Operation Watts and Operation Sandon, Ms Shing immediately became defensive. She ordered the live feed to be cut. Actions such as this can only lead an observer to conclude it was done to prevent the public from hearing the line of questioning.

This was not the first time Ms Shing had intervened in questioning either. She had earlier shut down anti-corruption commissioner Robert Redlich when, in response to a question from a Liberal MP, he appeared to be referring to the Premier's appearance before IBAC. Now, her reasoning for doing so was that questions could not be asked about a current investigation. Mr Redlich has since hit back and said that there is nothing in the statute governing the committee that precludes members asking and

IBAC representatives answering questions unless the disclosure of information concerning the witness's welfare would prejudice the IBAC investigation. According to Mr Redlich—

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

EMERGENCY SERVICES TELECOMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:00): My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Minister, how much will it cost to rebrand ESTA into Triple Zero Victoria?

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:00): I thank Mr Davis for his question. Last week when I publicly released the Ashton report I did so in conjunction with the government's response, as appropriate, and we have accepted in principle the 20 recommendations that the Ashton report makes, because we want to ensure that we have a system to support ESTA and Triple Zero Victoria going into the future. It does include a rebrand, but as we progress that work I have not looked at costings, because I am focused completely on the here and now, and the here and now is about making sure that we have a workforce that can continue to be supported, answer calls and continue to meet the unprecedented demand. So in terms of calculating a cost for a rebrand, it is certainly not something I have been focused on. That is something that will be progressed as part of the implementation of the Ashton report. I am right now, as is the organisation, focused on delivering a service that Victorians can rely on.

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:01): The problem, Minister, is that people cannot rely on the service at the moment, and I ask in that context and in response to your answer: what do you say about this rebranding to the families of those that have died while waiting on hold, when instead of a new name they actually want changes that will save lives?

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:02): Mr Davis, I would note that it is my understanding that the opposition have actually committed to the 20 recommendations in the Ashton report as well. In relation to the families, I know firsthand their experiences because I speak to them, and I continue to commit to them that the focus that I have is on the here and now, providing adequate funding and support for that workforce, including mental health support as well as additional resources, additional call takers. That is where my focus is, that is where the organisation's focus is and that is why I would continue to say to families that I am committed to ensuring that we get this right. On the long-term plans of the Ashton review, the rebrand is not my focus at the moment. We are setting up a task force to get on with that work, but I think it is appropriate that I continue to converse with families and tell them where my attention is, where the organisation's attention is, and that is on making sure that our call takers are answering calls as quickly as possible, working with our emergency services agencies and getting people help as soon as possible.

DRUG HARM REDUCTION

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) (12:03): My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Health. On 29 April the Coroners Court handed down its findings into the death of Mr S, who was 20 years of age. He died on 28 June 2020, and I would like to extend my sincere condolences to Mr S's family. Mr S died of mixed-drug toxicity. Coroner Gebert's principal recommendations flowing from this inquest were that she was satisfied that:

... a drug checking service and drug early warning system are necessary elements of any strategy to reduce these harms.

She recommended:

... pursuant to section 7(2) of the Act:

That the Department of Health, as the appropriate arm of the Victorian Government, implements a drug checking service in the State of Victoria as a matter of urgency, to reduce the number of preventable deaths (and nonfatal harms) associated with the use of drugs obtained from unregulated drug markets.

So my question to the minister is—

The PRESIDENT: Your question is out of time, Ms Patten. Please watch the clock, ladies and gentlemen and good members.

Ms PATTEN: Thank you, President. I appreciate that. My question for the minister is: will he heed this recommendation and implement drug checking in Victoria?

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:04): I thank Ms Patten for her question. I think we could get the question from the tone of what you were asking about, and I too would extend my condolences to Mr S's family. The issues you raise are very important, and I will get an answer from the Minister for Health in relation to that.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: SUBURBAN REVITALISATION

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (12:05): Today I would like to provide an update on the suburban development revitalisation program. I am very pleased that this year's state budget delivers another \$9.7 million to continue the great work being done through the suburban revitalisation boards. Across Melbourne the suburban revitalisation program has invested more than \$32 million in the last two years to deliver 185 projects, at a value of \$88 million, in partnership with local governments, businesses and communities.

I was actually very pleased to join the chair of the Boronia Revitalisation Board, the member for Bayswater, Jackson Taylor. We visited Bayswater community centre, where there is a breakfast program that is being financially supported by the Boronia Revitalisation Board. This provides hot meals five days a week for a number of people that are in need. It is led by fantastic staff from Knox Infolink. As I said, it was a privilege to be there and see this occur. It is making a huge difference to the people that are attending these breakfasts, where Knox Infolink are giving wraparound support. People are turning up for a hot breakfast, and Knox Infolink are actually linking people to other services. It has been a great outcome. I just want to say I am really proud that this particular revitalisation board decided to invest in this particular program. I am really proud of the chair of that board, Jackson Taylor. If anyone knows his background, they would understand why he drove this social outcome. He is a great member of Parliament, and as I said, I am proud that he initiated this particular program out of this board. That whole board should be acknowledged for it.

HEALTH SERVICES

Mr HAYES (Southern Metropolitan) (12:07): My question is to the minister representing the Minister for Health. Following on from the report in the *Age* newspaper on 5 May about failed election promises, I ask the minister why none of the 10 community hospitals which were promised by the Andrews government prior to the 2018 election campaign have ever been built or upgraded, despite the Victorian government unveiling billions of dollars in new health spending.

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:07): I thank Mr Hayes for his question. I will be more than happy to get an answer directly from the Minister for Health.

Mr HAYES (Southern Metropolitan) (12:07): The latest figures for elective surgery waitlists in Victorian hospitals reveal more than 89 000 Victorians are currently on the waitlist. I understand there

have been additional resources allocated to address this issue in the budget, but I am wondering why the minister has not released an elective surgery road map with estimated time frames indicating how long it will take for Victorian hospitals to clear or reduce the numbers that are on that list.

The PRESIDENT: I do not know if that is related to the question. Mr Hayes, it is not related at all, but I will give you an opportunity to rephrase it if you want to, or I will rule it out.

Mr HAYES: Can the government release time frames indicating how long Victorian hospitals will take to clear or reduce the numbers that are on the waitlist?

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:08): I will pass it on.

YOUTH JUSTICE STAFF SAFETY

Dr BACH (Eastern Metropolitan) (12:09): My question today is for the Minister for Workplace Safety. Minister, you previously told the house, just last week, that there were more than, in your words, 195 WorkSafe inspections in response to serious safety concerns between July 2021 and April this year at Victoria's two—only two—youth justice facilities. That is more than four a week. When experienced youth justice workers take their payout packages and retire this year, leaving inexperienced and agency staff to handle the current violence—and then surely the workplace becomes even more dangerous—how many more WorkSafe inspections will it take before you intervene, as the minister responsible for workplace safety?

Ms STITT (Western Metropolitan—Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for Early Childhood) (12:09): I thank Dr Bach for his question. I want to just take up a part of your question and correct the record, if I may. I think that question was asked last sitting week, and you were away, unfortunately, unwell. I actually indicated that there were 195 visits between July 2021 and April 2022, but that was in respect of all correctional and detention facilities in the state, including youth justice, so the assertion that you make about the numbers of visits and the numbers of youth justice facilities only being the facilities that the 195 visits relate to is incorrect. That figure represents the figure for that entire sector across all of our facilities in corrections. I think it is important to clear that up.

As I indicated to the house in the last sitting week, this kind of violence and aggression is never okay. I want to reiterate the government's support for the staff that work in our corrections facilities, including youth justice. They do really challenging work, and we want to continue to try to do whatever we can to support them in their work. WorkSafe have been undertaking significant enforcement and compliance activity in this sector, and I think that bears out in the numbers of visits and inquiries that they have been making.

In relation to the part of your question about the industrial matters in respect of redundancy and the like, I am not able to make any comment about those industrial and operational matters. I guess I would just say that regardless of the outcome of those internal processes the duty holder is still required to provide a safe workplace. I know that WorkSafe in their role as the independent safety regulator will continue to take whatever action is necessary, but that is a matter for them. As I have said on a number of occasions in the house in relation to these questions, they are an independent statutory body and their enforcement and compliance activities are at arm's length from me, and that is absolutely appropriate, Dr Bach.

Dr BACH (Eastern Metropolitan) (12:12): I do thank the minister for correcting the record and correcting her incorrect statement in this house last week.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I think from now on supplementaries should be asked without any comment. I do not believe the minister was doing that.

Ms Stitt: On a point of order, President, I think if you review *Hansard* from last sitting week, Dr Bach is actually misrepresenting what I said.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you.

Dr BACH: Thank you very much, President. The actions that are currently being taken as a result of WorkSafe investigations are, according to staff, not doing enough. They are not making the workplace safer. Staff are on record saying the workplace is toxic and that it will take somebody dying at work for action to be taken. This is the most dangerous workplace in Victoria right now. Why will you not intervene to ensure the safety of these workers?

Ms STITT (Western Metropolitan—Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for Early Childhood) (12:13): It is pretty disappointing that the opposition continues to try to make cheap political points about what is a really serious set of circumstances and a really challenging work environment in our state. I have already outlined the extensive compliance activities that WorkSafe have undertaken to date, but it is also important to note that there is a power of cooperative work going on between WorkSafe, the Department of Justice and Community Safety, the public sector union which covers these staff and the health and safety reps that work on the ground. As I have already indicated, it is very unhelpful for the opposition to seek to make cheap political points over what is a really complex workplace.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: DIGITAL JOBS

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Resources) (12:14): It is my great pleasure to provide the house with a further update on the digital jobs program. The Victorian digital jobs program is a \$64 million initiative that is aiming to address Victoria's digital talent workforce shortage by re-skilling 5000 mid-career Victorians. Participants receive a free 12-week digital skills training course, followed by a paid 12-week internship with industry. Demand for places is incredibly strong, with 14 000 applications received for the first 2000 places. The response from industry has also been incredibly positive, with more than 150 businesses registering to take on placements.

Last week, together with my colleagues and two terrific local members, Will Fowles and Matt Fregon, I visited one of these businesses.

Ms Terpstra: Great local members.

Ms PULFORD: They are great local members. Carnival Homewares in Burwood was founded by Anna Cerdan, together with her sister Penny, some 20 years ago, and they have been importing the most beautiful homewares from India for sale and distribution across Australia. They took on their first digital intern, Yurika, back in April. It is a beautiful tech-intern-to-small-business pairing that this has turned out to be. The business is very positive about their experience with the program and found that having access to a pool of available digital talent simplified the task of finding someone with the skills they needed. A digital intern has been engaged for six months to update and improve the business's website, which is a really important marketing tool for them and a sales portal to their customers. Even though she has only been in the role for a very short amount of time, Yurika is already considered a valuable staff member, and the business has expressed interest in expanding her responsibilities and employing her on an ongoing basis. The digital jobs program was designed in partnership with industry to build our digital workforce for businesses just like Carnival Homewares and to create opportunities for Victorians like Yurika. (*Time expired*)

ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG SERVICES

Mr BARTON (Eastern Metropolitan) (12:17): My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Health. This year's budget results in an 11.2 per cent cut from the revised budget figures for alcohol and other drug treatment and prevention, equating to \$39.8 million taken away from

services which support people in need of treatment. This comes at a time when the government has made it even easier to access alcohol through the introduction of the liquor reform bill that allows alcohol to be ordered online and delivered within minutes by untrained delivery drivers. Prior to this reform being introduced, the drug and alcohol treatment sector was already under immense pressure. Between September 2020 and July 2021 the daily waitlist for treatment increased by 50.9 per cent. So, Minister, why has the government chosen now to cut funding for alcohol and drug treatment by 11.2 per cent, the first cut to the sector in 17 years?

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:18): Mr Barton has raised a question for the Minister for Health, and I will pass that on and get him an answer.

Mr BARTON (Eastern Metropolitan) (12:18): Thank you, Minister. The government has also discontinued the \$25.62 million alcohol and other drugs COVID-19 workforce initiative. This initiative provided an additional 100 full-time alcohol and other drug treatment workers across Victoria, as well as training and upskilling. Can the minister explain why the government felt it appropriate to discontinue a \$25 million investment in the alcohol and other drugs workforce initiative when there is a massive shortfall in the alcohol and drug harm reduction workforces?

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:18): I thank Mr Barton for his question. I am sure that the minister will be able to provide you with information and point to many programs that are addressing the concerns that you have raised, particularly in light of the overlap with mental health services as well. I am sure there will be some information that you will find useful.

RAVENHALL PRISON CONSTRUCTION

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:19): My question is for the Minister for Small Business and concerns a firm, RPR Trades, which has incurred a significant debt while supplying labour on the Ravenhall construction project. Minister, an RPR Trades client, Cellcon Australia, went into voluntary liquidation late last year leaving accumulated debts of almost \$650 000 for work carried out on this Ravenhall project, a state government project of course. Whilst there is no dispute between RPR and Cellcon, there appears to have been aggressive behaviour by John Holland, who were withholding significant progress payments. RPR Trades has sought to honour wages and payments in full to all employees and stakeholders on Ravenhall, entering into an understanding that they would be afforded some degree of protection on the basis it was a state project. They received zero compensation, and I therefore ask: what action will you take as small business minister to ensure RPR Trades is not hung out to dry and is paid for work it has done on this state government project?

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Resources) (12:20): I thank Mr Davis for his question around really the intersecting financial arrangements between, it seems, three companies engaged in work on a state project. In the first instance I just want to call out Mr Davis's comment that RPR Trades have sought to pay all wages and entitlements to their staff through what has been a challenging period when they have got a customer that has not been able to meet the payments required, as I understood the question. We thank them for that, and it is obviously a good thing that they have sought to look after their people as best they can.

Your claims about aggressive behaviour by John Holland I probably need some more detail on. In Minister Wynne's portfolio the building regulator has a vehicle by which such disputes are facilitated. In my own portfolio the Victorian Small Business Commission can assist with the resolution of disputes between companies. But this is the first time this matter has been raised with me, Mr Davis, so perhaps I could suggest you email me the details and I will endeavour to ensure that the parties involved are provided with advice about what supports are available to them for these circumstances, of which I obviously only have a bit of the detail.

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:22): I thank the minister for that. This matter has been sent, I should say, to the Treasurer as well as to me, and I will pass that material on to the minister. But in this instance the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002 does not appear to assist RPR Trades at all, and I therefore ask: will you meet with this small business to help them find a solution, ensuring they are paid properly and the jobs are retained, given that this was in fact a state government project?

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Resources) (12:22): I thank Mr Davis for his further question. The security-of-payments legislation that Mr Davis referred to does not fall within my portfolio of responsibilities, and so, whilst trying to be helpful, I think that probably the best course of action, rather than speculating about these individual commercial arrangements between companies with which I am not familiar, is that if Mr Davis sends this information to me I will ensure that the parties are pointed in the right direction for what we can all hope is a satisfactory resolution to their issues.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: APPRENTICESHIPS VICTORIA

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:23): I am incredibly proud to update the chamber on the important role that Apprenticeships Victoria plays in supporting apprentices and trainees to achieve qualifications that are a career passport for life. This government is absolutely committed to ensuring that apprentices and trainees succeed, and that is why in this year's budget we announced \$12 million for the apprenticeship support officer program.

During the past few weeks I have been very pleased to meet apprentices, trainees and employers in the workplace and at Apprenticeships Victoria's headquarters in Melbourne. The positive reaction to the apprenticeship support officer program announcement has been absolutely fantastic. One of those workplaces was the construction site of the incredibly important Victorian Heart Hospital in Clayton, where I joined the Premier, Minister Pulford and local member Steve Dimopoulos to announce 300 new building and construction sector apprenticeships and traineeships across Victoria by mid-2023. Sixty per cent of those places will be earmarked for women. We met Nadia Conte, who is an apprentice carpenter working on that site. Nadia spoke of how her career choice is right for her and said that she felt really supported as an apprentice.

Employers, trainers, apprentices and trainees really value the role of apprenticeship support officers, who play a great role in assisting people to transition from the classroom to the workplace to be fully qualified in their field. This additional personal support leads to stronger completion rates. It is this government which is driving a renaissance in vocational education and training. We have set the benchmark for vocational education and training to be a fine alternative to university, not a second choice but the right choice for so many Victorians.

FIREARMS LICENSING

Mr QUILTY (Northern Victoria) (12:25): My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Police. In the minister's last written answer to my question regarding the 100 000 misplaced firearms on the licensing and regulation division database, I was advised that number was left over from the old firearms database that ceased operation in 1996. I was told that an ongoing audit had reviewed 60 000 records, but there was no word on what those 60 000 reviews had found. The fact that errors go back to 1996 shows that the firearms database has not been properly audited in the previous 25 years. During that time firearms could have been seized by police on the basis of faulty records, hypothetically been sold or stolen by police and then claims made that firearms had been lost or destroyed, and the LRD records would be unable to provide evidence to the contrary. I have heard a number of allegations that firearms that the police have had in custody have vanished. Minister, how many firearms have gone missing from police custody since 1996, including complaints about them going missing that were later resolved?

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:26): Can I say that I wish to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt condolences to those that have been affected by the dreadful shootings in America, and in particular the most recent ones. I understand that the death toll at the moment is hitting 18 people, many of whom are children, and I really do not think it is particularly appropriate to talk about guns today, to be quite frank. Having said that, there were a number of serious allegations, yet again, contained in Mr Quilty's question, and I will refer them to the Minister for Police. But I would encourage the member to really contemplate and reflect on the content of his questions today, particularly given the circumstances that have occurred in the United States.

Mr QUILTY (Northern Victoria) (12:27): I thank the minister for her editorial, and I will comment that missing firearms may contribute to shootings. Minister, what is the process when VicPol loses a firearm in their custody and what investigatory action is taken? In particular I am eager to learn about how this process works when the police officer involved is a senior member of the licensing and regulation division and is the firearm portfolio holder at the registry. It appears that in this situation the process is as simple as making an affidavit and having a junior subordinate officer witness it. I have a copy of such an affidavit in my possession, and the officer who made it is Senior Sergeant Andrew Armstrong. In the affidavit Sergeant Armstrong claims that the firearms were accidentally destroyed by forensics. Surely the Victorian forensic service centre would be able to provide evidence to this effect so that we would not be forced to take the senior sergeant's word for it. Sergeant Armstrong also takes care to mention that the firearms are of no monetary value. I wonder why he has done that. It is unlikely that five firearms have no monetary value, especially as at least one of those in question was a rare and valuable model. The affidavit is a curious document, and I look forward to the minister's explanation.

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:28): I will refer the matter to the Minister for Police.

Ms Pulford: On a point of order, President, it has come to my attention that the Victorian small business that Mr Davis was representing in his question earlier is actually a Queensland-based labour hire company, so perhaps I could seek some advice from you as to my ministerial responsibilities in relation to this.

Mr Davis: Further to the point of order, President, it is confirmed it is operating in Victoria and actually has worked on this government project. The fact is that its staff, the people that it has employed, have actually been left in a difficult position and are not being paid because of the miasma.

Ms Pulford: Further to the point of order, President, perhaps I might suggest, as a way forward, that I take this question on notice for the Minister for Corrections, who has responsibility for the delivery of the project.

Mr Davis: This is a business that is operating in Victoria and ought to be paid. If the minister is arguing that she can abscond and not have a role in that, well, good luck to her.

The PRESIDENT: We are not going to go into that. I was going to rule it from the beginning. Minister, sorry to say, there is no point of order. Even if it happens somewhere else, that is no point of order. We are not going to continue on this.

BALLARAT SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT

Mrs McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:31): My question is for the Minister for Small Business, and this is about local businesses. Minister, small traders in Ballarat are demoralised and facing ruin due to the 10-month-long closure of their frontages on busy Albert Street. They were informed in January that works would commence in February and continue until at least November. Businesses including a car wash, bakery, cafe and bottle shop are losing thousands of dollars of revenue each week, in many cases more than 50 per cent of their normal takings. Curbside Cafe owner Tracey

Nunn's income is down 75 per cent. She told me COVID was better than this. Minister, what action will you take to ensure proper, reasonable support is available to these small businesses so severely impacted by this government-sponsored project?

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Resources) (12:32): You guys have really got the full rockstar show on today, haven't you? I can actually answer this basically because I was the roads minister when we funded this project and it was an election commitment and I live in Ballarat and I drive past these shops all the time, so I am familiar with the works that are underway. The Keeping Ballarat Moving project, a series of six projects, was a commitment made by my predecessor in the roads portfolio, Luke Donnellan, another fabulous local member, and that is what Mrs McArthur is speaking about. Because the coalition, the Liberals—with apologies, Ms Bath, as the Nats have not had quite so bad a week actually—never really built anything, and certainly did not build anything in Ballarat, there is not a lot of depth of experience about how this works. The way that transport projects—

Members interjecting.

Ms PULFORD: With your forbearance, President, but I am representing the minister for roads in this chamber, the way that disruptions are managed by our various roads authorities and the Department of Transport in the delivery of projects that are about improving amenity and safety is that they do engage with small businesses to provide them with notice and signage and support to minimise the impact of construction works. We are known in this government for the Big Build. There is some disruption, and the transport ministers frequently are advising people, businesses and trading strips about the impact of those.

But I do want to pick up Mrs McArthur's point about 'worse than COVID'. Can I just take the opportunity to thank these small businesses, as I do all small businesses when I meet them all the time, for the extraordinary effort that they have made, whether it be ensuring that their staff and patrons are vaccinated or ensuring that they are operating COVID safe and that they have their COVID-safe plans, because those people have saved thousands and thousands of lives in Victoria, undeniably, as a result of their sacrifice.

