

**PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA**

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT**

**FIRST SESSION**

**THURSDAY, 10 FEBRUARY 2022**

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## **The Lieutenant-Governor**

The Honourable JAMES ANGUS AO

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Minister for Workplace Safety and Minister for Early Childhood .....	The Hon. I Stitt MLC
Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Regional Development .....	The Hon. M Thomas MP
Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs .....	The Hon. G Williams MP
Minister for Planning and Minister for Housing .....	The Hon. RW Wynne MP
Cabinet Secretary .....	Ms S Kilkenny MP

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**FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION**

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**Deputy Speaker**

Ms JM EDWARDS

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The Hon. DM ANDREWS

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

The Hon. JA MERLINO

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

The Hon. MJ GUY

**Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party**

Mr DJ SOUTHWICK

**Leader of The Nationals and Deputy Leader of the Opposition**

The Hon. PL WALSH

**Deputy Leader of The Nationals**

Ms SM RYAN

**Leader of the House**

Ms JM ALLAN

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Ms LE STALEY

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

*Parliamentary Services:* Secretary: Ms T Burrows

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**FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION**

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Addison, Ms Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Maas, Mr Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Allan, Ms Jacinta Marie	Bendigo East	ALP	McCurdy, Mr Timothy Logan	Ovens Valley	Nats
Andrews, Mr Daniel Michael	Mulgrave	ALP	McGhie, Mr Stephen John	Melton	ALP
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Kilkenny, Ms Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wynne, Mr Richard William	Richmond	ALP

**PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

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

## **Legislative Assembly committees**

### **Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee**

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

### **Environment and Planning Standing Committee**

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

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

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

### **Privileges Committee**

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

### **Standing Orders Committee**

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

## **Joint committees**

### **Dispute Resolution Committee**

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

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

### **Electoral Matters Committee**

*Assembly:* Ms Hall, Dr Read and Mr Rowswell.

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

### **House Committee**

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

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

### **Integrity and Oversight Committee**

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

*Council:* Mr Grimley and Ms Shing.

### **Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee**

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

*Council:* Mr Bourman, Ms Crozier, Mr Erdogan and Ms Shing.

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

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

*Council:* Mrs McArthur and Ms Taylor.

### **Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**

*Assembly:* Mr Burgess, Ms Connolly and Mr Morris.

*Council:* Ms Patten and Ms Watt.

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**Thursday, 10 February 2022**

**The SPEAKER (Hon. Colin Brooks) took the chair at 9.32 am and read the prayer.**

**Announcements****ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

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

**Business of the house****ORDERS OF THE DAY**

**The SPEAKER (09:32):** I wish to advise the house that general business, order of the day 8, will be removed from the notice paper unless the member wishing their matter to remain advises the Clerk in writing before 2.00 pm today.

**Documents****DOCUMENTS****Incorporated list as follows:**

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

*Family Violence Protection Act 2008*—Report 2020–21 on the implementation of the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Management Framework

*Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*:

Documents under s 165AQ on the making of pandemic orders implemented on 15 December 2021

Documents under s 165AQ on the variation of pandemic orders implemented on:

20 December 2021

23 December 2021

30 December 2021

6 January 2022

12 January 2022

25 January 2022

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994*—Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 151/2021, 4, 6

Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority (VARTA):

Report 2019–20

Report 2020–21.

**PROCLAMATIONS**—Under Standing Order 177A, the Clerk tabled the following proclamations fixing operative dates:

*Education and Training Reform Amendment (Senior Secondary Pathways Reforms and Other Matters) Act 2021*—Part 2—11 February 2022; Remaining provisions—2 May 2022 (*Gazette S62, 8 February 2022*)

*Liquor Control Reform Amendment Act 2021*—Sections 4(4) (except paragraph (a)), 8, 9, 10, 11(1), (2), (3) and (4), 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19(3) and (4), 39, 41 and 44—15 March 2022 (*Gazette S62, 8 February 2022*).

**Business of the house****ADJOURNMENT**

**Ms ALLAN** (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (09:34): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until Tuesday, 22 February 2022.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Members statements****COVID-19 VACCINATION**

**Mr PALLAS** (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (09:34): I rise to acknowledge the great efforts of the Werribee community in getting vaccinated and striving through the current challenges of the pandemic. The start of 2022 has undoubtedly been difficult for my local community, as it has been for many Victorians. Wyndham's incredible vaccination rate has shown us that the community is willing to overcome the hurdles of the global pandemic and keep each other safe.

I recently joined with Wyndham city councillor Jennie Barrera and members of the Huddle at the home of the Werribee Football Club to acknowledge Western Health's important project to distribute rapid antigen tests to our local CALD communities. Our government is also providing free rapid antigen tests to students and staff at local schools to protect our community and minimise disruption to learning.

We know that testing and vaccination boosters are vital in protecting us during the current omicron wave and slowing the spread of coronavirus. That is why I am pleased that the Andrews Labor government is making third-dose vaccinations accessible for Werribee locals, including those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged. We are making vaccinations available at the Werribee Open Range Zoo through our K-pop program as well as through a number of schools across the Werribee electorate. Targeted and dedicated services such as these are effective in delivering vaccines for those who prefer getting vaccinated in a familiar, tested environment close to home. I sincerely thank the Werribee community for their continued vigilance and resilience.

**BULLEEN ELECTORATE ROADS**

**Mr GUY** (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (09:36): I rise to raise concerns about the government's upgrade around Williamsons Road in Templestowe, which sadly will moonscape vegetation and flush cars down local roads to the detriment of many local residents. This issue has been raised by Manningham City Council, me and locals as well, not just with the government but with the North East Link Program, a number of times. It seems—whether there is unwillingness, an inability or just belligerence in providing any information—residents, the council and even I cannot find any information from any of the authorities or the government as to what indeed is occurring in this space. To treat the residents of Hawtin and Mandella streets and the precincts around them with such disrespect is disgraceful. And sadly it is not a one-off instance with this government; it is a pattern of behaviour.

Just some simple questions: why is large vegetation that acts as a noise-dampening measure being removed for little or no reason along Williamsons Road? Why are new footpaths in this area being built flush to back fences, resulting in major vegetation loss, when new paths have been constructed recently on the other side of the road? Why has it taken months of badgering for the North East Link Program and the government to finally put measures in place to discourage Eltham-bound traffic from using Hawtin Street as a rat run, which has resulted in a suburban street becoming utterly gridlocked? Residents are frustrated; they have had enough. They cannot get answers, the council cannot and I

cannot. This statement is a point of sheer exhaustion by all of us that the government frankly cares about no-one but itself, and it is a point we have also seen play out in the last 24 hours.