This is a really exciting improvement for Sebastopol. It will be better. It will be disruptive. What I can do is I can ask the minister for roads perhaps to ask the regional roads director if he would meet with these traders to make sure that they have all of the information that they need about the progress of works and the disruption and any other things that can be done around signage and the like to assist them while those improvements are being made right out the front of their shops.

Mrs McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:35): Minister, support is currently being denied because some access is theoretically possible via a backstreet entry obscured by signage and machinery. This 10-month closure of the busy frontage is already severely impacting trade. Yes, they did everything to stay open during COVID; now they are at their absolute last chance of ever surviving. And I am told also that the member for Buninyong has failed to respond to pleas from these distressed owners. So how many businesses need to go bankrupt before your government accepts that the impact is severe enough to warrant your financial support?

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Resources) (12:35): You are talking about compensation for a road project, right, so we are well outside of my portfolio remit here. In terms of—

Mrs McArthur interjected.

Ms PULFORD: I know you guys never build anything or do anything, which is why you had such a bad weekend, but the project is being delivered through the roads portfolio, and because we build

stuff all the time our agencies are well practised at engaging with local traders. These local traders have not sought a meeting with me, and I would be happy to speak with them in my capacity both as their small business minister and as their local upper house member. They have not sought to do that. Michaela Settle has been and continues to be an outstanding representative for businesses in Sebas and has delivered significant projects and funding to that particular strip and those particular streets.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE

Ms STITT (Western Metropolitan—Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for Early Childhood) (12:37): Today I want to update the house on the ways that the Andrews Labor government is supporting people to become early childhood teachers. Yesterday I was proud to announce the Upskill program, in partnership with the Front Project. This program will support up to 100 early childhood educators to move confidently through university and into their first few years as a teacher. Our government are investing in this initiative because we know that when teachers are well supported they are more likely to stay in the profession and make a big difference to the lives of young children. We will make it a priority to focus this support on students who face barriers to tertiary education, like those who are living and working in rural and remote areas, those who are the first in their families to attend university, those employed by smaller service providers or those for whom English is not their first language.

We are also supporting hundreds of diploma educators to become teachers through our innovative initial teacher education program. We have partnered with Deakin, VU and the Australian Catholic University, and that means that educators who are already working in the sector can earn while they learn.

I recently met with an educator, Kerrie, from Colchester Park Preschool—together with my colleague Jackson Taylor—who is two weeks away from finishing her degree at Deakin. Kerrie said the financial support we provided means that she can fulfil her dream of becoming a teacher. It means that Kerrie can take up one of the 4000 new teaching jobs that we are creating as we deliver three-year-old kindergarten. It is all part of our \$209.9 million investment in the early childhood workforce and the overall commitment of \$5 billion to deliver the three-year-old landmark reform.

WRITTEN RESPONSES

The PRESIDENT (12:39): Regarding questions and answers: Ms Patten to the Minister for Health, two days, Ms Symes; Mr Hayes to the Minister for Health, two days, question and supplementary; Mr Barton to the Minister for Health, two days, question and supplementary; and Mr Quilty to the Minister for Police, two days, question and supplementary.

I would like to acknowledge that in the gallery we have a former member of this house, Mr Bill Forwood. Welcome.

Questions on notice

ANSWERS

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) (12:39): I would like to raise a number of questions on notice which remain outstanding for the attention of the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. These are questions 4903, 4904, 4905 and 4906, which were asked on 8 March this year. Additionally there is a question outstanding for the Minister for Planning, which is 3699, which was asked on 25 May last year. I have written to both the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and the Minister for Planning advising that the questions are outstanding. They still have not been received, and I seek an explanation from the Leader of the Government, please.

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:40): Mr Rich-Phillips, if I grab that on my way out, I will get my office to follow it up immediately.

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Dr Bach: On a point of order, President, in question time the Minister for Workplace Safety claimed that I had misrepresented some statements that she made a fortnight ago. A fortnight ago she said 195 WorkSafe inspections had been made at youth justice facilities, so in fact her assertion about me today was incorrect. She had misled the house, I am sure inadvertently, a fortnight ago, so I would hope that the minister would review the *Hansard* and then in due course withdraw her accusation about me.

The PRESIDENT: I believe that when we spoke about it the minister responded to it. I am happy to review the *Hansard* and check.

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:41): Can I also raise the issue of outstanding questions on notice. I have got a list of 126 to the Minister for Health that have gone past the 30-day period. In the interests of time, I will not read them all out because there are 126. I will have more in the next sitting week. But I do ask that these be addressed.

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:42): Ms Crozier, I will also follow those up. But I have noted before the amount of questions on notice that go to the Minister for Health, who has a very important job of seeing us through the COVID recovery. If we put on record how many questions are asked, I think they are doing their best to meet 30 days, but they are also doing really important work making sure that our hospitals are supported and the community is supported in a health response. It is resource intensive when you get slammed with that many questions. But it is a requirement to respond, and I will follow up your outstanding matters.

Ms Crozier: Thank you, Minister, for undertaking that commitment. I take the minister's point about where it is, but I do make the point that these are important questions. I have had questions answered 18 months later. It is not good enough.

The PRESIDENT: We are getting involved with debate now, and I am not going to allow that.

Ms Crozier: I know, but I just—

The PRESIDENT: Sorry, Ms Crozier. I know you have raised the issue—

Ms Crozier: I would appreciate it if they would be addressed. They are important matters.

The PRESIDENT: We all know I cannot do anything about this. The minister took responsibility, so that is the end of it.

Constituency questions

NORTHERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) (12:43): (1792) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Public Transport. Mickleham and Kalkallo are such diverse and wonderful communities with many Victorians building new homes, but they need better access to public transport and they very much feel that their area is lacking. I recently invited the people of Mickleham and Kalkallo to complete my community survey. I thank those many people who replied to my survey. The residents told me they want better bus access to the train stations in Donnybrook and Craigieburn. So my question to the minister is: will the government conduct a review of the bus services in Mickleham-Kalkallo to increase the connectivity of my residents to the Donnybrook and Craigieburn train stations?

WESTERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (12:44): (1793) My question is to the Minister for Education in the other place, and it is from a resident, Vera. Can the minister advise how many teachers have since the start of the pandemic, one, resigned; two, had their contract expire; and three, been

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stood down? Last month I asked the minister a question regarding mandates for teachers, and I thank him for his prompt response. In his response he stated that:

... 99.6 per cent of government school teachers have been triple vaccinated. Given this, there have not been any staff shortages due to the vaccination mandate.

Vera contacted my office regarding this response. She advised me that she is part of a group of teachers numbering over 1000 who are not fully vaccinated and are working as cleaners, picking and packing fruit and doing deliveries for restaurants. Minister, could you please answer this question about the amount of teachers that have been lost since the start of the pandemic?

The PRESIDENT: Again, the constituency question should be related to your electorate. I do not think this is. I have to look at it, Dr Cumming.

WESTERN VICTORIA REGION

Mrs McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:45): (1794) My question is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change and concerns the future of electricity transmission in Victoria and particularly the western Victoria transmission project. It is significant that the minister is responsible for both energy and the protection of the Victorian environment. A balance must be struck between new transmission infrastructure and the impact it will have on the environment, visual amenity, property valuations, productive farming land, ecological consideration and firefighting ability, to name just a few problems. I am greatly concerned by the recent widespread social media and newspaper blitz by western Victoria transmission network proponents AusNet. They rely on a self-serving preliminary report highly disputed by other experts to discredit undergrounding. My question is: given the scale of new infrastructure required and the minister's support for underground transmission inherent in the Marinus Link and Star of the South wind energy projects, will the minister begin a comprehensive, neutral and honest statewide public consultation on this new network of 30 projects—particularly the western Victoria transmission project—which will crisscross Victoria and launch an honest debate on the value of undergrounding and power transmission?

The PRESIDENT: Do you know how long you went over time? No-one is watching; no-one is looking. We just take our time and ask a constituency question, ask a question, whatever we like. I could rule it out, Mrs McArthur, but I will not do it. But I am just asking members, please, when you are on your feet, there is a clock there. Watch the clock, or your question will be ruled out.

NORTHERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Dr RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (12:47): (1795) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public Transport. Parkville Gardens is a residential neighbourhood in my electorate located between Royal Park and the CityLink. The area is growing as additional apartment buildings are constructed, including much-needed social and affordable housing—which is very welcome—yet the public transport options are extremely limited. Just one bus line services the area, the 505 bus. Despite promising funding in last year's budget to increase the frequency of services on the line, there is still just one bus every hour, meaning residents who want to travel to work, the city or even the supermarket for fresh food need to rely on a single bus every 60 minutes. Residential neighbourhoods need good connections to transport links, services and local shopping precincts, especially for social and affordable housing residents, who are more likely to rely on public transport to get around. When will the frequency of services on the 505 bus line increase?

WESTERN VICTORIA REGION

Mr MEDDICK (Western Victoria) (12:48): (1796) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in the other place. Lake Wendouree is known for the black swans that take residence around the lake. They are loved and admired by the people of Ballarat and all who visit. However, in the past few years there has been a concerning increase of swan and cygnet deaths. These deaths are caused by both carelessness and cruelty. Swans have been hit by cars as they attempt to

cross the road, and on a number of occasions swans have been found decapitated. This happened again just last week. It is yet to be determined if the headless swan was killed intentionally or perhaps by a dog that was not under control at the time. But what is clear is that more needs to be done to protect the swans around Lake Wendouree. Speed bumps, a speed reduction to 40 kilometres an hour and CCTV around the lake would all act as preventative measures to stop swan deaths or to catch those who cause them. Will the minister for roads install these safety measures to protect our wildlife?

NORTHERN VICTORIA REGION

Mr QUILTY (Northern Victoria) (12:49): (1797) My constituency question is to the Minister for Health. Recently I heard from a Macedon Ranges resident who is disgusted by what this state has done to her and her other wildlife volunteers. She has a long history of rescuing animals, but due to mandates extending their reach to volunteers she can no longer rescue and care for injured and endangered wildlife. The fact that no-one has advocated for wildlife volunteers has also left her dismayed. Many animal rights activists hold strong views towards bodily autonomy and integrity. Many have chosen for ethical reasons not to have vaccinations due to animal testing. Excluding the unvaccinated from volunteer roles puts pressure on community organisations and takes value and purpose away from individuals who are passionate and committed to the causes they support. Now there is not just a shortfall in volunteers at Wildlife Victoria but for the CFA, in school canteens and at local sporting events. Northern Victoria depends on volunteers. Minister, when will you remove vaccine mandates from volunteers in Northern Victoria to allow them to support and contribute to their local communities?

SOUTHERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:50): (1798) I want to talk about the Fitzsimons Lane upgrade and the fact that this matter was part of the northern roads upgrade for a series of roads. There appears to be a very significant overrun on this. My question simply is: given that this is such an important north–south road and the movement through that area goes north–south and covers very significant movements of traffic, why has this matter blown out so much? This is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Why has this suburban roads package blown out by such an extraordinary amount of money—an increase of \$303.857 million. These are huge increases. What has happened that has forced this increase in the road cost?

The PRESIDENT: I have checked your constituency question, Dr Cumming. Unfortunately, even if someone from your electorate asked it, it still has to be related to your electorate, so I have to rule it out.

Dr Cumming: Thank you, President. I would like to put that question on notice.

The PRESIDENT: That is the right procedure.

Mr Ondarchie: On a point of order, President, I draw your attention to standing order 8.08, particularly section (4), which requires constituency questions to be answered within 14 days. I have a number of outstanding ones: a question to the Minister for Police 105 days ago, to the Attorney-General 93 days ago, to the Minister for Public Transport 63 days ago and to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety 50 days ago. These constituency questions are very important. We ask them on behalf of our constituents and expect answers within the statutory period.

The PRESIDENT: You know very well, Mr Ondarchie, that I cannot do anything about it.

Ms Pulford: Just in response, let me undertake to follow up those outstanding constituency questions with my colleagues.

Motions

INTEGRITY AGENCY FUNDING

Debate resumed.

Ms BURNETT-WAKE (Eastern Victoria) (12:53): As I was saying before the interruption, according to anti-corruption commissioner Mr Redlich, whether answers would prejudice IBAC is a matter for IBAC, not a matter for the chair of the committee. Ms Shing's actions have left many Victorians, including me, questioning and wondering what this government is not disclosing. Frankly, in my view her actions do not display the basic principles of transparent and accountable government. Is the Premier under investigation for corruption? Why is Ms Shing taking it upon herself to act as his private public relations officer? I do not know.

There is also a question of whether Ms Shing has a conflict of interest, be it actual, potential, perceived or otherwise, given her relationship with the Premier's chief of staff, and whether that relationship could improperly influence decisions or actions in her role as chair. All conflicts must be declared and managed appropriately. When conflicts are not declared and appropriately managed, it can lead to a lack of trust and undermine confidence.

This blocking of questions occurred concurrently with the Victorian Ombudsman's inquiry into the politicisation of the Victorian public service and three IBAC investigations into the Andrews Labor government: Operation Watts, Operation Sandon and Operation Richmond. Ms Shing's federal colleagues are pushing for a federal ICAC, which is needed, but at a state level members of the Labor Party could not be more opposite. They seem much more interested in doing all they can not to be accountable and transparent. The Victorian community would expect the chair of an integrity and oversight committee to act with integrity. They would expect someone who upholds principles of transparency and accountability, someone who welcomes questions and answers as part of a functioning democracy. They would also expect any conflicts to be declared. The Andrews Labor government do not like to answer questions. The only reason questions were asked at the Integrity and Oversight Committee is the Premier himself refuses to give Victorians, those he is responsible for as their leader, the answers they deserve.

This leaves us concerned about the ability of IBAC and the Ombudsman to conduct their inquiries. There is a history of underfunding. In a statement from 2021 the commissioner clearly stated that all budget allocations did not meet the commissioner's full request. IBAC needs enough funding to carry out its objectives to investigate corruption in this state, as does the Ombudsman. It is needed now more than ever. I support Mr Davis's motion to take note of Ms Shing's behaviour and call on the government to provide an immediate injection of funds into IBAC and the Ombudsman to ensure these inquiries are completed before the November state election.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) (12:57): I move:

That debate on this motion be adjourned until later this day.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.

Sitting suspended 12.57 pm until 2.04 pm.

COVID-19

Mr QUILTY (Northern Victoria) (14:04): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant harm to Victorians, including:
 - (a) the loss of liberty and violation of human rights;
 - (b) economic hardship, debt and consumption of savings;

- (c) the deterioration of mental and physical health;
 - (d) damage to the reputation of public institutions;
 - (e) reduction in the enjoyment of life;
 - (f) other expected future harms;
- (2) further notes that the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic was largely executed unilaterally using public health powers under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008;
- (3) calls on the government to establish a royal commission to:
- (a) investigate the integrity of COVID-19 public health directions, including:
 - (i) the evidentiary basis for the directions;
 - (ii) the consideration of expected harms caused by the directions;
 - (iii) the influence the government had on directions issued by the chief health officer;
 - (b) investigate human rights violations that resulted from COVID-19 public health directions;
 - (c) examine the harms and expected future harms caused by COVID-19 public health directions; and
 - (d) provide recommendations to protect Victorians against harms caused by the government as a result of the use of emergency powers, pandemic powers and any other related powers.

I contemplated breaking my rule today and speaking at length on this motion. If David were here, I am sure he would have covered things in much more detail; however, in the last two years I have already raised all the issues we will be discussing today. There is far too much waffle and hot air produced in this place that no-one ever listens to, and so as usual I will be reasonably brief.

The last two years have been dominated by the use of emergency powers. We have been banned from leaving our homes, banned from working, banned from re-entering the state, banned from protesting, forced to wear masks, forced to report our movements and forced to take vaccinations. The government deployed hundreds of riot police to break up protests. They fired rubber bullets and pepper spray into crowds. They intimidated people in their homes and made arrests based on social media posts.

The government took control of our lives using emergency powers legislation. Two years on, the government still refuses to give up that power. At no stage did the government try voluntary compliance. Having the big stick of emergency powers in their hand, they went straight to compulsion and force every time. The government extended the initial six-month cap on the use of emergency powers, then extended it a second time and then removed the cap altogether. We are still now subject to these emergency powers. Five per cent of the Victorian population are still being locked out of the economy in direct opposition to the health advice that we have seen, such as it is.

How should this be questioned or brought to account? In theory there are accountability measures around the use of emergency powers. However, none of these accountability mechanisms have amounted to anything. The reports published by the government show nothing of value about who made decisions, why they were made and what information was available at the time. For most of the pandemic the health advice was concealed. The decision-making process was opaque. Was the chief health officer making the health directives based on the best advice? We know that the human rights of Victorians were disregarded when decisions were being made. The words 'proportionate' and 'least restrictive' very clearly did not factor in the decisions as they should have. We have heard reports from people working in the emergency management team that advice and draft directions were regularly passed through the Premier's office. They were concerned that political priorities interfered with frank and fearless health advice. This is not the way the emergency powers were designed to run. This must be examined in an impartial process.

The inquiry into the hotel quarantine fiasco was buried under a mountain of 'I can't recall' statements. The findings of abuse of human rights by the Victorian Ombudsman were swept under the rug and ignored. This pandemic has exposed how vulnerable Victorians are to abuse of government power

and how emergency powers need proper safeguards to protect Victorians from their government during an emergency.

Putting to one side the human rights aspect of the pandemic response, there remains the question of whether the measures taken under the emergency powers were appropriate and whether over both the short run and the long run they improved the health of Victorians or whether in the long run more lives will be lost. We know in retrospect that many measures taken under the emergency powers did not improve the health outcomes. Locking people in their houses in the early stages of the pandemic and limiting outside exercise was probably counterproductive from a health perspective.

Many measures taken during the pandemic are having long-term impacts on the physical and mental health of Victorians. It seems likely that the long-term health costs of the response will dwarf the actual health impacts of the pandemic. Just the reduction in physical exercise—the pandemic weight gains will be an anchor around the necks of Victorians into the future. Alcohol consumption rocketed during the pandemic and has not dropped back to prepandemic levels. Other medical issues were ignored when they should have been treated, and mental health issues have spiked across age groups and across the state.

A clear example of the breakdown of process that should be examined is the treatment of children throughout the pandemic. Mounting evidence is suggesting that there have been significant impacts on children—higher numbers of students refusing to attend class and a devastating burden on mental health that has impacted many Victorians, but particularly children and teenagers. Just today we have reports that technology used for remote learning may have systematically breached the privacy of students, all of this for a virus that presents less risk to young people than the current strain of influenza that is circulating.

In addition to the questions about whether this was an appropriate response, there are questions of process that need to be examined. How were the benefits and harms assessed? How robust were human rights considerations? Any restrictions are supposed to be proportionate and the least restrictive of human rights. Who made the call, what advice did they act on and what was the process for doing so? Victorians deserve answers, and any future government needs to understand so we can avoid making the same mistakes in any future crisis, but we will not know if we do not look clearly and closely at this.

I have not even touched on the economic costs of the use of emergency powers—the billions of dollars in debt, the small businesses crushed, the lives and dreams crushed. The economy is not just some abstract economic figure; it is the sum of all human activity, all the effort and striving, the dreams and hopes of the people. Two years of our lives and so much more of our future gone.

It is clear that I believe that the way this pandemic was handled by the Andrews government is not a model to be replicated. But even if you think that things were largely managed well, there remain many lessons to be learned and improvements to be made, and I have zero faith that any review that is not entirely independent of this government will produce an honest, dispassionate analysis of the pandemic response, as we have seen all too often when the government investigates themselves.

That is why I am calling for a royal commission to investigate the use of emergency powers. A royal commission will be able to untangle the mess that is the last two years of dictatorial government control. It would expose the problems and reveal where reforms are needed, and no doubt it will also identify what has been done right. If the government thinks they have done well, they should have no reason to fear an investigation. They should welcome this review. It is not about a witch-hunt or finger-pointing; it is about finding truth. Victorians deserve to understand why their lives have been upended for the last two years. Victorians need to know what worked and what did not work, what was justified and what was not. If we do not examine properly what happened, if we allow spin and cover-ups to conceal what really happened, we will be doomed to repeat mistakes, and probably worse than them. We must look at this, really look at it so that we can do better next time.

Ms WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (14:12): I rise to speak on Mr Quilty's motion. Around the world the impact of COVID on communities and economies is profound. Australia was one of only a handful of jurisdictions around the world that was able to eradicate the virus for long periods of time, thereby reducing serious health risks to the community and protecting our health systems.

The slow progress of the commonwealth's COVID vaccine program in achieving high population-wide vaccination rates meant that here in Victoria interventions to protect the health of the community, particularly the health of our most vulnerable, continued well into 2021. With the slow progress of the commonwealth's vaccination program Victoria stepped in and stepped up to deliver over 40 per cent of all vaccinations administered in our state, which is well above the 30 per cent that the state system was responsible for. Our state vaccination system was so successful here in Victoria that it administered more vaccinations than any other jurisdiction. Since the commencement of the rollout, over 6.2 million vaccine doses have been administered through the Victorian government vaccination sites, and as of today almost 15.4 million doses have been administered in Victoria across all state-run sites and through our general practitioners.

Victoria's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been no doubt the most scrutinised in the country. For over 100 days the Premier held a daily media conference, together with public health experts, and answered every single question until there were simply no more. Victoria participated in the national contact-tracing review conducted by Professor Finkel, looking at contact-tracing and outbreak management systems and processes in all state and territories. The state officials and experts appeared before numerous COVID parliamentary inquiries for hours on end. The government's amendments to the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 have delivered the most open and transparent pandemic emergency response in Australia, and since the pandemic declaration on 15 December 2021 the pandemic orders have been published, together with the chief health officer's advice, the minister's statement of reasons and a statement on charter assessment compatibility. This is in addition to the hours of media interviews conducted each and every day by our public health professionals.

It is not the Victorian government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic that needs to be reviewed. As yet the previous commonwealth government has not been held to account for the many failures that exacerbated the pandemic here in our nation. Former Prime Minister Scott Morrison—and I will say that one more time, because I kind of enjoy it: former Prime Minister Scott Morrison—admitted during the recent federal election campaign that his government made decisions that 'not on every occasion were right'. They were late ordering vaccines, and they failed to provide rapid antigen tests when Australians needed them most. He admitted that they could have communicated more clearly about the risks and challenges when he called for an end to restrictions, including mask wearing, before the omicron wave in December.

Mr Gepp: It was not his job.

Ms WATT: It was not his job, and it is not a race. I think we recall hearing that more times than one, and I am sure other colleagues speaking to this motion will have much more to add. The commonwealth failed. It failed those in aged care. They did not have a surge workforce strategy, and they did not have a plan to support the private aged care system. Instead they sent in the military.

The Victorian government, along with all other states and territories, had to make some really hard decisions to keep our community safe while the federal government, along with those opposite, more often than not chose to play politics. This government and our dedicated hardworking health professionals are the most transparent across the country, and allegations to the contrary peddled by those opposite are wrong and, frankly, should absolutely be called out.

No decision made during the global pandemic has been taken lightly. We understand that the decisions that this government took in 2020 and 2021 to contain the spread of outbreaks and keep the Victorian community safe were difficult for many people across the state. The chief health officer's decisions—and now the Minister for Health's decisions—have always been on the basis of proportionate, timely

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and expert evidence-based public health advice, with the intent to reduce the serious risk to public health caused by COVID-19 driving the exercise of power. Further, the public health directions issued under the state of emergency and the pandemic orders under the pandemic declaration must comply with the principles of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 and the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006. The priority for this government is to ensure that Victorians are safe and ensure that we are open, and these powers will ensure that we do both.

In December 2021 the Victorian government passed the new pandemic-specific legislation that provides for a framework to ensure that Victorians can effectively manage the pandemic and any future pandemics. Under this new legislation a state of emergency in Victoria is no longer required to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. On 15 December 2021 a pandemic declaration was made by the Premier when the previous state of emergency ended. The current pandemic declaration expires at 11.59 pm on 12 July.

Under the pandemic declaration it is the Minister for Health in consultation with the chief health officer who considers what measures are required to manage the pandemic and to keep Victorians safe. The minister is also able to consider non-health factors, such as the economic, social and mental wellbeing of Victorians in the consideration of pandemic orders. Since the new arrangements came into place late last year, each set of orders has published online and is available to the public within seven days of the order being signed, together with the chief health officer's advice, a statement by the minister with the minister's reasons for making changes to orders and a summary of the human rights assessment.

The Victorian government thanks everyone in the Victorian community who continues to do the right thing, helping to reduce the impact of the virus on the economy, our healthcare system and our broader community.

Pandemic order settings are continually reviewed, including considering the evolving epidemiological and public health modelling to ensure that the appropriate settings are in place to manage the public health risk, protect our health system and keep Victorians safe. I will just note that some changes have come out today, including around second booster access for a range of people with some health vulnerabilities, including those with cancer. So the advice is changing constantly.

Under the new pandemic management arrangements, additional transparency and oversight measures ensure that decisions are open, easily understood and reviewed, including off the back of advice that comes from our national partners. This includes a joint parliamentary investigative committee with parliamentary oversight of any pandemic orders. Further, this contains the Independent Pandemic Management Advisory Committee, which is able to review pandemic orders and provide advice to the Minister for Health.

I am just going to take a moment to talk about our state's high vaccination rate. Vaccinations have simply made the most profound difference to the course of this pandemic, and achieving high vaccination rates is unquestionably one of the key factors that has enabled us to gradually remove many of the restrictions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the community. The vaccine mandates have been crucial to achieving this. First and second doses across a range of sectors were implemented in 2021 and have played a significant role in getting Victoria's vaccination uptake to such significant and high rates. With the omicron variant in particular, the evidence shows that being vaccinated with three doses matters, and it makes a significant difference to the health outcomes for those who contract COVID. There is clear data showing a third dose decreases the chance of being hospitalised by up to 90 per cent. Between 1 January 2022 and 5 May 2022 across all age groups, 82 per cent of people who died had not received their third dose and 35.4 per cent had not received two doses but make up 5.5 per cent of the general adult population.

This is why after consulting the chief health officer the Minister for Health determined that specific critical sectors, including aged care, health care, disability care and education workers, must all be

vaccinated with three doses to continue working, given the high risk of exposure to and of spreading the virus. The pandemic orders required that healthcare, disability, custodial, emergency services, meat- and seafood-processing, quarantine accommodation and food distribution workers must have their third dose by 12 March 2022, recently passed. Workers who were not eligible yet for a third dose on 12 January were required to get it by 29 March 2022.

There is so much more that I could say, but I know that there is interest and profound enthusiasm from other members here in this chamber to speak very strongly about the government's response to COVID-19 and in particular thank the Victorian people and our excellent healthcare workers.

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:22): I rise to speak to Mr Quilty's motion and in support of Mr Quilty's motion this afternoon, because it is speaking to the issues that I have been speaking to for many, many months. I have just listened to the government MP spruik the government's achievements, and whilst I acknowledge the challenges of the government with the COVID-19 pandemic—we all acknowledge that—there were failures, and there were significant failures. There were catastrophic failures, and I want to go to those.

I will go to those, but I want to just make the point that Mr Quilty is speaking about the government's response and the impacts—the loss of liberty, violation of human rights, economic hardship, debt, consumption of savings, deterioration of mental and physical health, damage to the reputation of public institutions, reduction in the enjoyment of life and other expected future harms. He talks a bit about the powers of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 and then calls on the government to establish a royal commission. Now, that was something that this side of the house, the Liberals and Nationals, were calling for in September 2020—a royal commission after the catastrophic failures of contact tracing in this state and the loss of 801 lives through the second wave.

But can I just go back to the point about—before I do speak more to that—economic hardship, debt and the consumption of savings. I know that the previous MP was gloating about the loss of the federal government just a few moments ago, quite disgracefully actually when you think about what the federal government did and put into JobKeeper, really assisting so many small businesses and providing that assistance that kept them going through COVID-19, especially here in Victoria. The former federal Treasurer Josh Frydenberg himself and his family were caught up in the Victorian lockdown—the lockdown after lockdown after lockdown, the six lockdowns to prepare our health system. That never happened. We are in the worst crisis that we have ever seen because of the failures. The government might gloat about that, but those issues for businesses would have been far more profound had the federal government actions not occurred.

But let us go back to this motion, because a royal commission is needed. I am reminded of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission into the terrible Victorian bushfires. I was reading the reasoning for why the commission was conducted. I want to read this, and I know you, Deputy President, know this more than most in this house, because you were in the Parliament at the time and you were in those communities at the time, after such a very significant tragedy:

The Commission conducted an extensive investigation into the causes of, the preparation for, the response to and the impact of the fires that burned throughout Victoria in late January and February 2009. As Commissioners, we concentrated on gaining an understanding of precisely what took place and how the risks of such a tragedy recurring might be reduced.

They went on and spoke of who they heard from at the opening hearings and who they spoke to, because they said they wanted to understand how we might avoid the risk again. That is why a royal commission is needed. That is why we called for one in September 2020. But since September 2020 so much more has happened; we have had far more lockdowns since then. And it was not just me calling for a royal commission at that time. There was the AMA. Victorian president Julian Rait said:

In life, unless you're prepared to acknowledge mistakes you won't grow and that's my concern about some of our institutions, particularly the Victorian government where there is this long-standing culture of defensiveness.

He is right—the secrecy, the ongoing obfuscation about the information that every Victorian deserved to have. There was no transparency. The government says, ‘Oh, there were orders’. There was no transparency. Who made the curfew decision? No-one knows. But we all do know—it was the Premier. The chief health officer did not give him that advice; he said so himself. Who berated people watching a sunset go down? The Premier, Daniel Andrews, did. Where was the advice coming from just a few months ago? Who made the advice allowing Novak Djokovic to get an exemption to come in and play tennis out of the Department of Health? No-one knows. No-one has given that advice.

Members interjecting.

Ms CROZIER: Listen to the government MPs spruik over there. Listen to them carry on. I can tell you that Victorians know that this government is the most disingenuous government of all time. There are multiple failures: contact tracing; on the vaccination program that Ms Watts spoke about, the botched booking system that delayed the vaccination program being rolled out in the state centres, with the Premier not even acknowledging that pharmacists and GPs would do it; the curfews; and the playgrounds. Who could forget the playgrounds? Taping off playgrounds for goodness sake—who made that decision? Good God. We must learn from this. We must understand what exactly went on, because the restrictions in this state were the worst of any others in the country, with the worst outcomes. The number of deaths in Victoria has exceeded every other state and territory. On the restrictions, Melbourne was the longest locked-down city in the world. The ramifications are the mental health aspects that Mr Quilty spoke of on children—the shadow pandemic. It is a pity you lot did not listen to the Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee last week when the Shadow Pandemic Victoria representatives came in and spoke of the mental health impacts: the suicides, the attempted suicides of children, the self-harm, the eating disorders and the gang rapes of young girls.

Ms Terpstra: You’re a disgrace.

Ms CROZIER: That is the evidence that was provided, Ms Terpstra, in the committee.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! Can we just have a bit of quiet. Ms Crozier has the call.

Ms CROZIER: I note the interjections from the government MPs—that they say this is a disgrace. That was the evidence provided to the pandemic committee the other week from Shadow Pandemic. These are mothers with children; 20 000 people came together to give their experiences. The mental health impacts on children are profound. They were shut out of school for months.

Members interjecting.

Ms CROZIER: The government MPs scoff at this. It is just astounding. You have no idea of the impacts of your government’s decisions and policy decisions. This is the biggest failure of a policy decision by any state government in the history of Victoria. We need a royal commission. That is why we called for it in September 2020. That is why I am supporting this motion of Mr Quilty.

There was the Coate inquiry, the farcical Coate inquiry, where the Premier, 10 bureaucrats and three ministers could not remember, could not recall. What a disgrace that was. It was a disgrace to every Victorian that they could not remember and recall who made the decision about the security guards for hotel quarantine, where the second wave started and led to the tragedy of 801 Victorians losing their lives. This is the true reality and nature of what happened in this state. This is what happened. You can be in denial, government MPs, but this is what happened. And here we have that Coate inquiry report, where Justice Coate herself was scathing about the government’s handling. It says the decision was:

... made without proper analysis or even a clear articulation that it was being made at all.

On its face, this was at odds with any normal application of the principles of the Westminster system of responsible government. That a decision of such significance for a government program, which ultimately involved the expenditure of tens of millions of dollars and the employment of thousands of people, had neither a responsible Minister nor a transparent rationale for why that course was adopted, plainly does not seem to accord with those principles.

That is what Justice Coate said about the hotel quarantine program; that is what she found. And yet we have had failure after failure after failure since then, and the impacts are profound, as Mr Quilty said—the economic impacts, the social impacts. There were those Victorians that were locked out of their own state in New South Wales. They could not come back to Victoria to attend family members' funerals. They could not come back to have medical appointments, for goodness sake. The Ombudsman found that.

I could say so much more. I am frustrated that I do not have more than another 30 seconds, but what I will say in conclusion is the policy failures of this government through the last two years of the COVID response need a proper response, and the only way to do that is to have a royal commission so that those failures may never happen again.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I call Mr Gepp.

Mr GEPP (Northern Victoria) (14:32): Thank you, Deputy President. For the 50th time, it is Gepp, and I would ask you to show some respect and pronounce it correctly.

I rise to speak on Mr Quilty's motion. Gee whiz, you think you have seen it all in this place and then you hear the contribution that has just been made by Ms Crozier and the one preceding it by the mover of the motion, Mr Quilty. I just checked on the World Health Organization website to refresh my memory about where things are up to in terms of COVID around the globe. Globally there have been 526 million reported cases of COVID and 6.28 million deaths. And I thought, 'I'll have a look to see where Australia sits. Where does Australia sit in terms of COVID?'. We have had 7.03 million reported cases of COVID and 8178 deaths, and we all feel dreadfully sad about each one of those lives that has been tragically lost to COVID.

How does that compare statistically to other countries around the world? Just on the table from the World Health Organization website, Japan has had 8.63 million cases, so a bit more than Australia, and 30 336 deaths—almost four times as many deaths. The Netherlands has had 8.16 million cases and 22 328 deaths. Iran has had 7.23 million cases—very close, very close indeed, to Australia's number—but the number of deaths is 141 000 in comparison to our 8000 deaths. Colombia has had 6.1 million cases and 140 000 deaths, and it goes on.

This motion calls into question some of the things that this government has done, particularly around things such as the vaccine mandates. I would strongly suggest to the house that if the government had not taken the action that it did take in relation to vaccine mandates, the numbers against our country's name in the World Health Organization table would be significantly higher. We do not apologise. We do not apologise for putting the health and safety of our citizens first and foremost. The Premier from day one when he first fronted the media about the pandemic said clearly—very, very clearly—that this government's priority would be the health and wellbeing of its citizens. First, second and third, that would be the focus of this government. We knew that there were going to be consequences of the decisions that we were taking. We understood that there was going to be an economic impact, that there was going to be an economic downturn. We understood that. We understood that it was also going to have an impact on things such as the mental health and wellbeing of our citizens.

So we acknowledged that, but we also acknowledged that if we could not keep our citizens safe, if we could not keep our citizens well, if we could not protect the health sector, if we could not protect the fundamentals of our health system here in Victoria with the measures that we were about to adopt and that we would take based on the best medical advice that we were receiving at the time—if we could not do that—then we were going to be in all sorts of strife, that we were going to be in all sorts of trouble. We understood that each and every time we took a decision in relation to this pandemic there

would be consequences. Of course there were—there always will be. But if we had not taken the measures that we took—if we had not taken those measures—then the number of deaths against the number of cases according to the World Health Organization table that I just referred to would be a darn sight worse.

You would think, wouldn't you, given the contributions from Ms Crozier and Mr Quilty that we are the only ones in the world that dealt with this. Well, just about every other country in the world wrestled with the same issues, wrestled with the notion of lockdowns. And we saw it again and again and again, right around the globe. We saw airports become vast desert wastelands.

Mr Melhem interjected.

Mr GEPP: China has just introduced some more lockdowns; that is absolutely correct, Mr Melhem. So this bunkum that we hear from those opposite, including Mr Quilty, again and again and again fails to recognise the facts. Had the Victorian Labor government under Daniel Andrews's leadership followed the advice of the Liberal Party and the Liberal Democrats, I can guarantee you that we would be in a whole lot worse trouble in terms of our health system. Our health system would be non-existent because it would have collapsed in on itself. It would have absolutely collapsed in on itself had we followed the advice and the urgings of those opposite and Mr Quilty, none of whom were acting on any scientific advice, none of whom were responding to the medical advice that was coming through on a daily basis. All the time the Premier was standing in front of those news cameras day after day after day explaining to the Victorian people the depth of that advice we had the chief health officer standing next to him every day explaining to the Victorian people—understanding that the decisions we were making would have some consequences further down the road—that the first priority of the government was the safety and the health and wellbeing of our citizens. When you look at the statistics on the World Health Organization COVID-19 table, I would say that we have done pretty well.

I just want to digress for another moment. The other thing that often gets overlooked is that when you look statistically at where the majority of cases actually occurred in the Victorian population, and indeed around the country and around the globe, it was working people. It was people who did not have available to them a vast amount of means—those people who had no choice but to go out and perform their insecure job because if they did not they could not put food on the table. It was those people who were the ones at most risk—the most vulnerable people in our economy. If you want to talk about economics, it was those people that were the most at risk in our economy. If you want to talk about kids, right from the outset the world was saying, 'This virus doesn't impact children as it does others in the community'. We knew that. But what we also knew was that the kids were the biggest carriers and they were the spreaders, and in early days the science was still out about the longer term impact on the children. What were we to do? Were we to just throw open the doors and say, 'Let's have life's natural selection processes take place here'? Because we know what would have occurred: it would have been the most vulnerable in our community, those that could not protect themselves, who would have fallen over.

In my last 50 seconds, before we finish up this Parliament and before it ends its life in a few short months, I would rather, whenever we have this debate in this place about the pandemic and our response, that we all stand as one and that we just applaud all of those workers who put themselves, day after day, minute after minute, hour after hour, between us and that pandemic. When we did fall ill, they were the ones who went to work, masked up and treated us as best they could. Let us have that debate. Let us stand up and let us applaud all of those healthcare workers, those transport workers, those supermarket workers and all of the supply chains. Let us say thanks to them instead of the drivel that we get from the Liberal Democrats. I oppose the motion.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Thank you, Mr Gepp.

Mr GEPP: On a point of order, Deputy President, that is the second time within 10 minutes that you have mispronounced my name. I corrected you earlier, and I would ask you, respectfully, to pronounce my name correctly.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Thank you, Mr Gepp.

I notice that in the upper gallery we have a former Deputy President, Khalil Eideh, and also a former minister, Andre Haermeyer. Welcome.

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (14:43): It is easy to come after the government. If this government has nothing to hide, why don't they open their books? Why don't you allow us to go into the department? Why don't you show us the science? Why don't you show us the medical advice? Why don't you show us and the community all of the information behind your decisions? Why are you so afraid?

A member: We're not.

Dr CUMMING: Oh, well, then have this inquiry. Get up and vote in about 2 minutes and say, 'Yes, we agree. We agree that the community should have the medical information. They should have the science behind our decisions. This government should be transparent and accountable'. Why don't you show us that before the next state election? Why don't we have this? The UK government was able to have an inquiry in the first 12 months of COVID so they could learn from what they were doing—their responses. But this government—oh, no, not at all. We cannot get the medical advice. We cannot see the science. It is made up as you go along. It has been an absolute propaganda show by this government. Why would this government actually come in here only a couple months ago and have us vote on the chief health officer getting immunity if he did not do anything wrong? Oh, that is right. This government did that. They came in here and they made an amendment to the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 to make sure that the chief health officer gets immunity for all of his decisions in the last two years. Wow. Nothing to hide. Who does that? Who actually does that? This government, the Daniel Andrews government.

At this time of the pandemic why wasn't the priority around our healthcare system? Why didn't this government produce the ICU beds that it promised at the start of the pandemic? Why didn't it put money into our ambulance services? Why did it allow for the shutting of elective surgery? Why? Why would you have health professionals sitting at home during a pandemic and create a massive backlog? Why wouldn't you allow people who could go out to get the diagnostic services that they required? Now we have an increased load of people presenting with cancers that are beyond help because of this government. Did they redirect their funds during COVID to build a hospital or with the hospitals they had on the books throw more money at them to get them up and running quickly or increase the capacity of those hospitals? No, they did not.

Where is the science? Where is the medical advice? Where is this magical medical advice that shows us that the unvaccinated currently cannot work? They cannot work according to this government. Every other state allows them to work, but not this state. How is it science when the unvaccinated can go into a shop but they cannot work there? How is that science? It is not, not at all. And the government will not lift the mandates—seriously, 10 months in. They are happy to have the worker shortages that we have across the state, all over. They are happy to have people leave Victoria in droves to work in other states due to fears of more lockdowns because they have not given assurances that they will not do it again—not at all.

The government could have protected our children throughout this pandemic. It did not. We could have had the most beautiful bubble around our children. They could have gone to school. They could have gone to playgrounds. We could have looked after their mental health. But no, we had to have an increase in the sexual abuse of children at home. In addition, sitting at home, it was encouraged by this government for people to drink as much as they wanted—Uber drinks. So those children had to sit in that, as well as the amount of domestic violence that increased due to the lockdowns—the pressure on

those marriages, the pressure on those families. The government did nothing to protect our children throughout this pandemic. They could have had a normal childhood, but the government refused. The government absolutely refused to look after our children, to make sure that they went to school, that their mental health was looked after.

We knew that this was a virus and we needed to protect our most vulnerable. The government did not. It did not protect the aged, not at all. It kept saying it was somebody else's job. It knew that our number one job was to look after our most vulnerable, but it did not.

Now where are we? We are at a place where people cannot afford food. The long queues for food vouchers, for food bundles, for soup kitchens are enormous. They are nothing like I have ever seen in my whole entire life. Come down to the mall in Footscray and see how long the queues are. Come and have a look. They are humungous. When Foodbank opens their doors the cars are around the street and up the road for blocks and blocks. Queuing for hours for food—for food!

The government allowed the community to lose their businesses and their homes and to not be able to go and get jobs or to work and be able to provide for their families. What government does that, under the guise of mandates? What kind of stupidity is that? And the government continues it. It continues to say in one breath it is about workers but then it does not allow people to work—work that is essential for their health and for their mental health and to provide a roof over their heads and to buy food. But the government does not care; it absolutely does not care. Why would government members not vote for this? Why wouldn't the government establish a royal commission and investigate all of its decisions if it has nothing to hide? Why wouldn't it?