#### ALANNAH MCGREGOR

**Ms ALLAN** (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (09:37): I would like to congratulate the Citizen and Young Citizen of the Year, honours awarded by the City of Greater Bendigo each Australia Day. The Citizen of the Year for 2022 is Alannah McGregor. Alannah has worked tirelessly for so many years in our local community, supporting families who have suffered the loss of a loved one as a consequence of suicide. Alannah has her own very deeply personal and tragic experience in this area, and she has taken that experience and given back to our local community in a very generous way that has gone on to help countless others. She has gone about this in a quiet way, she has gone about this in a very considered way, and it was wonderful to see her given this recognition and honour and to see her and her daughter Stacey on Australia Day. I have had the honour of knowing Alannah for a number of years now, having first met her back in the early 2000s following her personal experiences, and I have been pleased to support her annual Suicide Prevention Awareness Network walk to raise funds for suicide prevention.

#### JED ZIMMER

**Ms ALLAN**: I would like to congratulate the Young Citizen of the Year, Jed Zimmer, a young person who has already achieved much, again in the area of helping others with their mental health, working to raise funds and provide support for other young people in our community. They are two outstanding Bendigo people and will serve our city well.

#### GIPPSLAND EAST ELECTORATE ROADS

**Mr T BULL** (Gippsland East) (09:39): The roads in East Gippsland have never been in a worse state. For some time they have been just falling apart. Warning signs abound telling motorists to slow down due to potholes and due to broken pavement. The Great Alpine Road, the Bengworden Road and the Paynesville Road are an absolute disaster. The Bruthen-Nowa Nowa Road—I could go on and on and on. The Stratford-Maffra Road—pavement breaking up. Now, with government cutbacks to road maintenance funding, there is no surprise this is happening. We need that funding restored, and we need roads built to a standard where the contractors know they are going to last. They are building them to a standard at the moment, because of the tenders that go out, that they know will not stand the test of time. And then we get these flimsy, weak patch-up jobs that are not long term, and they are back there again and again and again. It is time VicRoads gets fully funded and that work is done properly.

#### THURRA RIVER BRIDGE

**Mr T BULL**: The other issue I want to raise is the Thurra River bridge. Four years it is going to take to repair. I have heard from a number of locals. We had been told it was fire damage. I am now told a piece of heavy machinery, trying to be taken across that bridge, made it collapse. I see the minister here. My community wants an explanation of what really happened to that bridge, and we want the time frame of four years to repair it brought forward.

#### SILVIO PITRUZZELLO, OAM

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (09:40): I rise to congratulate Mr Silvio Pitruzzello on being awarded an Order of Australia Medal for his service and dedication to the dairy and primary industries. Mr Pitruzzello is the general manager of Pantalica Cheese in Thomastown and vice-president of the Italian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Melbourne. As a member of Parliament and proud member of the Italian community, I have known Mr Pitruzzello and his family for more than 20 years.

Silvio showed his passion for the cheesemaking business very early in his life. He started helping his father, Sebastiano, making cheese at the age of nine. Together with his father, he has achieved recognition for the cheese production industry not just in Victoria but across Australia. Mr Pitruzzello

is a successful businessman, which he achieved by hard work and dedication from humble beginnings. Like his family, Silvio is a humble man, and he has helped many causes throughout his journey. Along with his family, he has always been very generous in the Italian community. They have been great supporters of a range of community organisations and charitable causes. These include fundraising for the Cabrini Foundation, the Cabrini Italians of Melbourne and Guide Dogs Victoria, just to name a few. Mr Pitruzzello is another fine example of the immense contribution our migrant communities have made to Victoria, and continue to do so, through the generations. I want to congratulate Silvio for his achievement. It is a well-deserved award, one that I know his family are very proud of and all of us are very proud of. I wish him great strength for the future.

#### CLYDE NORTH MOBILE PHONE COVERAGE

**Mr BATTIN** (Gembrook) (09:42): Mobile phones these days are no longer just a way to communicate, they are part of our life. They are the way that we can do work and the way that we can get access to education. They are entirely part of our life now and an essential part of our life. It is disappointing that in Clyde North there are so many parts of that community—a new community—that have zero access to mobile phones at the moment. Telstra, if you look on their maps, will say 4G is green the whole way through Clyde North. I can assure you an amount of people are coming into my office now that area is coming into the new electorate of Berwick and complaining about the fact that they cannot get access on their mobile phones—they drop out.

At the moment more and more people are working from home. This is a problem that needs to be fixed. Telstra, Vodafone, Optus—I do not care who goes down there and has a look at it. I have promised on behalf of my community I will contact all of those telecommunications organisations and ensure we can get it back. Young children are doing education from home. Whilst they are at home they are expected to be on laptops. Most of them will be using a mobile phone these days as a hotspot or having something on their phone to connect through to the system. It is so unfair that kids in these areas, when they are moving in, do not have access to vital services for education. If they are at home in isolation for seven days, they should have the same access that every other student has. You cannot develop these areas and then not give them the infrastructure to make sure they can survive in a modern world.

#### AUSTRALIA DAY AWARDS

**Mr CARBINES** (Ivanhoe—Minister for Child Protection and Family Services, Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers) (09:43): I would like to acknowledge the Australia Day honours award recipients, in particular David and Janet Bryar. A couple of years ago I was at a 50-year celebration of their work for the 1st Ivanhoe Sea Scouts, and even on that day David had been at Sandringham with the Sea Scouts in the morning and Jan was on her way back from a lunch at Camp Warringal in Whittlesea. They do not stop, and I am really pleased that they have been acknowledged with OAMs for their over half a century of work for and commitment to young people through 1st Ivanhoe Sea Scouts.

Nathalie Cook from Banyule Community Health service was recognised for her services to dietetics, Dr Ziad Nehme of Rosanna was awarded an Ambulance Service Medal and Christine Mackenzie was recognised for significant services to librarianship and to professional associations through her leadership roles. I knew Christine, as you did, Speaker, in her role and our role as board members of the Yarra Plenty library service.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the Honourable Bronwyn Pike, a former member for Melbourne. For a decade I worked with her on her ministerial staff, and now I have the opportunity to work with her in her role as CEO of UnitingCare in my ministerial responsibilities. She has received an OAM for her significant service to social welfare, not-for-profit organisations and her continued work for vulnerable people. I am really thankful and grateful that the Honourable Bronwyn Pike is a recipient of an OAM, and also the Honourable Maxine Morand.

**LGBTIQA+ EQUALITY**

**Mr HIBBINS** (Pahran) (09:45): As a progressive politician I would have thought choosing between protecting trans and gay students and teachers and supporting Scott Morrison would be a pretty easy decision, yet disgracefully the Liberals' religious discrimination bill passed federal Parliament last night with the help of Labor and so-called moderate Liberals. Protecting LGBTI students and teachers from discrimination has been a passion of mine since I was first elected, and it was so pleasing to see that we got legislation and change here at the state level last year. The fact that this could be overridden and undermined and the hard-won gains of the LGBT communities here in Victoria could be overridden by federal legislation is absolutely appalling. This needs to stop. Equality must be for all.

**STONNINGTON HEALING CEREMONY**

**Mr HIBBINS**: I want to thank the Wurundjeri traditional owners and Stonnington council for the healing ceremony that they put on on 26 January this year. It was an insightful, warm ceremony. I was so pleased that children, including my own, were able to take part. Apparently Pauline Hanson has a problem with this. Well, let me tell you, if Pauline Hanson has a problem with it, you know you are doing something right. I want to thank the traditional owners. I want to thank Stonnington council for putting on that healing ceremony, and I look forward to attending a similar event next year.

**GRAPE EXPLORATIONS AUSTRALIA**

**Ms KILKENNY** (Carrum) (09:46): Congratulations to Michael Aveson and Oscar Orellana of Grape Explorations Australia for winning silver at the Victorian Tourism Awards last week. What an outstanding achievement for this wonderful local business, and what a superb acknowledgement of their business and service excellence and their passion for creating amazing experiences and incredible memories for visitors to some of the most beautiful boutique and family-run wineries as well as the grand vineyards and cellar doors of the Mornington Peninsula and Yarra Valley.

**LGBTIQA+ EQUALITY**

**Ms KILKENNY**: To our LGBTIQA+ community, their families, friends and loved ones, here in Victoria equality is not negotiable. We love you just the way you are. Religious faith should never be put above other rights—the right to feel included, protected, safe and equal under the law.

And as for our kids, they are not born discriminatory. Discrimination is learned from the grown-ups around them. Sadly, tragically and unacceptably, this includes many of our leaders. Diversity is amazing. It is positive, it is strong and it enriches us all. Together we must support it in all its forms—stand up for it, nurture it and affirm it—and above all remind everyone that equality here in Victoria is not negotiable.

**SEAFORD PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**Ms KILKENNY**: Congratulations to the 2022 school leadership team at Seaford Primary School: Mia, Daniel, Kalen, Evie, Lindsay, Mia, Max, Indi, Lexie, Astrid, Levi, Samuel, Ryan, Melissa, Jesse, Jarrah, Ryda, Hamish, Derek, Jessica and Owen. You will do us proud this year.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

**Mr RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (09:48): I rise this morning to put on the record the very concerning feedback I am getting in the role of Shadow Minister for Local Government, and that feedback is universal across the state. There is a genuine concern amongst residents and ratepayers from one end of Victoria to the other—in the metropolitan areas, in the larger regional provincial towns and in our small rural communities. There is a series of themes emerging, and one is that there is a great concern about rates inequity. The inequity in rates now in Victoria is almost obscene. A home in some parts of Melbourne at a certain value will be charged around \$300. For that same home in another part of

Victoria, you could be paying nearly \$4000. There is no justice in the rating inequity that currently exists here in the state of Victoria.

There is great concern about governance and accountability of councillors. People in the community want clear direction about what their councils and councillors are responsible for and who they are ultimately responsible to. There is a real concern in many shires particularly and less so in metropolitan areas around economic sustainability going forward. There are huge infrastructure demands, and capacity to replace and maintain assets is diminishing by the year. So it will be incumbent upon this government and future governments to look seriously at the need for proper local government reform and rejuvenation.

### DOHERTYS CREEK P-9 COLLEGE

**Ms CONNOLLY** (Tarneit) (09:49): As we welcomed teachers, parents and students back to school last week, I could not think of a more fantastic way to commemorate the new year than to celebrate the opening of the much-loved Dohertys Creek P-9 College to middle school students this year, starting with year 7. It seems like only yesterday I was opening the school for the first time to families in Truganina and their wonderful children, but three years have passed since, and it has been an absolute joy to see that school community grow. So many parents and year 6 students over the years have asked and begged for me to be able to deliver the funding and build that second stage of the school so they could stay and complete years 7 to 9. Well, I was so happy in 2020 when I got the call for an \$11.23 million capital upgrade as part of the building works package to deliver stage 2, and I am so proud to say that those doors are finally open. Year 7 students started last week. It is fantastic to see Dohertys Creek finally live up to its name and become a P-9 college, and I look forward to working with the new principal, Tami-Jo Richter, to deliver for the school community for the many years to come. Thank you so much to all the parents and their children for advocating for this funding to deliver stage 2—we heard you, we listened to you, and the doors are now open. I also want to give a big shout-out to Ian Wren, who advocated so fiercely for this.

### MILDURA TONGAN COMMUNITY

**Ms CUPPER** (Mildura) (09:51): The recent volcanic eruption and tsunami near Tonga has had a deep and lasting impact on our community. Our electorate has the highest proportion of Tongan people of any regional area in our state, and the fear and uncertainty in the immediate aftermath of this event caused significant pain and hardship. Tongan communities in Mildura, Robinvale Irymple, Colignan, Nichols Point and Red Cliffs were all deeply concerned about what was happening to family and friends overseas.

Close to a decade ago a proposal led by former mayor Peter Byrne, OAM and members of the local Tongan community was brought before Mildura Rural City Council to make Mildura a sister city with the Tongan capital Nuku'alofa. It could have provided many benefits to the nation through partnerships in education and policing and especially in health. Remarkably and very sadly Tonga's health system does not have the capacity to provide dialysis services to the high numbers of people living with diabetes. A sister-city partnership would provide a foundation for deep, meaningful and long-term healthcare partnerships that would be enormously beneficial to our close Pacific neighbour. The sister-city proposal was ultimately declined by council at that time, but I am working with our local Tongan community council, the Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council and other stakeholders to see if the idea could be reconsidered. The discussion has been enthusiastically received by the Tongan community and indeed the broader community, and we are hopeful for a good outcome this time.