We have had a loss of liberty. We have had so many lockdowns. People are in the worst amount of hardship with their mental health and their physical health. They cannot go to a hospital. Show us what you have done. If the government is so strong about its decisions, show us the working behind all of those decisions. Because I know that they are not right.

The government popped up a tent near Highpoint and allowed people to get tested and just walk through Highpoint when it could have had long-lasting infrastructure. That money could have been put into community halls or community facilities and been spent on those buildings for the next 50 years. But no, the government chose to put up tents. It could have put that amount of money into the community for a proper, long-lasting response, for infrastructure that we could have had forever, but it chose not to. The government had a disposable response. It really should, if it is not worried—it constantly crows in this place—show us. Be accountable, be transparent. That is what the community wants. But government members know that they cannot because there is nothing. The government made it up as it went along. It has not got anything.

It was clear with the pandemic bill that the government wanted to continue to have verbal advice, so there will not be any paper trail apart from hopefully a whole heap of receipts and a lot of debt. Do not worry: one day the government will be made accountable. It will be in November and it will be next year. There will be a proper inquiry when people are in this place and able to hold the government to account.

Mrs McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:53): I rise in support of Mr Quilty's motion requiring a royal commission into the Andrews government and its handling of the pandemic and the catastrophic consequences for this state. Why do we need a royal commission? We would not normally need a royal commission, but the fact of the matter is we simply cannot trust this Premier. The people of Victoria cannot trust him, so we need to have a royal commission into the consequences of the pandemic.

The Premier hollowed out this Parliament. He sidelined the safeguards which the legislature traditionally places on the executive with the cancellation of parliamentary sittings, the inability to institute a virtual Parliament and voting as there was in many other countries, and the suppression of committees, including the Labor chair of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee abdicating

that committee's important role to investigate legislation thoroughly before it comes to this Parliament. The Public Accounts and Estimates Committee was eventually given an oversight role, but with a Labor chair it is next to useless. In other jurisdictions subscribing to the Westminster model opposition members chair oversight committees like this, as happened in the federal Parliament, for example. The Premier used this hollowed-out Parliament not just to avoid scrutiny of his decisions but to pass legislation which granted him even greater powers.

The pandemic bill, which we have already heard so much about, is the prime example. We have seen just how ineffective the Independent Pandemic Management Advisory Committee is. In months it has achieved absolutely nothing. It is not just parliamentary scrutiny the Premier has cut out; it is scrutiny from outside—independent oversight bodies. The Victorian Ombudsman has recently and rightly announced a critical review into the politicisation of the public service and has investigated the pathetic performance of the government on the border permits fiasco. At IBAC, where the Premier now has a frequent flyer pass, budget were cut again despite record levels of investigation being required, largely due to his party's rotten culture. It is for these reasons that this royal commission is necessary. In a normal world it might be trusted that the government could learn lessons responsibly. But every bit of this Premier's record tells us he will not. That is why we need an independent external and expert commission. We simply do not trust the Premier. There is no-one to blame but yourself, Premier.

Where else in the world, where else in this country, have we had lockdowns to the extent that we have had here? Where else in the world did we have curfews like those on innocent Victorians? Anyone would have thought that the Victorians who live in Melbourne were criminals of the highest order. I mean, we think very seriously about locking down criminals for 23 hours. But no, innocent Victorians were locked down. What damage did that do to people? Think of those people locked up in housing commission towers or in flats who were not even able in the end to allow their children out into the playground. I heard stories of mothers and grandmothers with their children being chased out of parks when the ruling came that children could not be in parks on swings. What nonsense is that?

The damage to mental health has been extreme. Otherwise why would this government introduce a new tax on businesses to cover the mental health issues that they themselves have created? The problem has been of their own making, so businesses now are taxed extra to cover the mental health issues that the government themselves have created.

There are health issues. We have now got at least 80 000 people on waiting lists to get surgery. What is the cost to the people of Victoria who have forgone heart surgery, cancer surgery or orthopaedic surgery? We have all had constituents, I am sure, who have complained to us about the fact that even though they have saved all their life to have private health insurance just to be able to get surgery when they require it, they have had their surgery cancelled two and three times and are in excruciating pain—some in wheelchairs waiting for surgery. Small babies and children cannot get surgery. Patients that need eye operations cannot get surgery. What will be the cost down the track of these health conditions that have not been addressed because you closed down hospitals and could not manage the pandemic properly in a health situation? You promised us 4000 beds. What happened to them? Why are we in a situation where people cannot get the surgery they require when they require it?

The loss of education for children was massive. How on earth are they going to recover? Children and students could not have proper tuition for two years. I know of so many students who basically lost those two years of their lives in an education sense and cannot go on to further education because they could not cope with online learning, let alone the parents who were put in a situation of having to try and teach their children while trying to hold down a job, maybe with small, preschool children underfoot. That cost is immense. It cannot be measured now, but it will be measured in the years to come.

The economic hardship, as one of the clauses in the motion raises, is massive. So many businesses closed, and businesses are still fighting nonsensical worker mandates—absolutely ridiculous—where they cannot get workers. We are short of workers in every industry and yet there are still mandates on

workers and they cannot go to work because they are not triple vaccinated or some ridiculous nonsense. We have encouraged Victorians to do the right thing: go and get vaccinated. What is their reward? They cannot work. They cannot put bread on the table because their job might have gone, and those who want to work but cannot for one reason or another be vaccinated are still without work even now with 95 per cent of the population vaccinated. What was the point of all that?

So much damage has been done. There was the extraordinary case of police barging into a constituent's house in Ballarat, arresting and handcuffing a pregnant woman, a mother, because she suggested on social media that we should somehow make a case against what was happening to everybody. Is that the sort of state we want to live in? Is nobody going to be accountable for this? Let alone the tens of millions that were spent on the Coate inquiry. I found out and was assured in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee that the legal fees were being paid by the state insurer—that means the taxpayers of Victoria footed that bill. All we learned from the Coate inquiry was, 'I've had a memory loss; I don't recall', and one minister 'doesn't read emails'. We learned nothing, achieved nothing, from the Coate inquiry. Nobody was responsible for ensuring that unqualified bouncers became hotel quarantine inspectors, resulting directly, as it was ascertained, in 801 deaths. That is a responsibility of this government, yet nobody is taking responsibility.

The government lacks accountability, it lacks transparency. I will happily support Mr Quilty's motion to ensure that a royal commission is conducted so we can get to the bottom of how this whole pandemic was so badly managed.

Mr TARLAMIS (South Eastern Metropolitan) (15:03): I also rise to make a contribution on Mr Quilty's motion today, and can I begin by saying, 'Wow'. I do not know how else to begin my contribution. There is a lot to unpack in the contributions that have been made so far, but 'Wow' is pretty much the way I would begin this contribution. I have been in this chamber on many occasions on a Wednesday when we have seen various motions come to this place on opposition and crossbench business day but also on other sitting days when we have had various questions in question time and when there have been pieces of legislation debated and many questions asked around the pandemic, and there has been a lot of information forthcoming as through other processes as well. But you would think from the contributions of those opposite that, I do not know, we have not been experiencing a global pandemic, there have not been challenges created by that global pandemic and there have not been consequences that have arisen because of it. This has impacted the world. All communities and economies have been impacted by COVID. No-one has been immune. To suggest that the Victorian government have taken the decisions that they have lightly and have basically not been cognisant of the fact that they would have repercussions is just ludicrous. Of course we knew that there would be repercussions from the decisions that we made. Very tough decisions had to be made to slow the spread of COVID and to protect Victorians, and that is what it was all about. It was about protecting Victorians and keeping them safe, and all those decisions were taken after careful consideration and based on medical advice.

Quite frankly, these comments that are thrown around here and these statements and claims that workers cannot not work, that we refuse to look after children, we refuse to look after the vulnerable and we do not care about people are just absolute garbage and rubbish. There is no substance to any of it whatsoever. There are these throwaway lines about, 'Why don't you follow the science?', and then every time we produce information that does have evidence, if it does not back up what they believe, they just dismiss it. They are just farcical some of the statements that have come out of the mouths of some of the people here.

As for Ms Crozier's contribution, I mean, it is what we have come to expect from the opposition consistently throughout the entire pandemic. It has been inconsistent and all things to all people. One day they have been claiming one thing, the next day they have been claiming the opposite. The inconsistencies—

Ms Crozier interjected.

Mr TARLAMIS: That is fine. The inconsistencies are on the record for everyone to see. Do not take my word for it, go back and have a look at the various press conferences. They are there in the public domain to see. Go back and have a look. You can see for yourself. They are all on the public record, the inconsistencies. One day there were claims that this was their position, then they had a subsequent different position. It is all on the public record. They were trying to be all things to all people and were chasing popularity. That is not what the government sought to do. The decision-making process that the government went through, in terms of the actions that they took to protect Victorians and to get them through this pandemic safely, was based on medical advice and was based on careful consideration. It was not based on what was going to make us popular. If we were trying to be popular, we would have taken a very different path. The decisions that were taken slowed the progress of the virus, and unlike many jurisdictions around the world we were able to eradicate the virus for very long periods of time, reduce the serious health risks to the community, slow the spread of the disease and protect our health system, and that is what we intended to do.

But again, at no point did we hear those opposite criticise the commonwealth. At no point whatsoever did we hear them step up and criticise the commonwealth for their lack of action on anything. When it came to quarantine, which was a responsibility that they should have stepped up for, they washed their hands of it. There was nothing but silence from the other side. When it came to the vaccination rollout, there was silence from the other side. When it came to rapid antigen test availability, there was silence from the other side. There was basically nothing from the other side. We delivered more vaccinations than we were originally intended to do, because the commonwealth could not get their act together and there was nothing from the other side. And every time the states did step in, to take the lead, deliver more than they were supposed to and basically get out there and pick up the pieces where the commonwealth fell short, they copped criticism from the commonwealth government about what they were doing. They sought to politicise things and criticise the government, yet during the election campaign you had the former prime minister out there basically saying, ‘Oh, look how great we are. Look how tops we are. Look at the great job that we’ve done. We’re owning this. We got us through. Look at all the people that we saved. Because of our leadership, we got you through’. Point to the decision that he made to help get us through. He could not. When he stepped up and said, ‘Vote for me for my leadership during the pandemic’, well, the public had a look and could not remember what he did, and they basically voted accordingly. I am sorry, you lot opposite did not call out the federal government once.

We stand by our record on what we did. Basically we took tough decisions, unlike you lot, who basically took the populist route, which was inconsistent and all over the shop. It is on the public record for people to see, and that is fine; you can own that. And you sought to politicise everything with the amount of misinformation and the scare campaigns that were run. I mean, you talk about people’s mental health—you have got some responsibility you have to take for that as well. Members opposite were out there putting out misinformation and scaring people and making them think things were happening that were not happening and scaring them. They were running scared thinking that things were going to happen that actually were not going to happen because of the things that you were putting out there in the public domain. And then you sought to blame us for the misinformation that was being spread. The only people that politicised this issue were the Liberal-Nationals and the Liberal Democrats, who were aiding and abetting them. You lot have a lot more to answer for than us.

When it comes to transparency and integrity, every time you lot get up and talk about transparency and integrity—I mean, have you guys got amnesia? Don’t you recall your time—

Ms Crozier interjected.

Mr TARLAMIS: Oh, so now you are confining your claims of integrity and transparency to certain inquiries. You do not want it to be across the board, because if we go across the board and we look back at your track record, we will see just how hypocritical you are. You were really transparent and your integrity was really great when you were in government—absolutely.

Ms Crozier interjected.

Mr TARLAMIS: Yes, that's right. Come on, make some more accusations against me. That's fine, go for it. That's fine. Make some more accusations against me. That's fine. You can make all the accusations against me that you like. It does not bother me, because I know that the Victorian government has been open and transparent during the pandemic. We have released information. The Victorian people do not want us to conduct more of these sorts of—

Ms Crozier: They do actually.

Mr TARLAMIS: They do not.

Ms Crozier interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! Through the Chair!

Mr TARLAMIS: Yes, they want integrity and trust from you because they believe that you are the bastion of integrity and trust. I am sorry—if people believe that, good luck.

Ms Crozier interjected.

Mr TARLAMIS: We do not support this motion, and the fact that Ms Crozier is having to shout out those sorts of interjections means that her integrity is being called into question and she has to do that. That is fine; it does not worry me. When we call your integrity into question from the time when you were in government, you have got no leg to stand on whatsoever. This government have been far more transparent than your government ever was, and basically there is no comparison whatsoever. We will not be supporting this motion.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (15:14): I just find it amazing that we have people in this chamber that are all angry and blowing up about a health system under pressure. The same people that spoke about health measures when it came to COVID-19 and trying to control it spoke about and against every health measure. And now we have this narrative that the health system has been overwhelmed by the same people. We listened to contributions from people speaking against every health measure that was prescribed by experts in the field to contain a virus before we had been vaccinated—every measure—and now have motions like this saying that those measures should be investigated.

Well, I think the measures proved themselves to be correct to the point that the previous federal government claimed those measures during the campaign. The previous prime minister claimed those measures and said that those measures saved tens of thousands of people's lives at a period of time when people had not had the opportunity to get vaccinated. I can say firsthand for very close family members of mine, one who is very, very young and one who is closer to my age, that I witnessed them having the virus to a great extent as far as affecting their health goes, and it was terrifying—the older person was triple vaccinated—to the point that I am not too sure if they would have not been on a ventilator if they had not been vaccinated, they were that ill.

I feel like we get these lectures from a couple of anti-vaxxers—well, they are vaccinated anti-vaxxers—that actually encourage people not to get vaccinated. They stood at rallies because they thought it was the popular thing. This chase for the anti-vaxxer vote is madness, because there are well over 95 per cent of adults who are vaccinated anyway, and these groups are chasing this anti-vaxxer vote. I have known people who genuinely are against vaccinations if they can do without, because that is their lifestyle. They have been like that for decades. They believe it, and I respect that conviction. But these are opportunistic anti-vaxxers who made money. The people who led these groups were doing it for money and notoriety. They attracted other people to their cause—made money off them—but the people were not even real anti-vaxxers. They were just like a cult that got formed together and

got taken advantage of. So then we have political organisations chasing this tiny little thing. It got proved on the weekend that it does not matter.

There are no mines here. There are no mines for Palmer here. There is no money for Palmer here in Victoria. Palmer is gone from Victoria. He did not have a win. His win was for the preferences to go to the Liberal Party, to maintain the Liberal Party in the federal government and therefore have a big win on a mining licence in Queensland—not in Victoria. There are no mines for him, so he is gone. So this group are chasing this tiny little vote, and it was proved on the weekend that it was all to no avail. As Mr Tarlamis said, the previous prime minister tried to claim the health measures in Victoria and other jurisdictions and tried to claim that he saved all these lives. He actually took ownership of the health measures here. We have a Liberal opposition that go the opposite way, but then as a whole party the Liberal Party have this thing where, ‘We’ll still run these lines, because in Victoria we’ll make political gains because Daniel Andrews is so unpopular because of the health measures that were taken’. That is what they were claiming. It is all weird, I know, but they were claiming that Daniel Andrews is really unpopular. Well, I tell you what: the Victorian Liberal Party would love to be as unpopular as Daniel Andrews. As proof of the pudding from this election, they would absolutely love to be that unpopular. The result in Victoria—losing the federal Treasurer; losing four, possibly five seats in Victoria—is just due to an amazing effort of people that have convinced themselves that the media outlets that bang on about this are right. Well, they have been proven wrong—they have been proven completely wrong.

Our frustration in the government is that we did not like putting in place the measures—we did not like it. We did not like the lockdown. It is not like we thought we would be popular because we had locked down the community to stop people from getting a virus while they were not vaccinated and dying. We did not like that we had to do that. We did not want to do that.

I think this is where this argument from people in here is just completely moronic. Maybe they should just listen back to themselves sometimes. Maybe they should look at their contributions made in here and listen back to themselves. I have hope that maybe it will dawn on them how absolutely moronic the position they have taken is. It is moronic because it is not politically popular, and it has been proven. It is moronic because where it is politically popular there is a tiny percentage of the electorate, and there are a number of groups fighting for that tiny little bit. And wouldn’t they have worked out that is not the stairway to heaven by now? But no—maybe we should hold out hope, but maybe we should not hold out too much hope, because all the arguments for the health measures have been proven right, and I have seen it firsthand. I have seen it firsthand. I am so thankful that the people I have seen get COVID in recent times have been vaccinated. I shudder to think what it would have been like if they were not, to the point that they reckon they might not even be here anymore.

Once again, it is appalling, moronic politics. I still do not understand where these people think it takes them. If they want to carve up that tiny little percentage and fight over it, well, good for them. I think the federal election outcome kind of proved, as I said, that there is no great stairway to heaven for anyone there. The worst thing you can do politically is insult the majority’s intelligence, and that was proven on the weekend. People were going around insulting people’s intelligence. People knew. We are the same as them—we did not like the lockdowns; we did not like having the lockdowns, but people knew that it was the right thing to do to protect the people closest to them. I think that we have been through a journey. Despite these measures that, as I said, no-one wanted, no-one enjoyed, I think that it was shown on the weekend—people agreed that the right thing was done.

Anyway, we will leave others to themselves if they want to keep fighting for that little, tiny bit of the electorate—good for them. We will continue to do the right thing by everyone. And I think, after seeing firsthand certain instances recently, I am very, very glad we did.

Ms TAYLOR (Southern Metropolitan) (15:24): I have to sort of count to 10 when we have this allegation about more scrutiny: ‘We need more scrutiny on this issue’. Victoria’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been the most scrutinised in the country, and I think this is not about that. It

has nothing to do with getting more scrutiny. No, it is really about them wanting to keep that position, that issue, that narrative alive so we do not have to look forward, we do not have to recover and we do not have to think of Victorians into the future. They just want to keep this dead and awful and negative, and actually factually incorrect, narrative alive because they do not want to go forward—because they ain't got a vision; they have got nothing. This is all they have got, and they want to hang there, on this. Well, let me tell you, for the sake of our country but also for the sake of Victoria, let us start thinking of fellow Victorians and thinking forward.

Now, I know—and I share the sentiments of my colleagues as well—that nobody likes a pandemic. Furthermore, nobody likes having to take these very difficult health measures to survive the pandemic. But that is the point: it was about saving lives. I do not think those opposite get that. I do not think they actually care. I do not think they actually understand that health measures are necessary because, consistent with what Mr Leane has said, at every step on the journey they defied and went against every health measure that was implemented as a necessity, not something that we wanted to do. This was about thinking about fellow Victorians—thinking about my mum, my relatives, my constituents. Sorry for being so selfish and thinking of others and their health.

Now, the other thing is I think the opposition—I know it is the Lib Dems' motion—are a bit blind to the world, because I had conversations with cousins who work in allied health in the States. They also had to do remote learning with their kids at home. Who knew it was not just in Victoria? But the way this debate is going it is as if we live in this strange and bizarre reality, this alternate reality. I can also speak other languages, not that you need to. I would watch French news and I would watch German news, and they were having similar debates, similar dilemmas, similar challenges—excruciating, yes. Guess what, when you are in government you have to make really tough decisions. You do not have the luxury of saying, 'Look, it's all a bit hard. It's inconvenient. Let's just do nothing. Let's sit on our hands and pretend it's not happening', because that is exactly the narrative that was being perpetuated by those opposite, and it was horrifying and it was frightening, when in fact we knew that we were doing what had to be done in order to preserve the lives of fellow Victorians—plain and simple.

I know there are issues alleged by those opposite about accountability. Well, let me tell you about accountability and what that really means. Let us look at former PM Scott Morrison, who admitted during the recent federal election campaign that his government made decisions that not on every occasion were right. They were late ordering vaccines. They failed to provide rapid antigen tests. He admitted they could have communicated more clearly about the risks and challenges when he called for an end to restrictions, including mask wearing before the omicron wave in December. The commonwealth failed those in aged care. They did not have a surge workforce strategy, and they did not have a plan to support the private aged care system. Instead they had to send in the military.

If we are talking about accountability, didn't I mention from the outset the extraordinary degree of scrutiny? I do not know. Didn't those opposite, the Lib Dems, see the Premier? For over 100 days the Premier held a daily media conference together with the public health experts and answered every single question until that were no more. Victoria participated in the national contact-tracing review conducted by Professor Finkel looking at contact-tracing and outbreak management systems and processes in all states and territories. Victorian officials and experts appeared before numerous COVID parliamentary inquiries for hours on end: the joint investigatory committee's 2020–21 inquiry into the Victorian government's response to the COVID 19 pandemic—forgive me for rushing but I think I have to allow 5 minutes for the summing-up, so I am rushing a little bit—the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's COVID-19-specific hearings; the new Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee; the hotel quarantine inquiry; and it goes on and it goes on, and there are still accountability measures continuing. We have the Independent Pandemic Management Advisory Committee as well. We also have a joint parliamentary investigative committee with parliamentary oversight of any pandemic orders.

See? It is not about scrutiny. That is not the issue here. It is about wanting to go back to a really negative and a factually incorrect narrative that suits them politically. This has nothing to do with the health of

Victorians, let me tell you this. This is just about perpetuating a very destructive and retrospective narrative, and that is it. It is time to look ahead and remind ourselves about what really matters here, and that is fellow Victorians and caring about their health into the future.

Mr QUILTY (Northern Victoria) (15:30): I will be brief in closing. The case for a royal commission is straightforward. We are all tired of hearing the word, but it is true: the response to COVID was unprecedented. It was extraordinary, and it deserves extraordinary scrutiny. There are questions that deserve answers, problems that need solutions and improvements that need identifying. This motion is merely the acknowledgement that we should try and find those answers, address those problems and make those improvements.

Governments are always reluctant to have their actions examined and investigated, but it is important for the integrity of our democracy that the use of extraordinary powers is matched with an extraordinary level of accountability. The government speakers today are exhibit A in why an independent review is necessary—no substantive engagement with the motion at all, only repeatedly arguing that they did a wonderful job and there were no problems at all caused by their pandemic management. Also, because there were no problems, all the problems were caused by federal incompetence. But there were no problems. This assessment is far from objective, to say the least. It is obvious that any government should not be trusted to provide an honest account of their own management during the pandemic.

Government speakers were eager to suggest that we do not need a review because Australia has suffered few COVID deaths. This attitude demonstrates another problem: that government members were single-minded in their pandemic response. As Mr Gepp put it, reducing pandemic deaths was the first, second and third priority of this government. They ignored all the other costs of their decisions, they are still ignoring them, and that is exactly why we need to talk about them.

We will not know what the right thing is unless we review our response to COVID properly. And no, it is not over; people still cannot work today. We cannot put it behind us because it is not behind us. It is still in front of us. We need an independent review. Perhaps a royal commission should be a built-in requirement whenever the government decides it is going to use emergency powers. We certainly need more transparency than we have now. I believe the government should be accountable to the public. If members believe this too, I encourage them to demonstrate that belief by supporting this motion.

Motion agreed to.

INTEGRITY AGENCY FUNDING

Debate resumed on motion of Mr DAVIS:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

- (a) Ms Harriet Shing MLC, chair of the Integrity and Oversight Committee, has now twice intervened to block testimony to the Integrity and Oversight Committee from independent officers of the Parliament, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission's (IBAC) Commissioner, the Honourable Robert Redlich AM, QC, and the Victorian Ombudsman, Ms Deborah Glass OBE;
- (b) this occurred concurrently with the Victorian Ombudsman's inquiry into the politicisation of the Victorian public service and with the following three IBAC corruption investigations into the Andrews Labor government:
 - (i) Operation Watts;
 - (ii) Operation Sandon;
 - (iii) Operation Richmond;
- (c) the Andrews Labor government has failed to adequately fund IBAC and the Victorian Ombudsman, with funding increases for IBAC being conditional on the completion of a review of

their office and the Victorian Ombudsman only being provided with an additional \$700 000 through a one-off Treasurer's advance; and

- (2) calls on the government to provide an immediate injection of funds for IBAC and the Victorian Ombudsman to ensure a lack of funding does not prevent the completion of these inquiries prior to the November 2022 state election.

Mr SOMYUREK (South Eastern Metropolitan) (15:33): It is very important that our integrity bodies are not only seen to be independent but actually are independent. The biggest risk of corruption not only in Victoria but throughout the world in every liberal democracy—in fact in every government throughout the world—is government corruption. When you are talking about risk of corruption in the body politic, you are talking about government. Therefore it is very important that our integrity bodies are not only seen to be at arm's length but that there is a firewall between any government and the integrity bodies.

But what we have got in our state at the moment—not the fault of this government; it is a fault in the design of the integrity bodies—is integrity bodies that are anything but independent from government. What we have got is a system that is designed where the government elects the Commissioner and re-elects the Commissioner. What we have got is a government that elects and then re-elects the commissioners. What we have got is a government that controls the purse strings of IBAC and the integrity bodies. There are two oversight mechanisms for IBAC and the Ombudsman. One is the Victorian Inspectorate and the other is a parliamentary committee, the oversight committee, and what we have got is a government-dominated oversight committee. Again, it is not just this government. That is the way the system works. So what we have essentially got is a government with its foot well and truly planted on the neck of the integrity bodies through appointment, through funding and through the oversight mechanism. That is not the way it should be working. If you are talking about an Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, it needs to be independent from the highest risk of corruption—that is, the government of the day, and again, not just this government but governments everywhere in the world.

That is a big problem. Why is it a big problem, what I have just explained? For the last two years I have been through an inquiry based on a TV program that was a sensationalist TV program, and what that program alleged was absolutely bad, bad corruption—in-depth, systemic corruption. It was a lie, but the public did not know it was a lie. The upper house referred the matter to IBAC, as it should have. The Premier referred the matter to IBAC, as he should have. But it was in the public interest for IBAC to come back very quickly, within a few months, and report on what they found, or release a preliminary report on what they found. Instead we are two years into the inquiry and there is nothing; there is absolutely nothing. I have had plenty of gag orders on me, but there is nothing in terms of what IBAC has reported back. That is a problem.

There is also the issue of IBAC only investigating one part—one subgroup, one small group—of a faction of the Labor Party, and that person is not a part of the Labor Party. I quit on 15 June 2020. Why is it doing a branch-stacking inquiry on me when the risk to corruption is from all other sections of the Labor Party? So that is odd.

I will tell you what else is odd. I am going to read you a complaint to the Victorian Inspectorate from a witness. She has got mental health issues. I am not going to mention her name, but let me just read this to you:

I suffer from chronic mental health problems, including several suicide attempts. In fact, because of the way I was treated by IBAC during its investigations I made **two suicide attempts**

I was lied to by them being advised that I will remain anonymous in all publications, manipulated in to making statements that were **untrue** and forced into several **panic attacks** during examination.

I was manipulated and forced to **lie** by the Examiner.

I have apologised to **Mr Somyurek**—

she has—

for the untruthful statements that were placed into my mouth whilst suffering severe mental health including Panic attacks and suicidal thoughts throughout the examination that he—

that is me—

made me sign membership forms. **THIS IS NOT TRUE!!!!**

I was falsely accused of protecting “Mr Somyurek” when I actually was obligated and sworn in by law to tell the truth. When i said it was Ms ... Stalder—

the person that unlawfully recorded—

that coordinated and as chief of staff for Mr Byrne manipulated all staff to get **signatures**, the IBAC member **insisted that I was lying**. I would like to state again i worked for Mr Byrne for **10 years** not Mr Somyurek during these things. On a few occasions as stated below, and in my hearing i was guided by **and forced to say what was wanted to be heard by IBAC** which was **not the truth**; what I tried to say things, IBAC was not interested. They only had interest in what I could be got to say about Mr Somyurek.

I was misdirected whilst having a panic attack by the Examiner with Commissioner in attendance to say particular sentences such as **Mr Somyurek made me sign forms**. i advised it was Ms Stalder and Mr Byrne who did this. Ms Stalder and Mr Byrne threatened me with losing my job if I could not provide the numbers in members.

I was also told directly when speaking all truth to **stop protecting Mr Somyurek which led to a breakdown midst interview**, even though I stated that I was not protecting anyone as I’m sworn under oath. I was manipulated to say statements that were not correct or misinterpreted ... This made me feel mentally unhealthy and thinking about suicide.

I can confirm she attempted to commit suicide after her IBAC hearing.

So what have we got here? We have got an integrity body that is completely out of control. It is waterboarding witnesses that have got mental health issues, that are suicidal. Why? Because they are trying to get someone. This is outrageous behaviour. We have got a bunch of thugs who are running our integrity agencies at the moment. Who does that? Who coerces, who thugs a mentally ill young woman—and they knew that; she had a psychologist present—into making untrue statements? Who does that? IBAC. Why? The question is: why? What agenda do they have? This is the problem. When you have got a system that is designed with a design that gives all the leverage to the government of the day, when weird things happen like this you begin to wonder what is going on. Are there corrupt arrangements in place? You cannot get a battleaxe to a young woman who is suicidal and make her lie under oath. She is telling the truth, and IBAC is saying, ‘We don’t believe you’. Who does that?

We have got a massive problem with this IBAC. We have got a problem with our system as well. We have got a problem with IBAC. And when you also get one part of the ALP who are still members of the ALP being investigated and you get someone who is not a member of the ALP, has not been a member for the duration of this inquiry, being investigated, you have got to call it for what it is. It is one of three things: there are corrupt arrangements being entered into by IBAC or they are plain stupid or incompetent. That is all I can say about IBAC. This has gone to the Victorian Inspectorate, and I expect the Victorian Inspectorate will use the powers that they have to investigate, again, IBAC.

Mr GEPP (Northern Victoria) (15:42): I rise to speak on motion 775 under Mr Davis’s name. I want to say from the outset that I will not stand here as some sort of defender of Ms Shing, because she does not need defending. She is a strong, independent woman who is more than capable of standing on her own two feet and stands behind the decisions that she makes. I am not going to stand here and be a defender of the Premier, because he too is a very strong individual more than capable of defending himself. But what we cannot cop in this debate is when we hear words bandied around, words such as ‘integrity’, ‘honesty’, ‘truth’, ‘scrutiny’, ‘cover-up’, ‘corruption’ and then of course—

Ms Crozier interjected.

MOTIONS

Wednesday, 25 May 2022

Legislative Council

1733

Mr GEPP: Oh well, you know, Geppy, make sure you are spot-on here. You have got to go to the dictionary. Let us look up the dictionary and let us make sure that we are certain, that we are actually applying these words correctly. I did not get past ‘integrity’, because I must admit, after I hit the print button I started to chuckle when I read this, particularly when I compared this meaning to the mover of the motion:

adherence to moral and ethical principles; soundness of moral character; honesty.

the state of being whole, entire, or undiminished ...

a sound, unimpaired, or perfect condition ...

Then I compared that definition to the contribution that I heard from Mr Davis, and I thought, ‘Okay, let’s run the ruler over that’ as it applies to Mr Davis. And—bah-bow—we come up just a tad short, just a little bit short. When we go back and we have a look at the history of Mr Davis—and I could only go back so far; Google can only go back so far. It will not go back to—oh, we have got a point of order. We do not like it!

Mr Davis: On a point of order, Acting President, it seems the member is going to go on a frolic, and I ask you to bring him back to the quite direct motion.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem): I think I have heard enough. Resume your contribution, Mr Gepp. There is no point of order.

Mr GEPP: Thank you, Acting President. Let us just highlight a couple of things, because Mr Davis likes to prance around this place as if he is some sort of moral compass for the place. Well, God help us if that is the case, because we would have to rewrite the standing orders book; we would have to rewrite the entire rule book. There was an *Age* report back in 2005, on 18 November—

Mr Davis: On a point of order, Acting President, the member is heading out on a frolic on matters that are not connected with this motion at all.

Mr GEPP: On the point of order, Acting President, Mr Davis talked at length during his contribution about integrity, about truth and about scrutiny. He referred to the Premier on numerous occasions. He called the Premier and the government corrupt. He opened the door. Mr Somyurek has just talked for 10 minutes about matters completely unrelated to the motion. I would suggest to you that I am entirely in order.

Ms Crozier: On the point of order—

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem): I am ready to rule on the point of order unless you want to add to it. There is no point of order. I just remind the parties—Mr Gepp is right—Mr Davis ventured to all these subjects in his contribution and other members have. I ask that Mr Gepp be heard in silence.

Mr GEPP: Thank you, Acting President. So it was mentioned on 18 November 2005 by Mr Michael Kroger from the Liberal Party, who was talking about a then unnamed frontbencher—but of course he then subsequently named him. He said that that person, the senior upper house frontbencher, had been accused of branch stacking and was spending too much time shoring up his own numbers for his own preselection and was not taking his job on. But of course this theme continued.

Ms Shing interjected.

Ms Crozier: Well, actually the motion is about you, Ms Shing, and how you have blocked testimony to the Integrity and Oversight Committee, and it is in a very specific motion that is very important to the integrity of this whole parliamentary process and the committee process. And on a point of order, Acting President, I would ask you to bring Mr Gepp back to the crux of what this is

about. It is talking about the way that Ms Shing blocked the testimony of the Commissioner and the Ombudsman—very, very important issues.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem): I think I have heard enough. There has been a lot of debate, and the mover of the motion had moved on to why there was a contribution, including branch stacking. When members on both sides open up and have contributions that go to areas that might not necessarily be in a motion, I cannot stop an individual member from venturing in the same way. So can I ask that for the next 3 minutes and 40 seconds Mr Gepp be heard in silence without further interruptions, if possible.

Mr GEPP: They successfully cut out between 2005 and 2018, so I will just fast-track to 2020 and 2021. Let us just focus on the two years of this bloke's behaviour—this bloke's drunken behaviour. When representing this Parliament up in Bright his behaviour was called into question—oh, he does not like it?

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem): Mr Gepp! Order!

Mr Davis: On a point of order, Acting President, you well know and the member well knows that if he wants to attack people on substantive matters he can bring a motion to that effect.

Mr Leane: Further to the point of order, Acting President, it has just been well documented, and Mr Davis has admitted to being drunk at public events and being quite handsy and inappropriate, so I think that Mr Gepp is actually not going outside anything that is true.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem): Thank you for those contributions. Mr Gepp, can you go back to the motion.

Mr GEPP: The motion is about integrity, and integrity should be applied across the chamber and exercised by all members. What we have got is the hypocrisy of Mr Davis opposite, who has such a glass jaw that now his lack of integrity and his behaviour is being put on the public record he does not like it—he does not like it at all. We have two recent examples. One was when we were in Bright holding a regional sitting, and the behaviour of Mr Davis in the Bright Brewery and the offence taken by the workforce there when he was abusive, when he was violent, when he was drunk—

Ms Crozier: On a point of order, Acting President, I know Mr Gepp is loving the sound of his own voice, but this is really very important. This is about the Integrity and Oversight Committee of this Parliament, with very serious agencies involved, and how it was blocked by the chair. That is what this motion is about. That is what this integrity is about.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem): There is no point of order.

Mr GEPP: I have no doubt they will jump to their feet again because I have not even got to the multicultural dinner. Do not let me stray there, for goodness sake, because that is where he inherited the nickname, after the South Australian cricketer, 'Handsy'. That is where he was when he was too close, too personal, and people took offence at it. The then Leader of the Liberal Party did not chastise him: 'I'll put him on his last warning'. It is as if you were talking to a six-year-old: 'You're on your last warning, young man, before I send you to your bedroom, not to come out'. This bloke has got form. He has no integrity. He has no-one in his party who is applying scrutiny to him.

This is a political stunt, Ms Shing is quite right. She has acted in accordance with the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003. She has done everything by the book, appropriately, out on the public record. Any suggestion by those opposite that anything else has occurred is an out-and-out lie, frankly.

Very quickly, my last comment is in relation to Ms Burnett-Wake, who sought to introduce a personal relationship that a member of this chamber had with somebody outside. That is very, very dangerous territory—very, very dangerous territory—and you on that side should be ashamed for raising it. You should be ashamed.

Mr BARTON (Eastern Metropolitan) (15:53): This is a serious matter, so I went and sought some advice from the very integrity agencies we are talking about and also the Law Institute of Victoria, and I have concluded this motion is very concerning. It essentially seeks to undermine and inappropriately fetter the independence of our parliamentary committee system, a system that is a critical function of this Parliament and fundamental to our democratic process. The Integrity and Oversight Committee, in accordance with the Victorian constitution and the well-established doctrine of the separation of powers, acts independently, as do all our parliamentary committees. Parliamentary committees should not be subject to external influence or political control. As a member of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee and the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, I know well the importance of these committees in independently holding government and the public sector to account. I also know that committees are required to function and operate in accordance with parliamentary law and custom and the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003.

In relation to the matters referenced in part (1) of the motion, the Integrity and Oversight Committee has provided a clear statement clarifying the details of the hearings that have been conducted in relation to witness welfare in recent weeks. Under section 7 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, the committee is prohibited from investigating any matters being investigated by an agency, including reviewing any decision by an agency to investigate, not to investigate or to discontinue to investigate a matter. Further, it is prohibited from reviewing any findings, recommendations, determinations or other decisions in relation to particular matters, including complaints to agencies and agency investigations.

The committee has no power to interfere with or overturn integrity agency determinations with respect to individual matters. Under section 7 the committee is prohibited from disclosing any information which may prejudice any criminal proceedings or criminal investigations; prejudice any investigation conducted by IBAC, the Victorian Inspectorate or the Victorian Ombudsman; or breach any secrecy or confidentiality provisions in any act. I agree that it would be entirely inappropriate if the committee were to become or be seen to become a platform for any person involved in an investigation to relitigate any aspects of such investigation. This would fundamentally change the nature of the committee and allow investigations to become exposed to political interference.

In performing its duties, the Integrity and Oversight Committee therefore has very clearly established parameters in law, under which it is required to act, ensuring the committee complies with these requirements, particularly in relation to the public hearings and the fundamental role of the chair of the committee. I have spoken in this place on numerous occasions about the importance of appropriate oversight of government decisions and actions. Transparency and independence are critical to the functions of this Parliament. What this motion does is the exact opposite. It seeks to undermine the independence of our parliamentary committee, cast doubt on the actions of the independent integrity agencies and insert political direction into the actions of these independent bodies. In terms of funding, I am advised that both IBAC and the Ombudsman's office have received the funding that they requested in this year's budget, so I ask myself: what are we trying to fix here with this motion?

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (15:57): In reply I want to be very clear. Mr Barton says, 'What are we trying to fix?'. Well, I invite him to look at schedule 1 in the Appropriation (Parliament 2022–2023) Bill 2022. It makes it very clear there is a very modest increase only in the IBAC funding. It makes it clear there is only a very modest increase in the Ombudsman's funding.

A member interjected.

Mr DAVIS: No, have a read. Let us be clear. The money that is potentially available is not being appropriated in the budget. It is not being appropriated in the budget—you have got to be quite clear about this. I want to also be clear that as much as the Labor Party might squirm and wriggle, the truth is that Ms Shing ought not to have closed down those hearings. She ought not to have closed down those witnesses. I actually have more faith in the IBAC Commissioner and his ability to step a careful

line, as he is required to do. I make the point that Ms Shing did this for purposes of cover for the government. It is also true—

Ms Shing: On a point of order, Acting President, again, if Mr Davis wishes to make specific allegations about my actions, he should do so and have the courage to do so, departing from his cowardice, by way of a substantive motion.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem): I actually uphold the point of order, unless Mr Davis is repeating what he said in his contribution. I appreciate if you made that in your general contribution it would be quite okay, but I think for the right of reply I would remind you to go back to just summing up instead of venturing into it.

Mr DAVIS: I would indicate that earlier I did indicate that I had a different view from Ms Shing and that in fact Ms Shing, in my view, ought not to have closed down those witnesses.

A member interjected.

Mr DAVIS: That is my view, and I think it is the view of many in the community.

Ms Shing: Further to the point of order, Acting President, I listened very carefully to Mr Davis's contribution earlier today. He was somewhat more careful in the way in which he framed his initial contribution, and he is somewhat looser now in the way in which he is characterising conduct by me, which if he is prepared to be something other than a coward will involve a substantive motion and not in fact an allegation made on the fly while he is trying to summarise this particular motion. He has extended the reach of what he said initially, and he knows it.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem): I think I dealt with that in my ruling earlier, so Mr Davis to resume his contribution for his 3 minutes.

Mr DAVIS: I want to be quite clear. There needs to be a clear injection of funds into IBAC, a \$10 million injection.

Members interjecting.

Mr DAVIS: No, there is not going to be a \$10 million injection—there is not.

Members interjecting.

Mr DAVIS: No, they did not. You read what is in the actual—

Ms Shing interjected.

Mr DAVIS: Well, they are under threat. Let us be quite clear that they are under threat because the government is holding a funding instrument over them. How inappropriate to be holding an office review and holding the funding as contingent. That is one of the problems with this government: it is holding these matters of funding as a sword over the Ombudsman's office and as a sword over the IBAC office. That is the reality, and they have made it very clear that they will only provide the money if these agencies play ball. What they want to do is put pressure on these agencies.

Now, I have faith that the agencies are strong and can stand up to them. But having said that, if they do not have the resources to do the work they need to do, the work will happen more slowly. The work will happen much more slowly, and that is what this government wants in this circumstance. It wants to get through to November without the release of many of these embarrassing corruption reports that go to the heart of the government's corrupt activity. It is clear that the government ought not to be acting this way. A government that was supporting our integrity agencies would have provided the money no matter what. That is not what this government has done, and that is what the schedule shows. The schedule shows that the money is not being provided without strings attached, and I say the government ought not to be behaving in this way.

PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

Wednesday, 25 May 2022

Legislative Council

1737

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 14

Atkinson, Mr
Bach, Dr
Burnett-Wake, Ms
Crozier, Ms
Cumming, Dr

Davis, Mr
Finn, Mr
Lovell, Ms
McArthur, Mrs
Ondarchie, Mr

Quilty, Mr
Ratnam, Dr
Rich-Phillips, Mr
Vaghela, Ms

Noes, 20

Barton, Mr
Elasmar, Mr
Erdogan, Mr
Gepp, Mr
Grimley, Mr
Hayes, Mr
Kieu, Dr

Leane, Mr
Meddick, Mr
Melhem, Mr
Patten, Ms
Pulford, Ms
Shing, Ms
Stitt, Ms

Symes, Ms
Tarlamis, Mr
Taylor, Ms
Terpstra, Ms
Tierney, Ms
Watt, Ms

Motion negatived.

Sitting suspended 4.08 pm until 4.28 pm.