### SUNBURY ELECTORATE INFRASTRUCTURE

**Mr J BULL** (Sunbury) (09:52): It is great to be back in the Parliament and great to be delivering for my fantastic electorate. 2022 promises to be a huge year locally as we get on and remove the dangerous and congested Sunbury level crossing, build a brand new 600-space multideck car park in

the station precinct, start the Sunbury Road duplication, plan for future Calder Freeway upgrades and the future Bulla bypass project as well as upgrading a huge number of local schools, sports clubs and community facilities. We will continue to invest in these important local projects, and we will continue to get things done.

I was also delighted to receive information from the Minister for Local Government recently that on top of \$31 million that have been allocated to 35 projects across Hume City Council from the Growing Suburbs Fund, four additional projects have been included to be delivered in my electorate: \$350 000 to upgrade Sunbury Park, including new seating and playground equipment; \$260 000 for a ninja course and fitness exercise area at the Forrest Street Reserve, Speaker, which you are always welcome to come and visit; \$256 000 for a new playground and landscaping at Village Green reserve in Rolling Meadows; and just short of \$190 000 to upgrade the Westmeadows shopping precinct with new car-park lighting and landscaping. This is a terrific fund. I completely support the Growing Suburbs Fund, and we will continue to get things done.

### ALBURY WODONGA HEALTH

**Mr TILLEY** (Benambra) (09:54): In this house we are constantly suffering through Labor gaslighting our hardworking medical staff and services. Well, as we say on this side, look at what they do and not what they say. The most pressing issue for Albury Wodonga Health, the public hospital that straddles both New South Wales and Victoria, is for a major funding injection to meet that demand. We have a catchment of about 300 000 people. We have an emergency department presentation that is in excess of all but Geelong in regional Victoria, and the two campuses of Albury Wodonga Health are groaning under that pressure. We were promised a master plan in September last year. That became December, and then we were told this document was in the sole possession of the Victorian Minister for Health and he would provide it at his leisure. He needs to read the room. The minister now has a letter signed by border medicos that says the current hospital situation is dangerous and poses a significant clinical risk.

This is not a political game. These are people's lives. Labor's reluctance to fund any meaningful capital works at Albury Wodonga Health should be an embarrassment to the current Victorian Premier, one of the significant signatories on the document that created this important single health service in regional Victoria and southern New South Wales. This government needs to release the master plan now and make whatever preparation it needs to fund the new hospital.

### BROADMEADOWS ELECTORATE FUNDING

**Mr McGuire** (Broadmeadows) (09:55): Small investments are invaluable and urgent to save lives and livelihoods, revive our economy, create opportunity and deliver prosperity. We know the pandemic stalks inequality, therefore the most significant needs-based investment is only \$79 million for the hospital upgrade in Broadmeadows, the epicentre for outbreaks, with statewide lockdowns costing \$1 billion weekly. The added value in the plan I am proposing is that it will relieve the highest number of patients attending the emergency department and ambulance ramping in this state, at the Northern Hospital. The health centre of excellence demands more funding for Kangan Institute to combine training for nurses and allied health workers where they are needed most.

My campaign for needs-based funding will continue, and I also want to make sure we fix the Broadmeadows railway station, because that is a critical catalyst. Cabinet ministers have publicly called me the relentless Frank McGuire. I wear that label with honour because I am relentless with a cause: confronting inequality, creating opportunity and delivering prosperity.

### STATE ELECTION

**Mr McGuire**: The preselection process for this year's state election in Victoria was manipulated. So were the media. The technique used was to falsely link me to the factional group Victoria's IBAC is investigating. This was wrong, misled the public, misled the national executive members and damaged my reputation. This must be addressed. As the first person raised in Broadmeadows to

represent this community, humbled by getting the highest number of primary votes from the community, I confronted the faceless men to make them address this issue. This needs to be changed and it needs to be fixed.

### LUNAR NEW YEAR

**Mr TAK** (Clarinda) (09:57): I send my best wishes to all those celebrating the Lunar New Year in 2022. The Lunar New Year, and with it the spirit of renewal and hope, is something that has resonated with all Victorians. It is something that we as Victorians can celebrate in the spirit of togetherness. It is a wonderful time of the year and a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the contribution of our many diverse communities in our state and nation. Along with the hardworking member for Oakleigh, I was delighted to join the celebration last week with the Australia & China Music Communication & Promotion Association, the Melbourne Cloud Concert and DanDi Talks. Thank you to all the participants, representatives and community leaders. It was also a wonderful celebration of culture and heritage, from the Springvale temple to the Bright Moon temple in Springvale South. We could still hear the dragon dancing and firecrackers for almost two weeks. The spirit of sharing and acceptance is so important in our wonderfully diverse state, where almost half of Victorians either were born overseas or have parents born overseas. We really are a multicultural success story, thanks to the many waves of migrants who have settled here with open hearts and minds. So to everyone celebrating, I wish you a very happy New Year, the Year of the Tiger.

### CAROL BLAIR

**Ms CRUGNALE** (Bass) (09:58): Incalculable with their generosity of spirit, perpetual in their compassion towards others and relentless in their civic service—today I pay tribute to three extraordinary people who are all heart, all community. Carol Blair, Bass Coast Citizen of the Year, was recognised for her countless hours of volunteering in a myriad of local organisations and committees. She was instrumental in the journey to childcare services at Bass Valley, is chair of the Bass Coast Community Foundation and is now focused on their Women for Change program to enrich the quality of life of women and girls. A mentor for many, a voice for others, a strategic navigator of systems and processes—her work towards an inclusive, serviced, welcoming and equal society is far from done.

### ARSHU MASKEY

**Ms CRUGNALE**: Cardinia Young Citizen of the Year Arshu Maskey is all about helping, inspiring and empowering others. As community service representative leader when at school, she organised blood donation drives and ran activities and events. As a member of the Rotaract club, she raised funds for bushfire relief efforts. A recipient of the Monash University Postgraduate Industry Experience Expo award for creating IT for social good during the pandemic, she now mentors students as part of a Women in Technology program at her uni.

### FLYNN COLLIER

**Ms CRUGNALE**: Casey's Young Citizen of the Year, Flynn Collier, Hillcrest Christian College's 2021 school captain, made everyone feel included and valued, regardless of their background, gender or sexuality. Beyond the school gates, on the Youth Action Committee, he delivered projects themed around wellbeing, climate change and education. Future volunteering includes a short film about eating disorders— (*Time expired*)

### SURF COAST SHIRE PLANNING

**Mr CHEESEMAN** (South Barwon) (10:00): The other week the Liberal leader and the member for Polwarth visited my electorate and proved once again how out of touch they are with my constituents. On development in the Surf Coast the member for Polwarth said:

We can't end up with enclaves worth millions and millions of dollars just for the people who got here first ... the opportunity exists to open up new areas.



These dismissive comments just show how out of touch the member for Polwarth is with the people of Torquay and Jan Juc and the long-running campaign they have been running against excessive development in their part of the state for over a decade. It is also clear from his comments that Matthew Guy continues to support developers in wanting to see Spring Creek opened up for further housing. The opposition leader, when he was the Minister for Planning, advocated strongly for 3000 additional houses to be constructed in the Spring Creek valley, and his views have evidently not changed. Both Matthew Guy and Richard Riordan are out of touch with local communities in expressing directly what the developers want to see for the Spring Creek valley.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I remind members to call members by their correct titles.

### LUNAR NEW YEAR

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh) (10:01): I had the pleasure of attending a number of local events last week to celebrate Lunar New Year. This included the global Chinese New Year online gala organised by the Australia & China Music Communication & Promotion Association. The event was remarkable for a number of reasons but in particular because the organisation and performances were done by a group of 11- to 14-year-olds. Most of us in this place will have experienced the challenges of organising virtual meetings. It is tough enough just to master the technology for a meeting, let alone having to cater for hundreds of attendees and balance music and dance performances and speeches, but this event was brilliantly coordinated. It was an amazing presentation of Chinese culture, and I want to express my gratitude to the organisers for including me in their celebrations.

I was also very excited to host, along with my colleague and friend the member for Clarinda, as he just stated in his members statement, local community leaders for a virtual gathering to welcome the new year. It was a sensational event. We had people from a number of backgrounds: Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore and China. It was a fitting platform to acknowledge the contributions that they have made not only during the pandemic but to our country, bringing thousands of years of heritage and culture to our beautiful way of life here in Victoria. Thank you to those who attended, and I want to wish a very happy Year of the Tiger to everyone celebrating.

### CRIME PREVENTION

**Ms HUTCHINS** (Sydenham—Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (10:03): We know that disadvantage is one of the biggest drivers of crime. Whether that is seen in a lack of opportunity, no safe home to live in, addiction or isolation from one's community, the odds are stacked against many vulnerable people. As the member for Sydenham and the Minister for Youth Justice and Minister for Corrections I am aware of this acutely. Not only does it cost people the opportunity of a great life but it costs government—lives that could be more and funding that could just do more. Just have a read of an article in the *Age* from January about David Wendon and the positive outcomes from his involvement with the Compass care leavers program run by Anglicare and VincentCare. He discussed how the program saw social workers get involved in his life to make sure he got back on track. He said it made a massive difference in his life, and this was a big step and a massive change in the way government delivers its services.

Investing early is the champion through which the Treasurer's early intervention framework is being delivered in a coordinated way that we know will make a difference to people's lives. That is why we have the better connected care program that I am closely working with the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services on. It aims to improve life outcomes for those frequently in need of government services. By working in more coordinated and intensive ways we can improve outcomes for the most vulnerable Victorians who need to use them. Things like personally tailored plans to help people connect and navigate— (*Time expired*)

**Business of the house****NOTICES OF MOTION**

**Ms HORNE** (Williamstown—Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (10:04): I advise that the government does not wish to proceed with notice of motion 1, government business, today and ask that it remain on the notice paper.

**Bills****ALPINE RESORTS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022***Statement of compatibility*

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (10:05): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Alpine Resorts Legislation Amendment Bill 2022.

**Opening paragraphs**

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (the 'Charter'), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Alpine Resorts Legislation Amendment Bill 2022.

In my opinion, the Alpine Resorts Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 (the Bill), as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

**Overview**

The Bill amends the *Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997* to repeal the establishment of the Alpine Resort Management Boards and the Alpine Resorts Co-ordinating Council by that Act and to establish Alpine Resorts Victoria. The Bill also makes related amendments to the *Emergency Management Act 2013*, *Forests Act 1958* and the *Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2021)* to address the establishment of the new entity.

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

The Charter sets out the rights, freedoms and responsibilities of people in Victoria. The Bill establishes a new government entity and sets out the governance arrangements, functions, powers and duties of Alpine Resorts Victoria and the management of, and strategic planning for, Victoria's six alpine resorts.

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

- The right to take part in public life in section 18 of the Charter; and
- Cultural rights in section 19 of the Charter.

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

***Section 18 [Taking part in public life]***

Section 18 of the Charter provides that every person in Victoria has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to participate in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives. It further provides that every eligible person has the right and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination to have access, on general terms of equality, to the Victorian public service and public office.

Clause 16, which inserts a new proposed Part 3 into the Act, provides for the appointment of directors to the board. In determining appointments, the Minister is to consider a person's skills, qualifications, knowledge and experience. Clause 16 of the Bill also provides for the circumstances in which a member of the board can resign, be removed or the office becomes vacant. The appointment requirements outlined in the Bill are reasonable, objective and do not engage any attribute protected against discrimination or conduct constituting discrimination under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* that is also discrimination under the Charter. Further, although clause 16 may be viewed as restricting a person's right to take part in public life, any limitation imposed by these provisions are justified in that they facilitate good corporate governance and hold members to account for their responsibilities as members of the board.

Accordingly, the Bill is compatible with the right to take part in public life under section 18 of the Charter.

**Section 19 [Cultural rights]**

Section 19 of the Charter recognises that Aboriginal persons hold distinct cultural rights and must not be denied the right, with other members of their community to enjoy their identity and culture, maintain and use their language, maintain their kinship ties and to maintain their distinctive spiritual, material and economic relationship with the land and waters and other resources with which they have a connection under tradition laws and customs.

Clause 5 of the Bill recognises traditional owners as the original custodians in the land in alpine resorts and their spiritual, social cultural and economic relationship with that land. While the Bill makes it clear that the new provision is not intended to provide for any additional rights or give rise to any civil cause of action, neither does it impact on the rights of aboriginal people under the Charter.

As the Bill does not adversely engage any human rights protected by the Charter, I am satisfied that the Bill is compatible with the Charter and, if any rights are limited, those limitations are reasonable and demonstrably justified having regard to the factors in section 7(2) of the Charter.

**Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP,  
Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change**

*Second reading*

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (10:06): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

**Incorporated speech as follows:****Traditional Owners**

I acknowledge all Traditional Owners and First Nations peoples and I pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

I also acknowledge the close cultural and spiritual connection to Victoria's alpine country maintained by Victoria's first peoples. Groups with formal recognition and Registered Aboriginal Party status over the areas of Victoria's six alpine resorts are:

- Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation
- Taungurung Land and Waters Council
- Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation

Other groups that care for and have connection to the Victorian high country include the:

- Dhudhuroa Waywurru Nations Aboriginal Corporation
- Duduroa Dhargal Aboriginal Corporation
- Dalka Warra Mittung Aboriginal Corporation
- Jaithmathang Traditional Ancestral Bloodline Original Owners First Nation Aboriginal Corporation

**The resorts are unique**

Victoria's six alpine resorts—Falls Creek, Lake Mountain, Mount Baw Baw, Mount Buller, Mount Hotham and Mount Stirling—are unique places that make an extraordinary contribution to our state and to our regional communities.

They are places where more than a million visitors each year come to participate in one-of-a-kind experiences while enjoying breathtaking scenery and precious alpine environments. Visitors can experience a full range of snow-based activities in the winter months and are increasingly enjoying the resorts in the warmer months, for activities such as bushwalking, mountain biking and food and music festivals.

Each resort has its own history and special places, its own stakeholders and regular visitors, its own strengths and its own challenges.

Collectively, the six alpine resorts—Falls Creek, Lake Mountain, Mount Baw Baw, Mount Buller, Mount Hotham and Mount Stirling—are significant recreational and tourism assets for this state, contributing nearly \$1.1 billion each year to the Victorian economy and sustaining nearly ten thousand jobs.

**Challenges and opportunities**

The very qualities that make alpine resorts such enjoyable places to visit—their remoteness, their exposure to the elements and their location high in the Victorian alps—also present challenges.

The cost of establishing infrastructure or operating a business in resorts is high when compared to other towns or regions that primarily depend on tourism.

Alpine areas are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Whether through reduced snowfall or more frequent and more intense weather events such as storms and bushfires, we need to be managing Victoria's alpine resorts in a way that addresses these challenges head on and safeguards the resorts for future generations of visitors to enjoy.

Snow making and other snow management techniques provide a buffer against these impacts but cannot completely address all the risks associated with a changing climate.

Climate change is a pervasive, long-term challenge that requires a coordinated approach.

Over the past few years, the Victorian alpine resorts have been undertaking various adaptive approaches to ensure long term sustainable operations across 12 months of the year. This has included working with local businesses to provide an increasingly wide variety of green season products, services, events and activities designed to encourage Victorians to visit the alpine regions in the summer months.

Whilst this has long been an aspiration of the alpine resorts, to truly unlock their potential as year-round tourism destinations requires improved coordination, strategic planning and significant investment.

In 2020 and 2021 the alpine industry was particularly badly affected by the impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Restrictions to safeguard public health led to significantly reduced visitation during the winter months, the period when resorts and businesses are usually at their busiest and most profitable.

As a result, all alpine resort management boards have drawn down on their cash reserves and are now dependent on support from the Victorian Government. The Victorian Government also worked quickly to provide targeted support programs and relief schemes for alpine businesses.

**Alpine Resorts Victoria**

The Victorian Government is committed to supporting the economic recovery and long term financial sustainability of the alpine sector.

The Alpine Resorts Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 will establish a single entity, Alpine Resorts Victoria, to manage all six resorts and provide strategic leadership to the sector as a whole.

The establishment of Alpine Resorts Victoria will achieve savings through improved coordination, efficiencies of scale and reduction of duplication. It will build capability to undertake integrated, strategic and sector-wide planning for the common challenges faced by the resorts, including those associated with climate change, and help the sector recover from the pandemic and recent bushfires.

Timely and effective adaptation to climate change will help minimise the social and economic impact of climate change in resort communities and realise the economic benefits of new opportunities for alpine businesses, positioning alpine resorts as attractive places to visit, invest and live all year round.

**Overview of the Bill**

The primary purpose of this Bill is to amend the *Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997* to establish Alpine Resorts Victoria as the entity responsible for managing Victoria's six alpine resorts—Falls Creek, Lake Mountain, Mount Baw Baw, Mount Buller, Mount Hotham and Mount Stirling.

The Bill proposes the inclusion of a new clause recognising the intrinsic connection of Victoria's First Peoples to the land and waters covered by alpine resorts.

Alpine Resorts Victoria is to be governed by a board of up to nine members, appointed on the basis of their collective skills, qualifications, knowledge and experience. Importantly, the Bill proposes that the board must include cultural knowledge and authority arising from experience as a traditional owner of land in alpine resorts.

Alpine Resorts Victoria's functions will be broadly comparable to those of existing alpine resort management boards. It will assume responsibility for the periodic development of an alpine resort strategic plan from the Alpine Resorts Co-ordinating Council.

New principles have been developed to which Alpine Resorts Victoria must have regard when performing their functions or exercising their powers under the Act. Amongst other matters, these principles emphasise the importance of protecting the unique environmental, social, cultural and economic characteristics of each alpine resort, adapting and responding to the impacts and risks of climate change, diversifying the tourism

and recreation experiences on offer and partnering with Traditional Owners in policy development, planning and decision making.

To ensure Alpine Resorts Victoria works effectively with alpine businesses and stakeholders, the Bill requires Alpine Resorts Victoria to establish a stakeholder consultative committee at each resort. Amongst other matters, the Bill requires Alpine Resorts Victoria to seek input from stakeholder consultative committees on matters relating to contributions for service charges and fees.

The responsible Minister will be able to issue Alpine Resorts Victoria with a ministerial direction or issue a statement of obligations. Any such instrument will be required to be published in the Government Gazette and on the ARV website in the interests of transparency.

Necessarily, the legislation provides for the abolition of the four existing boards, the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board, the Falls Creek Alpine Resort Board, the Mount Hotham Alpine Resort Management Board and the Southern Alpine Resort Management Board that manages both Lake Mountain and Mount Baw Baw. I thank all current and past board members for their service.

The Alpine Resorts Co-ordinating Council will also be abolished and again I would like to thank all current and past Council members for their service. The functions of the Alpine Resorts Co-ordinating Council will be undertaken by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and by Alpine Resorts Victoria as required.

The Bill provides for various sundry matters to support a smooth transition to the new entity. All rights, property, assets, liabilities, obligations and staff of the alpine resort management boards will transfer to Alpine Resorts Victoria. This includes any leases, contracts and agreements entered into by those entities.

#### **Summary**

In summary, alpine resort management arrangements are currently fragmented and lack coordination, with no over-arching plan or single authority to provide strategic leadership to the sector.