Production of documents

JOHN WOODMAN

Debated resumed on motion of Mr DAVIS:

That this house, in accordance with standing order 11.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, all emails and other correspondence since 4 December 2014 between the Premier or the office of the Premier and:

- (1) Mr John Woodman;
- (2) Mr John Woodman's employees; and
- (3) Mr John Woodman's companies.

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (16:28): I will sum up very briefly. This is a very straightforward documents motion. It is in the public interest that these documents be in the public domain. We believe the issues between the Premier and the Premier's office and Mr Woodman and his firms and various companies are matters that should be seen in the light much more clearly. That is why this documents motion is here. It is clear that there are real issues that the community ought to see. There are other investigations going, but this is quite separate to those. These matters have come to public notice, and they have come to public notice over a number of years. Matters have been raised in the Assembly on these issues. But for this documents motion, standing order 11.01 requires the Leader of the Government to table within three weeks of this resolution the emails and correspondence since 4 December 2014 between the Premier, or the office of the Premier, and Mr Woodman, his employees and companies. This is an important motion. It is in the public interest.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

BUILDING PRACTITIONER FEES

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (16:30): I move motion 768:

That this house:

- (1) calls on the Andrews Labor government to reverse its decision to massively increase registration charges on builders, building companies, building surveyors and others from 2 May 2022; and
- (2) notes that these Victorian Building Authority fee increases are an unjustified imposition on the building and construction sector that will add to the cost of housing.

This set of charges that has been brought forward by the government through the Victorian Building Authority, beginning on 2 May, is an absolute doozy. These charges are applied now to builders, building companies, building surveyors and others and, as I will come to in a minute, are eventually to be applied to a whole list of trades the government intends to register. The government has already got the legislation in place and the regulations are being drafted as we speak for these other businesses to come through, but the increases here are unwise—unwise on two levels. First of all, they push the price of housing up. If you charge builders much more for the cost of registering their companies, there will be increased costs that have to be passed through. Those builders will not be able to absorb that cost. That cost will certainly be passed through. The VBA—a very inefficient organisation, a flawed organisation; I think even members of the government admit to many of the problems in the VBA—

A member interjected.

Mr DAVIS: No, they actually do. I have had conversations with many of them.

A member: Who? Name them.

Mr DAVIS: Well, indeed I think even the Minister for Planning has said that there are problems with the VBA. But let me just be clear: very few people in the community think the VBA is running well. It is an organisation that is top-heavy in many respects, but even aside from that it is an organisation that has not served consumers well. It has not served the building sector well either, and it is an organisation that has not got the outcomes that the Victorian community would want.

The changes that the government has put through will see huge increases and in a very small number of cases decreases in fees, but overwhelmingly very large increases in fees—100 per cent, 200 per cent and even more in some cases in terms of the scale of the increased fees. The government, I hasten to add, is also, as part of its process, planning to register a large list of trades and trade sectors. Carpenters are the first on the list, but also tilers, painters, plasterers and others are on the list to be forced to be formally registered by the Victorian Building Authority.

The government has gone a little slower on this than it had intended, partly because of COVID. Actually, I think it was a good thing that they paused with respect to COVID—there was a benefit. But the truth is they intend to press forward with their registration and they intend to put very large fees on every tradie, on every one of those registered groups, as they bring them forward. Now, some may argue that that registration is justified. It is the scale of the fees and the scale of the fee increases that we particularly resent, and we particularly stand up for the building industry, the building and construction sector and our tradies and say, ‘Those huge increases in fees—100, 200, 400 per cent in some cases—are fee increases that are far beyond what is satisfactory’.

We have indicated that it is the opposition—the Liberals and The Nationals—view that these charges should be reversed. They should revert to the charges that were in position before 2 May. They should step back from the increases, and they ought to make sure that those charges are paused at the 2 May level. That would provide some relief for those builders who are going to be clobbered, and clobbered hard, by these increases in fees.

The HIA, the Housing Industry Association, has been very clear on what these fee increases mean. They say that they will impose extra costs. They say that they will impact on many of the building firms. They have welcomed the opposition’s announcements on these matters. They have been very clear that this is not the right way to go and it is certainly not the right time to do it.

Let me also be clear on the impact of these new fee increases imposed by the Andrews Labor government through the VBA on 2 May. Those costs will flow straight through into housing affordability issues. We have already seen the government layer tax upon tax upon tax—more than two dozen new taxes on property by this government, taxes on building and construction, and the windfall gains tax, which is one which is yet to impact fully. That tax will increase the cost of housing directly. We saw the government push forward with its plan to put a new tax on every new

property, where there were over three on the development, in Melbourne and in the country—that new tax that they proposed and have temporarily paused on, temporarily stepped back from, that they had shackled to public housing funding. They had actually said, ‘We’re going to provide a source of extra funding, and we’re going to do it through a tax’. That tax would have put \$20 000 on a median-priced house in metropolitan Melbourne, it would have put \$12 000 on a median-priced house in country Victoria—a straight hit, a straight tax, straight on top. The government had shackled that new tax to some planning reforms and changes.

Those planning reforms and changes are the result of significant work that has been done with a lot of the industry groups and others, and there are in those planning reforms and changes some sensible, practical suggestions that will lower the cost of permitting and supporting the housing sector. Whilst we have not seen the full details of them, we see that many of those changes make sense. We have made a commitment that if in government, we will introduce those planning reforms and changes. We will do that after consulting with councils and after consulting with communities, and we will do it quite quickly if we are elected in November. We will work through that process, and those of the reforms that sensibly move us forward we will adopt—we will introduce them.

The government says that there is \$7 billion worth of cost savings to be achieved over 10 years. Even if only half of that were true—even if it was only \$3.5 billion over 10 years—that is a significant load off the system, a significant lowering of the cost, and the proposals appear in many respects reasonable. So we say: why not introduce those reforms now? Why not impact on housing affordability by making it easier to get permits, cheaper to get permits, more efficient, and thereby lower the cost of housing? We agree with that objective that the government set themselves, but the idea that you would only do that if it was shackled with a massive new housing tax is a dumb, dumb idea. So we said no to the housing tax. But, make no mistake, if the government are re-elected in November, they will bring back that \$20 000 tax on new homes in the city and that \$12 000 tax on new homes in the country. That is what they will do.

I might say I was shocked to see the Greens out talking about this and saying that actually the government’s proposed tax is not big enough. They are saying it should be doubled. They are saying to double it, which would add \$40 000 to a median-priced house in metropolitan Melbourne. So I just think of young families, young singles, others trying to buy a home getting shackled with an extra \$20 000 or being hit with an extra \$20 000 under the Labor Party—and goodness, if they had to do a deal with the Greens in the lower house to get government, I have no doubt Labor would do it and I have no doubt the Greens would do it. But the price of that could well be the Greens housing tax, which is a double whammy. They actually want to do a \$40 000 hit on a median-priced house in metropolitan Melbourne. So all of this is very important, because housing affordability is one of the most important points.

I say on housing affordability there is a lot that can be done. We will have more to say. In this case one thing that we can do is immediately unwind the new charges that have been placed on builders and building surveyors and building companies and will be placed on all the tradies that are in that long train that are about to be registered. That will be providing more costs, more hit, on the purse of young people trying to buy homes. Why would you do that? Why would you make it harder for our building sector? I think the Housing Industry Association had it right. They praised what we announced, which is that we would reverse those changes—we would remove those increases and put it back to the charges that were there before 2 May this year. So that is a very practical way. It is a simple way.

I want to make another point. The very large firm Metricon, amongst other firms, is actually under real pressure. Now, we accept that there are worldwide pressures on the supply chain on wood and other supply inputs to housing.

Ms Terpstra: Steel.

Mr DAVIS: Steel, indeed. We accept that this is a significant challenge around the world, including in Victoria. We also accept that there are significant labour supply issues. There are shortages in key groups, no question about that. But it is in the context of that that we are facing real pressures on a number of our builders, and not just Metricon; other builders have got real pressures. Government needs to be a model in how it behaves here, and I communicated this directly to government to say, ‘You need to make sure that you pay on time’. You cannot have firms that are under real financial pressures, some not of their own making—some on these worldwide issues and supply issues and so forth. Government must be a model payer, and they must do what they can to keep the cash flow going.

Today in the chamber in question time I asked a question about a firm that has been caught betwixt and between on a government project. Government projects ought to be the exemplars of assisting firms from whatever state they are based in, because they employ Victorians. No matter what is going on here, they employ Victorians, and those that employ Victorians ought to be supported in this way. If they are making a constructive contribution in that way, there needs to be support.

I accept the pressures that are there, but I just ask the question: why would you, with all of the pressures there, increase the charges on builders? Why would you jack them up hundreds of per cent in some cases? Building surveyors clobbered with a massive new charge—why would you do that when the economy is so fragile at the moment and with the pressures in the building industry, the admitted supply issues and the labour issues? Why would you, as a response to that, slap a tax on it? Why would you do that? I do not understand the logic of a new tax in the middle of this sort of crisis. So I would take that tax off, and that is what this motion is about. It says, ‘Look, take that extra tax off. That is reasonable’.

The other side of this is the windfall gains tax. Now, that does not start until next year officially, but actually it is already beginning to impact on behaviour across the sector. People are looking at sites. The uncertainty around the windfall gains tax is making it very difficult for people—for builders and for those developers that have wanted to take up land. They look at the land. They see there could be remediation issues, for example. Will that be taken into account with the windfall gains tax? We moved amendments on those sorts of things. If there is a windfall gains tax collected in a particular area, where will the money go? Well, we know it just goes back into central revenue. It is not held in the municipality that it is collected in, and we say it ought to be. If you are going to have that kind of tax, well, let us make sure it supports services and infrastructure in the area near where it is collected. I do not think that is an unreasonable point if it just comes back into the city to fund cost blowouts in major projects. Many of these cost blowouts predate the pandemic. Many of these cost blowouts predate the supply issues. Many of these cost blowouts are simply because the government could not manage projects, could not scope them properly and could not get them under control.

There was a case mentioned in this chamber earlier in the day about the heart hospital—a very important hospital. It was actually our announcement in 2014, the heart hospital. We had a different site and a different model. Ours was \$150 million. They announced a project at \$150 million with some differences. Ours would have been built in four years. They said theirs would be built in four years. We are now almost eight years later—

Mrs McArthur: Not built.

Mr DAVIS: and it is not yet built, and instead of \$150 million it is well over \$500 million. It is more than \$400 million over budget. So this is the failure of this government. What worries me about these taxes upon taxes upon taxes—these new taxes that this government scoops in—is they are not going often to constructive steps; they are going to fund waste and mismanagement, with money squandered on the poor scoping and poor planning of projects. If we look at the Metro Tunnel, that is almost \$4 billion over budget. The West Gate Tunnel is almost \$4 billion over budget. All of these are projects that have been botched and blundered because the government did not know how to manage these projects.

I am going to be quite clear on this straightforward motion. We recognise that there are cost pressures. The solution to those cost pressures is not more tax, it is actually less tax if you can possibly do it. Here is a practical way that we are suggesting to lower taxes on building, to lower taxes on construction and to lower taxes on firms that are under pressure now. They are under pressure, and I get that. And this pressure is not just in Victoria—of course it is not. But it is in Victoria that the taxes are being jacked up most harshly and most viciously, and they have targeted again and again and again the construction and building industry.

It is no wonder that housing affordability is so difficult. Forty per cent, roughly, of the cost of a new property is tax—roughly 40 per cent. The Urban Development Institute of Australia work makes it clear that around 40 per cent of the cost of a new property is tax. Then there are the delays in the planning system, and all of those just add and add and add. That makes it hard for young families. It makes it hard for people who want to buy a first home. It makes it hard for people who want to buy a second home even. All of these additional costs feed through. So the motion today is in that context of the challenges we face on housing affordability.

In the federal election we saw some options put forward. I thought the option of using some guided and structured access to super was actually not a bad one, and I thought that it was a superior option to the one provided by the new federal government. But I welcome any step that helps with housing affordability. What I think we need to be cautious of is this government—the state Labor government, the Andrews Labor government—returning again and again and again to clobber the construction and building industry and doing that in a way that makes it harder for them to provide the services, the building and the homes that are needed for people. One simple practical measure that this motion draws attention to is to reverse the new changes put in place. We can as a state make sure that those charges are not jacked up on builders, building firms, building surveyors and others, and the list of trades that are very close to being registered. So that is a practical way forward. It will help.

Ms TERPSTRA (Eastern Metropolitan) (16:49): I rise to speak on this motion 768 in Mr Davis's name calling on the Andrews Labor government to reverse its decision to, as he says, increase—I will not go into all the descriptive language in this, but it is basically calling on us to reverse our changes in building registration charges.

What I thought I would do to commence my contribution today was to, for those who might be playing along at home and watching this debate, perhaps do a little bit of explaining around what this is actually about, because I noticed Mr Davis's contribution was very heavy on flourishing rhetoric. Effectively the Victorian Building Authority is resetting its building practitioner registration fees, and the changes will create a fairer fee structure for practitioners, contrary to what Mr Davis says. The Victorian Building Authority is the chief regulator of Victoria's building industry, and as a self-funded regulator it is critical that the VBA has the resources needed to maintain safety and compliance through effective and efficient regulation. It is important because it is a critical industry. The Victorian Building Authority is funded through building and plumbing registration fees and the building permit levy. The legal instrument to change building fees sits under the Minister for Planning's head of power. The Victorian Building Authority is creating a fairer building practitioner fee structure to support future growth in the building industry.

The new fee structure reflects changes in how industry and practitioners operate and the increasing costs of regulation since the structure was put in place in 2005. So you can see that quite some time has passed since there has been a review of the fee structure. Over the last eight years there has been an 86.3 per cent increase in the value of building work, a 31 per cent increase in building permits issued and a 22 per cent increase in the number of individuals registered as building practitioners. The new fee structure is now aligned with other jurisdictions. Fees for commercial builders and domestic builders over the registration life cycle are comparable to those charged in other jurisdictions. The fees for other categories of registration, such as building surveyors, remain lower compared to some other jurisdictions as an incentive to attract new entrants into the field.

The VBA has given practitioners ample notice of the change so they can prepare for this. The new system introduces a hardship provision as well to support those practitioners who are doing it tough. It will allow the VBA to respond to the continued growth in the industry and to continue to protect consumers, as we know consumer protection is very important. It will promote the integrity of the building industry through the benefits of registration and greater regulatory oversight. The new fee structure more accurately reflects the cost of regulating the building industry. The VBA did announce its new fee structure on Friday, 11 February, so we do believe that there has been ample notification to the sector to enable them to prepare for these changes. And there are more risks to the community through practitioners using corporate vehicles because of the limitation to liability and the risks of phoenixing, which leaves consumers with little or no protection and which goes to my earlier point about why we need to ensure consumer protection. As I said, where you have got different providers using different corporate models, the risks increase. As I said, phoenixing can happen, and this leaves consumers with very little protection. There are higher costs associated with this to regulate corporate practitioners because of these business models that are being used.

So the new fees for corporate practitioners reflect the value gained from using a company structure and the increased oversight required by the VBA, and I think that is what is lost on Mr Davis in his contribution and that perhaps what he is not factoring into why the government is having to do this is exactly the reasons I have just mentioned—because there are different structures that corporations and individuals are using and there is an increase then in administration, so there is increased oversight required by the VBA.

Fees for other categories of registration, such as building surveyors, as I said earlier, remain lower compared to other jurisdictions, and this was done as an incentive to attract new entrants into the field. But we also understand that due to COVID-19 and related pressures some practitioners are experiencing financial hardship or facing special circumstances. As a result of that the VBA is developing a fee relief scheme to assist these practitioners and to alleviate any other unforeseen circumstances, as we did during 2020 and 2021 for those impacted by COVID-19.

As I said earlier, we did outline our changes to the sector on 11 February this year. We are giving close to three months notice of the change in fee structure so that practitioners can indeed get ready for this, so there has been ample notice given, and we have consulted closely with the sector as well on all of these matters.

People might say, ‘Why should I maintain my registration given the fee changes? Why should I keep my registration?’. The issue is that the registration gives you the right to practise and it shows people that you are qualified, skilled and experienced to do the job. To be registered you have to meet strict criteria. This is why we need to have regulatory oversight in the building sector, because as we know, if we look to some other jurisdictions, particularly overseas, sometimes accidents as a result of poor builds in the construction sector can have catastrophic events. That is why we have high standards here in this country and we have high standards in Victoria, and we are unapologetic about that. But with that comes a requirement to support the sector through regulation and oversight.

It is unlawful for a person who is not registered to carry out building work requiring a building permit for work valued at more than \$10 000. By being registered practitioners benefit through the legitimisation of their services over unregistered persons who may be unqualified or lack the qualifications or competencies to deliver safe and compliant building works. This is absolutely critical. Consumers benefit therefore by knowing that registered practitioners are competent and qualified to complete building work in the classes in which they are registered. This is really critically important. Consumers have additional protections because of the increased level of regulatory oversight over registered practitioners.

If we were to take the advice of those opposite, if we reversed everything—stripped fees and the like—we would actually see unsafe worksites and people being injured in workplaces. Stripping fees and regulations absolutely results in unsafe worksites and unsafe buildings, and this threatens everyone in

the building chain. Contrary to what Mr Davis says, the increases have been supported by industry, which is every bit as keen as this government to drive out rogue developers and dodgy builders. The fees are in line with other states and are vital to regulate a safe building industry. As I said earlier, there has been an increase in building permits. In fact over the last eight years there has been a 30 per cent increase in building permits issued and a 20 per cent increase in the number of registered builders alone. That is a very sizeable increase, and that is why we have to make sure that we keep our registration system and fees have to be fit for purpose and keep pace with other jurisdictions. As I said earlier, and I will say it again, the VBA has given practitioners significant notice of the change so they can prepare, and we are also looking to introduce a hardship model so that if people are suffering hardship, this government will support those practitioners to adapt to the changes.

Corporate registrations will also cost more than individual registrations, and that reflects the fact that corporations will have more capacity to pay than perhaps individuals or sole operators. Again, it is looking at who has the greatest capacity to pay. The new fee structure will protect building consumers and promote the integrity of the building industry through the benefits of registration and greater regulatory oversight. As I said before, the new fee structure will more accurately reflect the costs involved in regulating Victoria's building industry for all the reasons I have just outlined. There have been increases in people coming into the sector and we have got a massive uptick in building permits and the like, so it is only reasonable that we make sure we have a fit-for-purpose system to support that.

Tradespeople know that only Labor supports them. This is critically important. A resource regulator means unsafe worksites and unsafe buildings, which threatens everyone in the building industry, whether they are tradies or consumers. I know you guys do not like regulation; you would really like to have nothing. But the problem is people get injured, people get hurt and then what happens? We cannot have that. That is why we have got to have regulation; we have got to have a properly regulated and funded industry.

I understand where Mr Davis is coming from, but his motion is ill thought out and does not reflect the realities of the building industry and the sector. The government has consulted widely and closely with all who are involved in this sector. This motion should not be supported by the house, and I urge everyone in this chamber to also reject this motion.

Ms BURNETT-WAKE (Eastern Victoria) (17:00): I am pleased to rise to speak in support of Mr Davis's motion 768. On 2 May, the day before the budget was released, Daniel Andrews decided he would significantly increase the fees for individual and company building registration. While he was at it, he also hiked up the renewal fees. This is yet another tax imposed on hardworking Victorians by the Andrews Labor government. What the government fails to understand, or perhaps fails to empathise with, is that these increases will severely impact our tradies and construction workers at a time when they have, frankly, been through enough. The lengthy lockdowns, the limits on how many people can be on site for any given length of time and supply chain delays have taken their toll on the industry, with many small businesses having no choice but to close their doors. Tradies across the industry have had to juggle compliance with COVID-19 rules with the need to meet contracts, which in many cases could not be done.

Even larger companies have gone into administration, citing the uncertain business environment, such as the government's regular builder, Probuild, leaving \$5 billion in building projects unfinished. The impact of this is being felt by many Victorians, such as my constituents who attend the Rosebud Primary School. I have spoken in this chamber previously about how the children are going home covered in dirt due to their playground being an unfinished construction site, due to Probuild going into administration.

These taxes will have a further impact on the industry, but that impact will be handed down to everyday Victorians. The hardship is already being felt down the line by Victorian home owners, who are eagerly awaiting the completion of their homes after lengthy delays due to the supply chain issues and

a lack of building materials. But the industry pressure does not end there. This new tax will ultimately lead to increased housing costs for Victorians. If builders and construction workers are having to pay more to do their jobs, they will have to charge more to their customers, who are everyday Victorians. The dream of owning a home or building a new one is getting further and further away from reality for so many Victorians with the rising cost of living. The last thing this state needs is increased taxes on the construction and building industries. What they need is a state where hard work is rewarded and taxes are minimised. These tradies work extremely hard, and there is simply no justification for these increases. If we want our housing sector to be competitive, it needs lower charges, not higher taxes. This increase will only add to the cost of business, and that hike will be felt further down the line by homebuyers.

Driving around, everyone has seen those numberplates: 'Victoria—the place to be'. Isn't that a great memory? We know that over 45 000 people left our state at the height of the pandemic. We need to rebuild Victoria's reputation as a place to invest in and move to. This will not happen if it remains a place where tradies and builders are clobbered with unnecessary taxes and charges. That is why the Liberals and Nationals will have them reversed if elected to government in November this year. I commend this motion.

Ms TAYLOR (Southern Metropolitan) (17:03): I think it is very important that we put this in perspective—that is, we need to think about the reputation of the majority of those professionals in the building industry. Registration is an important part of that because it differentiates them from those who have not got the same skills and capacity to carry out work that Victorians can rely on. That is one point I want to make.