This Bill seeks to establish a single, modern and fit-for-purpose entity to manage Victoria's six alpine resorts, building the financial sustainability of this important sector as it responds to the impact of climate change on alpine communities.

The proposed amendments have been developed in consultation with a range of stakeholders, including existing alpine resort management boards, alpine businesses, Traditional Owners, local governments and tourism bodies. I would like to thank all those people and organisations for sharing their insights and ideas and I look forward to that continued engagement as we transition to the new Alpine Resorts Victoria.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:06):** I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Thursday, 24 February.**

### **REGULATORY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2021**

#### *Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Mr PEARSON:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:07):** I rise to speak on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2021. This is an omnibus bill. It covers a variety of issues that are loosely held together under the umbrella of streamlining regulation. Though some of the proposed measures are not contentious, others are highly dangerous measures that have been slipped into the bill under the guise of being benign.

For background and in summary, changes are being made in response to the pandemic, including things like making changes to online meetings and AGMs, fee relief to accommodate loss of earnings and changes in relation to tobacco inspectors. There are also changes in relation to the world becoming more digital. Those changes relate to legislative requirements for public notices, a matter that I will be speaking about later; electoral maps being moved online; and changes in relation to pharmacies. There

are also changes being made in relation to the teaching crisis in Victoria—changes in relation to the registration process, and I will speak about that matter later too. Finally, in substance, significant changes are being proposed to the electoral process—electoral reform—some of which include clarifying the number of posters that can be displayed, bans on mobile billboard advertising and, most dangerously, changes being made to the postal voting process, and I will speak about that in substance. There are also some other changes in relation to some tidying up.

A month ago President Biden gave a speech on protecting the right to vote, and in that speech he said:

... for the right to vote and to have that vote counted is democracy's threshold liberty. Without it, nothing is possible, but with it, anything is possible.

And further, to them—the 'them' he was referring to were people undermining, in his view, that right:

... too many people voting in a democracy is a problem. So they're putting up obstacles.

These electoral reforms proposed to postal voting are designed to create an obstacle to postal voting in Victoria. They are aimed at bastardising the availability of vote information and options available, including options and information available to the elderly and to the disabled—groups we know are the parts of the community that most benefit from the option of postal voting. If I can use an analogy we will all understand, the postal voting reforms proposed in this bill are designed to run sandpaper over the Victorian electoral cricket ball. They are aimed at squeezing the life out of postal voting. We will oppose this bill, and in government we will restore those rights for the community.

Almost 1 million people in Victoria receive information at each election about postal voting, primarily through political parties providing an application form to the community. Parties provide information to the community, and to a small degree—a very small degree—information is provided through the Victorian Electoral Commission. The best part of 1 million people at a state election would receive information that way and the electoral commission would provide information to, as it currently stands, roughly 80 000 people. 80 000 people are registered for a permanent postal vote and almost 1 million people receive information—paid for by the parties, mind you, not paid for by the taxpayer—through that process. This bill proposes to stop almost 1 million people receiving that information and cut it down to the 80 000 people or anybody who gets added to that list prior to the election. It is extraordinary and, as I started with, it flies in the face of what is happening in democratic systems around the world. It flies in the face of what other major countries, like the United States, are doing. In fact the United States is currently battling on these very issues, fighting on these very issues, and I will come back to that later.

To give some background further to those statistics on postal voting, of all votes cast at the last election 7.6 per cent were postal votes. There were roughly 3.5 million votes cast—3.7 million if you include everything that was knocked off—and 281 000 were cast via postal vote. So almost 300 000 people cast their vote by post. Think about that. Almost 300 000 people cast their vote by post, and the electoral commission has a list of 80 000 people.

You can see the difference between what the electoral commission will provide if these reforms are approved by the Parliament: the gap is not even a third compared with how many people cast their vote by post. And I think we all expect, and know, that the number of people who will vote prior to election day will only substantially increase. I understand the Australian Electoral Commission is anticipating half of all voters at the federal election will vote prior to election day, and we can all probably expect at least a similar number in Victoria. At the last election almost 300 000 people cast their vote by post, and we can expect a significant increase in all forms of prior-to-election-day voting. This reform will clearly put a dampener on that. It will bastardise that process.

Interestingly, out of the 3.5 million voters there were 119 complaints about postal voting. Even if you look at the almost 300 000 people that cast their vote by post, the number of complaints about postal voting was tiny, infinitesimally small, and we see proof of that point in the satisfaction rate of people who cast their vote by post. In fact postal voters were some of the most satisfied people of all voters

in information provided by the electoral commission to this Parliament in a prior committee. Postal voters were happy with the process.

We also know that postal voting is on the increase. There was almost a static number change at the last election, but there certainly has been over time a substantial increase. And interestingly enough, the electoral commission noted that part of that increase—and I will refer to their submission to the committee of this Parliament:

... was due to the fact that some political parties had distributed information encouraging people over the age of 70 to apply for ...

general postal vote status. The electoral commission confirmed that especially for people over the age of 70 there was an increase in participation because political parties had distributed information encouraging people to vote. And Labor knows that. The government knows that. That is what these reforms are about—these reforms are targeted political reforms to undermine the anti-Labor vote.

I mentioned earlier that under these reforms there will be significant restrictions on the way people can receive postal vote application information both through the list currently held by the electoral commission, which the commission advises me is 80 000 people, roughly speaking, and through Australia Post. Well, the electoral commission has advised the Parliament that ‘very few obtained their postal vote application from the post office’. It was 5 per cent at the last election.

When I asked in government briefings, noting this enormous reduction in information provided to the community, provided to the elderly, provided to the CALD communities, how this policy reform will address those concerns and what the election commission will do—I asked on notice for that information to be provided—you will be surprised to hear that the government did not answer that question. They have not answered the question. In the briefing their initial response was, ‘The CALD community can find out when they go to the post office to pick up an application form, and there could be alternative languages on the back of the form’. So they can find out they can apply when they fall into a post office, accidentally come across an application form, turn it around and perhaps find a language that they can read. I mean, you would almost have to fluke it, because only 5 per cent obtain their postal vote application through the post office anyway.

**Mr Wakeling** interjected.

**Mr NEWBURY:** They clearly will not know that it is there. It will be a fluke if people in the CALD community find out, and the government has no response—absolutely no response.