Secondly, consumers need to know that the Victorian Building Authority (VBA) has the resources it needs and requires to be able to keep them safe, because at the end of the day think of the cost of inadequate regulation. If you under-resource, think about what that might mean for consumers. I am hearing a very one-sided story from those opposite, and they are not actually thinking about the benefit and the reputation of the building industry itself. I will say, and I will make a qualification: we know that most professionals in the building industry are doing the right thing, but unfortunately there are those who are not and there are those who are trying to cut corners.

Ultimately if the VBA does not have the resources it needs—that is what this is all about: making sure that they have resources that are fit and proper for where the industry is at here and now rather than some other era that those opposite are talking about or reflecting on. I do not know what that is. It is so that consumers know and can rely on the quality work that is being delivered in this state. I am just going to refer to a media release. It is dated 29 March 2022:

The Victorian building watchdog issued more than \$180,000 worth of penalties to building practitioners found breaking the rules in the past three months.

The Victorian Building Authority ... has penalised 29 building practitioners a total of \$180,750 from December 2021 to February 2022 for various breaches of the Building Act and Building Regulations.

Breaches have included failure to call for mandatory inspections, failure to comply with directions to fix non-compliant work, issuing building permits inconsistent with applicable planning permit requirements and using false certificates of insurance.

The VBA's Executive Director, Regulatory Operations, David Brockman said that it was a practitioner's obligation to comply with the rules and keep Victorians safe.

Did you notice how conveniently those opposite left the safety aspect out of this debate today? Regulation has a very sound and proper purpose, and that is so that Victorians can rely on the quality work that is delivered in this state. So if the VBA is to be able to aptly do its job, we need to support it appropriately.

I might add that the new fee structure is now aligned with other jurisdictions. If you listened to what those opposite said today, you would think that Victoria was some extraordinary outlier imposing the fee structure that is being put in place, when in fact the new fee structure—and I will repeat this—is

now aligned with other jurisdictions. So that is what I mean also when it comes to the point of having some perspective in this space and in this debate.

There are many other aspects to this, and I know Ms Terpstra has put them on the record today, and that has been most constructive, because we are fairly short on time. But one thing that I did want to reiterate is that the new structure will allow the VBA to continue to help protect consumers and promote the integrity of the building industry through the benefits of registration and greater regulatory oversight. The changes will create a fairer fee structure across all practitioners. Recognising the differences in registration categories, the new fee structure means different increases dependent on the type and number of registrations held by a practitioner.

To come back to that reputation aspect—when we are looking at the building industry, thinking of those in the building industry—and that question, ‘Why should I maintain my registration given the fee changes?’, well, your registration gives you the right to practise. It shows people you are qualified, skilled and experienced to do the job. To be registered you need to have met strict criteria. It is unlawful for a person who is not registered to carry out building work requiring a building permit for work valued at more than \$10 000. By being registered, practitioners benefit through the legitimisation of their services over unregistered persons who may be unqualified or lack the qualifications or competencies to deliver safe and compliant building work. So I would ask those opposite to remember Victorian consumers and think about them and think about the cost to them for work that does not meet the requisite building standards. I note that this is in the minority. I am not trying to cast aspersions here, but we have to be realistic that there are those who do not meet the requirements. So maybe, those opposite, when you are thinking about cost, think about the cost of not regulating properly.

Mrs McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:09): I rise to support Mr Davis’s motion and to support those building companies, surveyors and tradies who are the latest target of a bankrupt government which fails to understand that taxing enterprise is not just immoral but is ultimately economic suicide. You socialists do not understand that in the end you run out of other people’s money. That is what happens when you keep taxing people.

The alarm bells rang in the first line of the authority’s media release, which notes:

The ... VBA ... is resetting its building registration fee structure, to create a fairer fee structure that supports future growth in the industry.

I agree with one part of that. It will support future growth, but that growth will be in the regulator, not the building sector being sluggish with this latest demand, and it certainly will not be fairer. In fact it is highway robbery.

Builders, many small and medium-sized companies, are currently facing huge pressure on their fragile operating margins. We know all about that—they are going broke everyday. The ongoing impacts of COVID are felt not just in vaccination mandates and staff shortages but in the supply crisis and extraordinary delays and cost inflation it has brought about. The numbers affected are substantial. More than 26 000 registered individuals and 11 000 companies will face these utterly unjustified increased charges, and all Victorians in the property market will pay as prices rise to accommodate the Victorian Building Authority’s (VBA) increased cut.

This increase bears no relation whatsoever to inflation, even at its current level. For a domestic builder, the practitioner registration fees have gone up by more than 180 per cent—180 per cent more just for the pleasure of being regulated by the VBA, just to have the freedom to do the work you have been doing for years. This really does nothing to shift the feeling of some that government regulators like the VBA are little more than parasites on the industries they serve.

The government often seems to assume that these price hikes can be passed on to consumers and the market will just take it. That was certainly their approach with the windfall tax which they have only just introduced, but many of these small operators have quoted on fixed-price agreements. They are

already absorbing huge increases in material costs and wages. This kind of thing, this tax, will be the final straw. It is just tax after tax after tax and for literally no improved service or offering.

The stresses on the industry are apparent. Even major operators like Probuild have folded, and rumours continue about the fate of Metricon. My concern is for the smaller businesses which do not attract the column space and whose staff are not paid employees, leaving the invoices at the office, but owners of family businesses struggling to make ends meet. Torquay businessman Anthony Lococo seems sadly typical. He spoke to the *Age* about the difficult decision to close his business and put his seven employees out of work. He said:

It's been a heartbreaking decision to make, but after two years of struggling to get materials and trades, and costs continually blowing out and eating into anything that even looked like a profit margin, I decided at Christmas that I just couldn't face another year of it ... I'm drained ... I've had enough.

That is a local business in Western Victoria Region. There are hundreds of thousands across Victoria like him. How can you sit there and want to tax people more so they go out of business?

This is not a complex motion. We need to reduce costs on this sector and to stop the latest attack on business and on the competitiveness of the Victorian economy. I strongly support Mr Davis here and the promise he has made that the future Liberal government will reverse this damaging raid on a sector so central to Victoria's economy.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Statements on reports, papers and petitions

DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY AND FINANCE

Budget papers 2022–23

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:14): I rise to speak on the state budget 2022–23, which raises the budget for public housing, and in particular I want to talk about the public housing waiting lists. We hear a lot from this government about their big build and, you know, how over the next few years they are going to build 12 800 properties, but in reality they will house only a very small portion of the applicants on this list.

The minister recently released the March 2022 figures, and the waiting list has now blown out to 54 945 applications. That is not 54 945 individuals—that is households, that is applications. Invest Victoria says that an average household in Victoria is 2.7 people, so we know that some of those people will be individuals but some of them will be families with five children. If you actually multiply that number by the average household size of 2.7, that means there are nearly 150 000 Victorians on the public housing waiting list waiting to be housed.

But of even greater concern are the 30 508 families who are on the priority waiting list, and this has actually blown out by over 200 per cent since this government came to power. When I was the minister that figure was at 9990, and I thought that was way too high. I was trying to make sure that we housed those people and we drove those figures down. This government has allowed it to blow out to 30 508 applicants. That is a 205 per cent increase, which is an absolute disgrace. When we talk about priority housing we are talking about people who are homeless, people who are escaping domestic violence, people who are living with a disability and people who have special housing needs, and we know that in my electorate of Northern Victoria Shepparton has the most homeless people in the state, with 372 homeless people counted in the last census. In addition there are three other areas: the electorate of Mildura, 255; Benambra, 197; and Bendigo West, 192. Four out of the top 10 worst regional electorates for homelessness are in northern Victoria, but we are certainly not seeing enough investment in our area to house those people.

The priority list in Bendigo has blown out to 1839 applicants, which is a 360 per cent increase, and in Mildura to 359 families, which is a 259 per cent increase. In Swan Hill it has blown out to 158 families,

which is a 37 per cent increase. In Seymour it has blown out to 314 families, which is a 369 per cent increase; in Shepparton, 904 families, an over 400 per cent increase; in Benalla and Wangaratta, 493 families, an over 300 per cent increase; and in Wodonga, 338 families, which is an over 122 per cent increase in the priority waiting list in that area. It is just an absolute disgrace that the government is not investing more to ensure that it houses people in northern Victoria. The big build will, as I said, house less than a quarter of the applicants on the list. The government needs to do much more, and they need to do it sooner.

They also need to invest in more youth foyers. We know that Wodonga and Wangaratta have had really good business cases with the minister for a very long time now, but we have seen no further movement from the government on announcing new youth foyers. At the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last year the minister actually praised me and said how good those youth foyers are and that he looked forward to announcing more. Well, come on, Minister, announce more; change young people's lives. We know that 85 per cent of the young people who go through a youth foyer leave engaged in further education and work. We know that people have gone on to build much better lives for themselves. We know that at least three participants from the Shepparton foyer alone have gone on to purchase their own home.

We need more investment from this government, and we need it now. We need it to help the people who are actually really struggling to get access to safe and affordable housing in northern Victoria, and we need to do much more to assist young people who are at risk of homelessness or who are actually couch surfing to allow them to continue their education to build a better life for themselves by having an education and going on to be self-sustaining for the rest of their lives.

VICTORIAN LAW REFORM COMMISSION

Improving the Justice System Response to Sexual Offences

Mr GRIMLEY (Western Victoria) (17:20): The Victorian Law Reform Commission (VLRC) *Improving the Justice System Response to Sexual Offences: Supplementary Report on 'Grab and Drag' Conduct* was released in the house a few sittings ago, and I wish to speak on it. Whilst I am not 100 per cent happy with there not being a recommendation for a completely new grab and drag offence, I am happy to see an aggravating factor for this type of offending.

To recap on why this report was commissioned, it was the outrage at Jackson Williams's acquittal of the offence of assault with intent to commit a sexual offence against a nurse just going about her business on her way home from work in Melbourne. He was caught on CCTV grabbing her, dragging her into an alley and straddling her, and, as Derryn Hinch said at the time, he was not there to play Scrabble. Anyone watching this footage could see the sexual intent, but apparently not the courts. This led to me and Derryn speaking publicly about the creation of a new offence so we could see this offending for what it really is—very serious and damaging to its usually female victims.

Em Jones, also a nurse who works in Melbourne, came out in the days after the offending, voicing her frustration at the acquittal and lenient sentence. She labelled it at the time as 'grossly inadequate', and I could not agree more. The mother of three young girls, Em joined me in Parliament about a month later, and we announced the presentation of over 90 000 signatures—it is now sitting at around 114 000 signatures—to the then Attorney-General, Jill Hennessy. In an absolute credit to her, Ms Hennessy then announced her referral to the VLRC for this specific investigation. I made a submission, and I was very glad to have been quoted a number of times in the report, which demonstrates that the VLRC have looked past the politics to see what is the right thing to do. I think they have realised that we speak to victims of crime every single day and that I do not necessarily speak as a politician but as a representative of those survivors and also as a former member of Victoria Police.

There are four recommendations in the report:

1. The Victorian Government should amend section 320A of the Crimes Act 1958 ... to introduce an aggravating circumstance where the assault would raise an apprehension of an imminent sexual offence.
2. The recommended aggravating circumstance should include an objective test for the fault element as an alternative to a subjective fault element. The court should be able to take into account all the particular circumstances in which the assault occurred in applying the objective test.
3. The recommended aggravating circumstance should have a maximum term of level 5 imprisonment (10 years maximum).
4. The recommended aggravating circumstance should be an indictable charge triable summarily.

Basically this means that where an offender apprehends someone in a grab-and-drag-type movement it will be an objective test needing to be proved by the prosecution, rather than a subjective test that the defence counsel will have a field day in opposing. The maximum sentence will also be increased by five years for offences that can be proven with this aggravating factor. I am so pleased to see these recommendations and that the VLRC has listened to the concerns of not only me but the victims of crime commissioner, Sexual Assault Services Victoria, Dr Steven Tudor and certainly not least Victoria Police.

I am very happy with this result, and it is pleasing to see this type of offending taken more seriously. We know that this type of lower level offending can lead to much more serious offending, so we need to denounce this behaviour at the earliest opportunity. Well done to the VLRC and to those who made submissions to this inquiry. Well done to Em Jones and those 114 000 people who used their voice for good by signing an e-petition. With the VLRC's interim stalking inquiry recommendations, this report, the Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance Scheme) Bill 2022 and the government's endorsement of my alternative reporting option motion, it is good to see victims of crime moving closer to achieving the justice that they so richly deserve. But there is more work to do, and we will keep working to support victims of crime every single day.

DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY AND FINANCE

Budget papers 2022–23

Ms MAXWELL (Northern Victoria) (17:24): I rise to speak on the 2022–23 state budget, and I will start with the good news and then move on to some projects we still hope to get over the line. During the Legislative Council regional sitting in Bright in 2021 I first raised the need for redevelopment of the Bright hospital, and we held a joint meeting with the hospital to discuss its needs and master planning. I would like to thank the Treasurer and the Minister for Health for meeting with me to discuss the funds and processes required. Suffice to say the community was delighted with the announcement of \$1.52 million in this budget to progress the planning for a high-care public aged care facility. I also thank the Attorney-General and fellow member for Northern Victoria for meeting with Alpine Health at the time of the regional sitting. Getting everyone on board from all levels of government is helping Bright and the surrounding towns it services so that they can get what they need and deserve. I look forward to working with Alpine Health in any way necessary on the next steps. Suffice to say we hope the federal government will open its chequebook and give their share of funding for the hospital and its Bright-by-name and bright-by-nature community.

Similarly, Mildura is thrilled with the commitment of \$36 million to deliver a 30-bed residential alcohol and drug rehabilitation unit. Consumption of most drugs is higher per capita in regional communities and contributes to family violence and general crime. Mildura is challenged by both social disadvantage and remoteness, something that I discussed with both Minister Foley and local MP Ali Cupper in separate meetings to talk about the need for a local residential rehabilitation facility. I was in Mildura only last week for their Field Days. I love visiting Mildura, and it was wonderful to be back there again. I had many conversations with locals and caught up with the new council CEO. We discussed all manner of things, including future planning for the residential rehab facility but also my hope that Mildura will be next on the list for a dedicated Drug Court. We know Drug Courts work,

and the government has expanded them into Ballarat and Shepparton. The KPMG evaluation shows Drug Courts are cost effective and an alternative to imprisonment, and most importantly they help reduce recidivism and improve lives. I wrapped a Drug Court in with my pitch for the residential rehab on my budget submission to the Treasurer this year. We have ticked off one, and now we will work together to try and get commitments ahead of the November election for the second important part of that package.

GOTAFE and Wodonga TAFE both have solid bids in with the government for Education First Youth Foyers in Wangaratta and Wodonga. While they were not part of the announcements in this budget, I am confident that the government is on board and recognises the value of youth foyers in helping young people at risk of homelessness to continue their education and build a positive pathway. Just shy of \$25 million is needed across the two projects, and again, I have had positive discussions with the Treasurer and Minister Wynne on these two projects. I hope we will soon be celebrating good news with the Wodonga and Wangaratta stakeholders. My colleague Stuart Grimley was pleased to see funding continue for the Geelong project, and we would like to see the same model delivered in Wodonga, so I will keep that advocacy going this year.

I have consistently raised ambulance response times and associated health service issues in this Parliament. These issues are serious and enduring. They existed before COVID, but the pandemic has turned a bad situation worse. I hope the new investment of \$457 million to employ 400 new 000 dispatchers will turn these issues around. I know it is not as simple as more money and more people, but that part is certainly necessary. Hand in glove with this is addressing hospital ramping and workforce shortages.

On that note I will leave my contribution there for when we debate the appropriation bills. But we will celebrate these wins, and I will keep advocating for other necessary funding for my electorate of northern Victoria.

Rulings by the Chair

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS

The PRESIDENT (17:28): Earlier in the afternoon Dr Bach raised a point of order about Minister Stitt misleading the house. I have checked *Hansard*, and I do not think in my capacity I have anything to add.

Adjournment

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (17:29): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY GRANTS

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) (17:29): (1932) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and it concerns the allocation of grants, a topic which has been discussed in this house in detail. These grants bring great benefits to all our great multicultural communities, but we must ensure that these grants are distributed fairly and equally. There is a growing sentiment in our multicultural communities that some individuals and groups are getting approved for grants because of their links to the Premier or senior ministers or their staff. In last week's Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings the department confirmed the buck stops with the minister. She is the one that signs off on the grants. Yet they were unable to detail if this process has changed from the previous minister—which resulted in alleged corruption which is now before IBAC. Victorians have stated they want a government that has integrity, a government that has transparency and a government that has nothing to hide, and this government's track record is anything but honest and transparent. Minister, the action I seek is for you to outline the process for handling a conflict of interest in the allocation of grants and detail how many times ministers and their staff have removed

themselves from these decisions. It is vital that this process is fair and merit based so that all Victorians can enjoy what our great multicultural communities do with these grants.

FAMILY VIOLENCE

Mr GRIMLEY (Western Victoria) (17:30): (1933) My adjournment debate is for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence in the other place. In the Coroners Court's findings for the suicide of a man who I shall refer to as 'Mr A' from Bannockburn, there was a deep history of family violence. Mr A had physically assaulted his daughter and physically, sexually and emotionally assaulted his wife in the few years before his death. He also threatened to kill his wife in front of their kids. Mr A had suffered a series of serious head knocks during his life, leading to an acquired brain injury, and so it was thought that this may have contributed to his escalating behaviour. Intervention orders with exclusion zones and no-contact orders were issued as a result. Sometime later Mr A was given a document from Victoria Legal Aid suggesting that the intervention application had been withdrawn. Mr A took this as the intervention order having been scrapped, possibly having misunderstood due to his acquired brain injury. He returned to the family home, but the locks had been changed. His wife, who was not home, contacted police to let them know that he was breaching the order, and the police notified Mr A that the order was actually still in place. He then left his wife a voice message saying, 'I love you. I love the kids. If I can't be with you and I can't be with the kids, I have to end my life. Sorry'. He then hung himself.

Mr A committed suicide, which is tragic, but we could very well have seen another story on the news titled 'Bannockburn man kills wife and children before he kills himself', and that is why I am so concerned about this case—it is the what-ifs. Mr A had been seeing a GP in the years before his death. He told his GP he had been accused of family violence against both his wife and one of his children on multiple occasions. It is worrying not only that the GP did not fulfil their mandatory reporting obligations under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 but that further support and prevention help was not offered aside from medication. The multi-agency risk assessment and management, otherwise known as MARAM, framework was developed post royal commission to better identify and assess risk in family violence cases, but GPs are not prescribed as part of it. In 2015 the then State Coroner recommended mandatory family violence training for GPs—(*Time expired*)

FOSTER CARERS

Dr BACH (Eastern Metropolitan) (17:32): (1934) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services, and the action that I seek is for him to release the KPMG report into funding for foster carers and also a government response. I was deeply troubled following the release of the budget about the manner in which so many issues to do with our most vulnerable children were not addressed. I was only more troubled after listening to what occurred at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee the other day.

Foster carers are some of the most meritorious people in our state, doing wonderful work with vulnerable Victorian children, and yet the foster carers allowance has not gone up a single cent since 2016. We are all aware that cost-of-living pressures are spiralling right now. We can all see the price at the bowser. We all know how expensive it is to buy steak these days. Foster carers have these same cost-of-living pressures, and yet Victoria is the only state that does not even index the foster carer allowance, so it has not gone up a cent since 2016. Before the budget I joined the Foster Carer Association of Victoria in calling on the government to rectify this glaring problem. However, nothing was done; once again nothing was done.

Questions were asked by the coalition team at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee about whether or not an increase in the foster carer allowance had been recommended by KPMG, who the government had do a review of support for foster carers. Minister Carbines did a very bad job of fudging his responses. It is utterly clear that KPMG has recommended an increase in the foster carer allowance. So now the minister must release the report—I trust he has read it; I hope he has read it—and a response from the government, because foster carers contact me every day. The level of

disrespect that they feel as a result of the government's persistent refusal to deal with their core request, an increase in the foster carer allowance, is palpable, but there were broader issues in this budget regarding how we should be treating the most vulnerable children in our state that I would like to briefly touch upon in the time that I have left.

At the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee the minister lauded himself and his department for their carer strategy. This strategy was released by Minister Donnellan three child protection ministers ago, in October 2019. Not one action from the carer strategy has been successfully achieved. Not one single cent has gone behind the carer strategy. So I confess I was dumbstruck, as so many carers were who have contacted me, that the minister had the front to pat himself on the back and the Andrews Labor government on the back for the wonderful work they have done in putting in place the carer strategy. The strategy is fine. It must be funded, and foster carers in our state must finally be shown the respect they deserve by the Andrews Labor government.

HANGING ROCK PRECINCT DEVELOPMENT

Ms MAXWELL (Northern Victoria) (17:35): (1935) My adjournment is to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and the action I seek is for the minister to facilitate a meeting for the Hanging Rock Cricket Club with the three traditional owner groups of the land on which the Hanging Rock Cricket Club currently stands and the Hanging Rock ministerial advisory group. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the Hanging Rock master plan and Aboriginal cultural heritage and natural values as they apply to the plan and affect the cricket club. This needs to happen before the consultation period on the plan finishes. On 5 April 2022 I tabled a petition on behalf of the Hanging Rock Cricket Club, who are pleading for local sport to stay within the Hanging Rock precinct. I am grateful to the minister for very promptly writing to me in response to this petition. I have enjoyed a very good working relationship with the minister to date, and I hope that this can continue in order to find a much-needed solution that will not break the hearts of Hanging Rock community sporting clubs.

We all recognise the iconic values of Hanging Rock, and I think we can be very genuine in saying there is a shared commitment to future planning that protects this special place while making sure it is available for the public to use and enjoy. Cricket has been played at Hanging Rock as far back as the tradesmen's picnic of 1864. The Hanging Rock Cricket Club was formed in 1903, and this has always been the proud home of their club. This community is devastated by the prospects of being relocated. There is no doubt that Hanging Rock has significant historical associations. It is enjoyed by picnickers, for outdoor sports and has hosted some massive concerts.

The draft Hanging Rock master plan recommends the removal of the Hanging Rock Cricket Club from their current home. The cricket club cannot understand how horseracing and concerts, which can attract thousands of people, will not negatively impact the site's Aboriginal cultural heritage and natural values—yet community cricket will. Just recently the Minister for Regional Development stated in Parliament regarding the government's funding towards a sports precinct in Gisborne that:

Sport plays such a powerful role in the everyday life of our communities, and when sports clubs tell us they lack the facilities they need to play the sports they love it means that the effects are felt by everyone.

Only local groups are being relocated under this draft master plan, and while I respect and acknowledge the assurances from the minister that this plan is still in draft and final decisions are yet to be made, the conversation seems to all focus on relocation, and I can understand how the sporting clubs involved feel that the writing is on the wall. The sporting and environmental and cultural heritages can coexist in a supportive and respectful way in the same way they can for major events and tourism. I implore the minister to help ensure this community can retain its beloved local sport at Hanging Rock, and I look forward to a favourable reply which supports the club.

MILDURA BASE PUBLIC HOSPITAL

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:38): (1936) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Health, and it concerns the current healthcare crisis occurring at the Mildura Base Public Hospital. The action I seek from the minister is for him to provide an immediate commitment to fund the construction of a new Mildura Base Public Hospital to adequately cater for the healthcare requirements of the Sunraysia community.

Despite the constant denials from members of the Andrews Labor government our state is currently in the midst of the worst healthcare crisis in living memory—ambulance shortages and ramping, emergency 000 calls that go unanswered, elective surgery waiting list blowouts, outdated and inadequate infrastructure at hospitals that are unable to cope with patient demand, and the list goes on and on. True to form the Andrews Labor government either blame the pandemic or the opposition for the current state of Victoria's healthcare system, despite the fact that Daniel Andrews has presided over the system as either Premier or health minister for 11 of the past 15 years.

What happened at Mildura Base Public Hospital last Wednesday night was a stark reminder to all of us of the dramatic deterioration of Victoria's hospital system under the watch of this Premier and this government. Last Wednesday a code yellow was called at the Mildura base hospital, an internal emergency because both the hospital and the emergency department had reached full capacity and wait times for patients exceeded 12 hours. During the code yellow a recovery bay in the theatre was turned into a ward to increase capacity. In a newspaper article the CEO pointed out the current crisis in Mildura is not due to staff shortages, influenza or COVID; it is about traditional injuries, people needing surgery and chronic diseases. Because of its remote location the hospital cannot go on bypass to another hospital, and amongst other things its current emergency department is not adequate to properly cater for its patient catchment, meaning construction of a new Mildura Base Public Hospital is of critical importance.

I was proud to stand with the Leader of the Opposition, Matthew Guy, my colleague Ms Crozier and our candidate Paul Matheson in Mildura on 8 May to announce that an elected Guy Liberal government will provide \$750 million to build a new hospital in Mildura. In contrast, Mr Foley's visit less than a month later came with no explanation as to why the new hospital's master plan, which was due to be completed in April, has been delayed until at least the middle of the year. I call on the minister to provide certainty that a new Mildura Base Public Hospital will be funded by his government to ensure the Sunraysia community receive the world-class health service they deserve.

PORT PHILLIP BAY FISHING INFRASTRUCTURE

Dr RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (17:41): (1937) My adjournment matter this evening is to the Minister for Planning. The action I seek from the minister is to acquire an environment effects statement (EES) for the Labor government's plan to build an enormous artificial structure in the ocean near the entrance of Port Phillip Bay. My Greens colleagues and I have recently been approached by local Mornington Peninsula residents who are deeply concerned about this proposed development. The development would install 16 large concrete structures and is aimed at attracting yellowtail kingfish for recreational fishers. This proposal is just another in an unbelievably long list of ways this Labor government continues to provide gold-plated treatment to the recreational fishing lobby in Victoria.

This proposal has the potential to cause long-term environmental damage in many ways. First, there is the direct impact of building such huge pieces of infrastructure in an environmentally sensitive and important marine area. Just one of the many issues is its proximity to a dolphin sanctuary. There are also the impacts of large numbers of fishing boats visiting sensitive areas and the potential for fishing rubbish to pollute the marine environment, something that is already a big issue. On top of all of this, it is unclear what the impact would be of attracting big fish to an area they normally would not be in. This could change the ecology of the whole area.

I understand that the local council have written to the government to express their concerns about the proposed project's proximity to the Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park, the lack of community consultation and an inadequate environmental assessment. Given all of this, I ask the minister to ensure this project is properly assessed under the EES before making a decision about whether or not it is appropriate to proceed.

WILD DOG CONTROL

Mrs McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:43): (1938) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. Minister, the action I seek is a clarification from you of a statement you made to me during questioning at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee budget estimates hearings last week. Unfortunately the time allowed for questioning expired at just the wrong point and has left a very important question unanswered for many regional Victorians, particularly those involved in tourism and farming. Discussing the potential reintroduction of dingoes in Victoria, Minister, you said:

... we are very clear that the plan acknowledges the concerns raised by the community and that there are no plans to reintroduce dingoes.

I asked, 'In the Grampians?'. You replied, 'Full stop'. I queried, 'In Victoria?', at which point the chair interrupted with, 'Mrs McArthur, your time has expired'. This seems at odds with your department's previous stance, so I seek either confirmation or clarification of this response.

This is an important question and one which I believe deserves a definitive position. Farmers across Victoria and members of the tourism sector are vitally concerned and worried about the potential for the reintroduction of what is really a wild dog, and that is not going to be helpful for either the farming industry or the tourism sector. We need to be very clear that this government has no plans to introduce wild dogs anywhere into Victorian public places, especially where there are farming and tourism activities, so we just need clarification from the minister to confirm that across the whole of Victoria this introduction will not occur.

MELTON ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (17:45): (1939) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in the other place, and the action that I seek is for the government to urgently invest in the roads in the City of Melton. Now, the City of Melton is one of the fastest growing areas in Australia, with a population set to triple to half a million people in the next 30 years. Every year more than 7100 people move into Melton, and 52 babies are born each week; that is over 2800 a year. Right now the road infrastructure is not keeping pace with the residential growth. Years of underinvestment within the City of Melton have led to aged, rural-standard, congested roads that are a major safety concern. Analysis of the funding through the Victorian Big Build identified that the City of Melton has received no funding upgrade to the critical roads while outer suburban councils have shared in \$4.7 billion over recent years. Roads in the City of Melton are at capacity and projected to get worse. There are high volumes of traffic use on roads that desperately need more lanes, better intersections and major safety upgrades.

The City of Melton and the entire community, through the Fix Our Roads campaign, is requesting that the state government upgrade the Western Freeway, including a new interchange at Bulmans Road; duplicate and upgrade the Melton Highway; duplicate and upgrade Hopkins Road; duplicate Christies Road; duplicate the Robinsons Road, Westwood Drive and Calder Park Drive corridor; and build the Calder Park interchange. Now, these roads have had nine deaths, 163 serious crash injuries and 336 other crash injuries in the last six years. With over 70 per cent of the workforce leaving the municipality every day, the creation of local jobs has never been more important. Council's investment attraction strategy developed by Ernst & Young demonstrates that the accelerated pipeline of road infrastructure will help attract commercial investment that will create over 100 000 jobs over the next 30 years.

The City of Melton has significant land availability in the western state-significant industrial precinct and the Cobblebank metropolitan activity centre. Better roads to these commercial precincts are essential to improve accessibility and productivity and to create more local employment opportunities. I look forward to the minister's response.

BUILDING PRACTITIONER FEES

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (17:48): (1940) My matter tonight for the adjournment is for the attention of the Treasurer, but it is also clearly of interest to the Minister for Planning. The chamber has recently been discussing the new tradie tax, the layer of additional costs that has been imposed on builders, building companies, building surveyors and others, and obviously the state government is proposing to register a huge swathe of carpenters, tilers, painters, plasterers and a long list of trades over coming months. Obviously on 2 May they increased massively the charges for builders, building companies, building surveyors and others—in some cases by 100 per cent, in some cases 200 per cent, in some cases even more. In a tiny number of cases there was an adjustment down, but overall the fee increases were very large.

I received back a response from an earlier adjournment from the planning minister, and he has said that this increase in charge is justified. Now, we do not think it is at this time, and we do not think it is a good way forward at any time in the sense that it hits housing affordability directly—higher costs for builders, higher costs for tradies. Obviously it is passed straight through into housing costs for families, housing costs for first-home buyers—housing costs that go up and up and up, with the cascade of the layer of taxes imposed by the Andrews Labor government. But obviously just at the moment, quite separate from that general argument, we are at a point with Metricon and a number of other firms where they are under huge pressure with increased supply costs—wood and steel and others—but also increased costs through labour. They are in a very tenuous position. They have got huge cost pressures. I say at this point it is especially unwise to slap them with new taxes, with new charges. Why would you do it now? Why must they do it now? It is thoughtless. Yes, they have got a huge need for money, as Mr Ondarchie says. They have got cost blowouts everywhere. They are desperate for more taxes. But this is especially unwise with the building and construction industry at the moment.

My request to the Treasurer is to intervene, and with his colleague the Minister for Planning preferably remove these charges completely, but at a minimum pause them. Do not force these through right now when we have got these challenges in the building industry. My simple request is for him to meet with his colleague and between the two of them pause these charges at a minimum—preferably remove them, but at a minimum stop this damage now.

ALTONA MEADOWS COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) (17:51): (1941) I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Housing. Last week I attended a meeting with a number of constituents along with Cr Daria Kellander from the Hobsons Bay council. These were residents of the Altona Meadows public housing estates, and they expressed to me their horror and their deep, deep distress at some of the things that they have witnessed in some of the homes in those estates. The overwhelming majority of people who live in public housing are decent, honourable, good people, but unfortunately, as I suppose everywhere, there is a section of the community that does not meet that criteria. Unfortunately these ladies told me about what they have been going through: the fact that a 79-year-old woman has been terrorised in her own home by her neighbours for three years; the substance abuse that has created havoc right through many of these streets and suburbs; and the woman who walks down their street swinging a golf club destroying everything as she goes. Imagine having to put up with that every day. I do not think that anybody should have to put up with that sort of thing. There are major drug issues. There is no question there are major drug issues in the Altona Meadows public housing estates.

This is having a major impact on mental health. One of the women that I met with last week was in tears at the meeting just recalling what she has to go through and what her relatives have to go through.

It is not fair, it is not right, and it is just beyond comprehension that we could have this situation allowed to happen in Melbourne in 2022. I suspect that the housing department is not doing its job. I suspect that the housing department is allowing these abuses to occur, allowing the great majority of people in these housing estates to be terrorised and to have their lives ruined without a second thought—without inspections, without any of the precautions that one would normally expect to see from a government department. So what I am asking the minister to do this evening is to hold a ministerial inquiry into the Altona Meadows public housing estate and to find out exactly what is wrong, to find out who is doing it, to find out who is responsible for allowing it to happen and to ensure that it stops, and that it stops now.

WESTERN PORT HIGHWAY TRAFFIC NOISE

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) (17:54): (1942) I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in the other place, and it relates to the impact of heavy truck noise, heavy vehicle noise, on the northern section of Western Port Highway in my electorate in the vicinity of Lyndhurst and the Marriott Waters estate. This is a section of the Western Port Highway which has experienced substantial traffic growth in recent years. It is experienced in the vicinity of substantial residential growth in recent years. There is now a solid line of housing stretching from roughly Northey Road to Thompsons Road on that section of Western Port Highway, with a solid residential development. And of course with the long-awaited arrival of the intermodal freight terminal, which is due to open in 2023, the volume of heavy vehicle traffic is also going to substantially increase. There are already concerns among local residents about the impact of heavy vehicle noise on that section of the Western Port Highway, and those residents have experienced those problems around the clock. It is not only through daylight hours, it is also at night—the large volume of traffic. They are now seeking intervention.

The most obvious solution for addressing that heavy vehicle noise on Western Port Highway at the moment is the installation of noise barriers. The section of Western Port Highway lends itself to the installation of noise barriers on the eastern side. There is a very wide easement which has been set aside for widening the highway in future, so there is more than adequate space for the installation of noise barriers, which would be the simplest and most sensible solution to address those noise concerns. So the action I seek from the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in the other place is to prioritise the installation of sound barriers on the eastern side of Western Port Highway between Northey Road and Thompsons Road so that those barriers are in place prior to the opening of the long-awaited intermodal freight hub in 2023.

WERRIBEE EAST EMPLOYMENT PRECINCT

Ms VAGHELA (Western Metropolitan) (17:56): (1943) My adjournment matter is directed to the Honourable Martin Pakula MP, Minister for Industry Support and Recovery; Minister for Trade; Minister for Business Precincts; Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events; and Minister for Racing. This adjournment matter relates to the portfolio responsibilities of business precincts.

Wyndham city is growing at a rapid pace. Wyndham has seen a huge population growth, and more and more people are choosing Wyndham to raise their families. This makes Wyndham a crucial place for investment in infrastructure, employment and education to boost the future outcomes for the locals. The COVID-19 crisis showed us that there is a need for people to have employment close to their home so disruptions like the pandemic can be managed in the future. The increasing inflation rate has people concerned about their cost of living. The growing costs are bolstering the case for local employment hubs. With the shock of increasing oil prices and other living costs, this is the right time to reconsider the East Werribee employment precinct.

The plans to pursue the East Werribee employment precinct were rejected by the state government in 2019. If it had been pursued, a commercial precinct, a new town centre, a health and learning precinct, an enterprise precinct and a business precinct would have been developed, according to the Victorian Planning Authority, the VPA.

This is of major importance to Wyndham and the community living in the Western Metropolitan Region. Education and employment opportunities should be local; the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us this. This would help boost the local economy and help the west become self-reliant. The action I seek from the minister is to provide me with an update on when the Victorian government will commit to reconsidering this important East Werribee employment precinct, and if it will not, to advise me on what actions will be taken as an alternative.

PLANNING POLICY

Mr QUILTY (Northern Victoria) (17:58): (1944) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning. Preston Market is set to be redeveloped. The owners were set to build 2200 apartments on the site that surrounds Preston station. This should be a slam dunk win for Preston and for Melbourne—thousands of people with direct access to a train line and close access to stores and market stalls. The project was set to contribute \$800 million to the area, with \$75 million being spent on developing and supporting the market itself. The project also follows housing affordability advice from the Grattan Institute: to make housing affordable you need to build more houses, and the best houses to build are ones that contribute the least to congestion. Their specific advice was to relax density restrictions for housing along transport corridors.

In classic government fashion the authorities have decided to ignore this advice and squash the development. Housing affordability be damned; the locals want to keep pushing up their property values, and they cannot do that if people are allowed to build houses. Mark my words, nimbys are the cause of unaffordable housing. This new development would help share the Preston community and train line with many more people. It would provide living space to thousands of people in a desirable location. It is selfish to set up in a neighbourhood, to stake your property and then to demand that no-one else be allowed to build new housing just so you can keep it for yourself, just so you can keep your own property value high and rising.

The Minister for Planning's latest proposal is to slash the number of apartments almost in half. The median price of a two-bedroom unit in Preston is \$610 000, with median houses costing over \$1.2 million. Local action groups go on and on about preserving the character of the neighbourhood, but the primary characteristic of your neighbourhood is that soon only the wealthiest Australians will be able to live there. Preston Market is not in my electorate and is not an issue for me to decide, but I do not want what is happening there to happen to Northern Victoria.

In Bendigo a proposal for 14 new houses was rejected by the council to again maintain the neighbourhood character. The council defended their decision, saying that they could ban the creation of new houses and lower housing prices at the same time. This is not actually possible. Rental prices are soaring in Bendigo and across Northern Victoria. Housing support providers are raising alarm bells because the number of people accessing emergency accommodation is rising quickly.

No more excuses—we need to build big in Victoria. The government should immediately take action to remove restrictions and allow homes to be built. The Liberal Democrats want to see an ambitious new target in Victoria of 1 million new homes in the next 10 years. We need right-to-build laws. I want people to build new housing in Northern Victoria. I want to see property prices stop rising so people can afford to buy them. I want people to be able to afford to live here. I call on the minister to relax planning restrictions that prevent and slow the rate of new housing being built.

ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS WORKFORCE

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) (18:01): (1945) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and the action I am seeking relates to *Victoria's Alcohol and Other Drugs Workforce Strategy*. This strategy sets the direction for workforce development and planning for Victoria's AOD sector, but it is from 2018 to 2022. So it has finished, and we have seen no new strategies going forward. This strategy is supposed to be focused on workforce availability, workforce capabilities and workforce diversity, improving the health of workers in that area, strengthening leadership and

delivering person-centred integrated care. I can tell you that in every single inquiry that the Legal and Social Issues Committee does we report that we need more alcohol and other drug workers. We are bereft of them. In the inquiry that I am going to this evening, where we are talking about the impact on children of parental incarceration, the lack and the dearth of alcohol and drug workers is mentioned time and time again.

In fact even in Mr Finn's adjournment—now, most people would not expect us to agree, and we may not agree on the outcome—the issues that Mr Finn raised relate to the lack of an alcohol and other drugs strategy. Mr Finn might have different ideas of what to do with those people than I do; however, it shows yet again that our strategy is not working. Then in this budget we saw a cut of \$40 million to this sector when everyone is saying we do not have enough alcohol and other drug workers. We do not have enough rehab beds, we do not have enough treatment and we do not have enough counselling, yet we saw a \$40 million cut. So the action I am seeking from the minister—and I am very hopeful that the minister and the minister's office have already done this, that they have developed a strategy for the next four years and that they are fully funding the strategy—is for the minister to publish that strategy and help us meet the demand and help us reduce the preventable deaths and injuries resulting from drug use in Victoria.

COMMERCIAL PASSENGER VEHICLE INDUSTRY

Mr BARTON (Eastern Metropolitan) (18:04): (1946) My adjournment this evening is for the Assistant Treasurer. The government has allocated further funding to the Business Acceleration Fund, previously named the Regulatory Reform Incentive Fund. My understanding is that this fund is aimed at reducing the regulatory burden on small businesses, especially when it comes to regulators duplicating their requests for data. Currently small businesses in the commercial passenger vehicle industry have been unfairly overburdened by frankly unnecessary data requests from the regulator. I have deep concerns regarding the regulator—the Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria's (CPVV) data collection requirements for booking service providers in the commercial passenger industry. Under the current regulations all booking service providers are required to keep and submit records of trip data, including things such as kilometres travelled and the fee charged as well as the date, the time and the GPS coordinates of where the trip started and ended.

One may think this data would only be called for when it is found relevant to a specified incident or complaint, but the CPVV is demanding that all of this data be submitted at regular intervals. There exists little clarity about why this data is being collected, who will protect it and how it will be used. Not only does this create issues over client consent but also the strict and specified format of the data-reporting requirements is near impossible to be fulfilled by smaller industry operators without the technological know-how or the time to record, maintain and submit this information. These data requests have not been justified by the regulator and threaten to cripple struggling commercial vehicle operators.

This is not the only regulatory absurdity. There is also a significant issue of duplication of requests between the CPVV, VicRoads, the State Revenue Office and the Essential Services Commission when it comes to data requests for operators. I often have those in the industry inform me they have had multiple requests for the exact same data from multiple regulators. It is almost beyond belief. This can be fixed. The industry needs a review that can reduce the unnecessary duplication of data requests and the onerous regulatory requirements for small vehicle operators, who provide an essential service to our community. So, Assistant Treasurer, will you undertake a review as part of the Business Acceleration Fund of the unnecessary and onerous regulatory burdens imposed on the Victorian commercial passenger vehicle industry with the aim of improving efficiencies?

RESPONSES

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (18:07): There have been 15 adjournment matters directed to 10 different ministers, and I will ensure those matters get to those ministers and those ministers respond.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) (18:07): I wish to raise three outstanding adjournment matters for the attention of the minister. The first is 1420, which was directed to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. The response was due on 3 September last year, and it related to sky rail on the Frankston line. That has not been responded to. The second is 1616, which was also to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. It was due on 26 November last year in relation to level crossing removal. The third is 1717, directed to the Minister for Health, which was due on 10 March this year in relation to health services in my electorate. So if the minister can provide some insight into where those are and when they will be provided, that would be appreciated.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (18:08): Mr Rich-Phillips, I can respond that I cannot give any insight into where those particular responses are. I do appreciate that particularly in the health area there has been quite a challenge in dealing with the recent pandemic and other things. But in saying that, Mr Rich-Phillips, the numbers of those responses will be in the *Hansard*. I will get my chief of staff to ring those respective ministers' chiefs of staff by the end of the week to make sure that you get those responses.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6.09 pm.