I mentioned earlier the number of complaints about postal voting. There were also specific complaints related to postal vote material—77, and I will put that into context. At the last election there was a total of 861 complaints made to the Victorian Electoral Commission, with 77 relating to complaints about political parties distributing postal vote applications—77 of 861. If I can refer to the Electoral Matters Committee report on the last election in relation to postal vote complaints, there was an infinitesimally small number of complaints relating specifically to the material that was provided. Of the 77, from memory five complaints were specific to the material inside. As the VEC said to the committee:

Five complainants were unsure if the material had come from the VEC or the Liberal Party but felt that it must be against the rules.

So of all the complaints received, which were from a very small number of the people who vote—3.5 million people voted, 861 people made a complaint, 77 people made a complaint about postal votes—five complainants were unsure about the difference between the material and a party. Five. On that hook the government has put this reform before the Parliament—using that hook.

We can see the debate going on in the United States at the moment about changes to voting rights. There have been extraordinary changes across the States to voting rights—extraordinary changes. In fact last year there were over 2200 election-related bills introduced into state legislatures. Thirty-eight states enacted at least one voting law reform last year. If you go to Voting Rights Lab’s recent report,

*A Tale of Two Democracies*, 22 states enacted legislation to expand or improve mail voting, two states adopted new voter mail systems and 11 states enacted restrictions to that process, including restricting third-party ballot-related reforms, which is what we are talking about here.

I referred to President Biden's remarks at the start of my contribution. If I can add further to that, and he is specifically talking about state reform here:

And what's been the reaction of Republicans in Georgia? Choose the wrong way, the undemocratic way. To them, too many people voting in a democracy is a problem, so they're putting up obstacles ... voting by mail is a safe and convenient way to get more people to vote, so they're making it harder for you to vote by mail.

'They're making it harder for you to vote by mail'. Further:

That's not America. That's what it looks like when they suppress the right to vote.

That is what this bill does. It is aimed at suppressing the right to vote. By contrast, in New South Wales, with four by-elections this coming weekend the New South Wales government empowered the electoral commission there to provide a postal vote pack to every elector. Talk about a sharp contrast to this state. We are ripping the option away. We are strangling the right—the government is proposing to strangle that right—and in New South Wales they are providing a vote pack to every single voter. And I will note the opposition there has been supportive, and they have also talked about the impact of reforms of this nature on the CALD community. They have been outspoken on that. To know that the government has provided no assurance to those communities—no assurance that they will not be disenfranchised in this state—is disgusting.

We will oppose this bill—we absolutely will oppose this bill—and in government we will restore those rights to the almost, at the last election, 1 million Victorians to receive the information they need to make a decision about how they vote. On this one measure alone Victorians should be concerned. Victorians should be concerned about the pattern of behaviour from this government in undermining democratic institutions, a government with a track record of closing Parliament and trying to kill electorate office attendance. I mean, this government's record on democracy is shameful, absolutely shameful. It is not the only electoral reform. That one is the most pernicious, but there are also other reforms that do not make sense.

The Labor Party, in the committee stage of the 2018 state election inquiry, recommended that mobile billboards have a 100-metre ban from early voting centres, so of course the government has used its parliamentary power to pick that up as a reform in this bill. When questions were asked about that proposed reform and its workability, there were no answers. The proposed law does not provide any discretion; it just says that if a mobile billboard passes the 100-metre space, that is a breach. What about voting centres on main roads? That is a breach. It is a breach. It is totally unworkable.

I will now move to the publication element of the reforms, and this should have every regional member in this place concerned. Anyone who represents a regional community should be deeply, deeply concerned, because in simple terms what this bill does is it moves the publication requirements of certain government matters online.

Has anyone thought about what that does to regional media? Has anyone engaged? Because as far as I have seen, the engagement on this bill has been zip. I think departments have spoken to each other—I am sure that is the case—but regional media partly survives on some of these publications and the capacity for work to be published. And the local communities want it; the local townships want to read about what is happening in their community. I worked for a former Premier who would go back to front of his local newspapers, and he would know every single thing that was happening in that regard. I would refer the chamber to the Leader of the House's comments in this place in June, when she said, with crocodile tears:

... the ongoing decline in the number of regional journalists and regional media outlets that is contributing to an ongoing diminution of the ability for regional communities and regional voices to have their stories told ...

... we are witnessing the ongoing, sad decline of regional media newsrooms.



She then gives a whack to the federal government and says they should be focusing on support for regional journalism and regional newsrooms. I would say to the Leader of the House and the Labor Party: look at your own bill. What crocodile tears! The Leader of the House stood there and through crocodile tears wept for regional media, and then has been part of a cabinet that has spearheaded a knife through regional media. The Victorian Country Press Association wrote yesterday:

Regional news providers across Victoria including our own have deep concerns about—  
this bill—

which will be presented to the Victorian Parliament in tomorrow's sitting.

The reforms, if passed will take away the government legislated mandate for local councils to place their public notice and community information classified in regional Victorian local newspapers, taking away yet another revenue source and effectively negating even more council connection with their local communities. It will also potentially lead to all local government classified advertising migrating to a purpose-built government web platform. This could potentially remove local regional newspapers from receiving any local government advertising. Internet in country areas can be unreliable and unlike city folk, country people rely on their local paper for this information.

The Warragul *Gazette* said:

This Bill amendment I believe is happening tomorrow will be another huge nail in the coffin of regional publishing. The threat is real, that if this bill is passed that we, like many the regional publishers will be hundreds of thousands of dollars in ad revenue down, being redirected to a platform that provides no community interest, no investment in local jobs, no avenue to the community for council and political parties, and removes one of the primary roles a regional newspaper does which is be a source of local news and information for the community we serve.

Well, that is emphatic, isn't it? And where is the Leader of the House now—protecting regional media? Trying to fix a Labor implosion, talking about who has been kicked out of Labor caucus—

**Mr Wakeling** interjected.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Yes, threatening to kick people out of Labor caucus. Instead of standing here talking about, through a members statement, what you think you should say, why don't your actions meet your words instead of doing the exact opposite? This bill will hurt regional media, and every regional member—and as I look around there are very few in the chamber—should touch base with their outlet and ask them what effect this bill will have.

I would finally like to mention the reforms relating to the teacher shortage and quote from media reports:

Almost one in three secondary school teaching jobs in Melbourne's north and west are going unfilled and teachers warn the situation will grow worse amid expected staffing shortages forced by the Omicron wave.

Further:

The Department of Education and Training report reveals specialist subjects including languages and technology are chronically short of qualified teachers, with roughly three in 10 advertised roles resulting in no appointment, while 20 per cent of advertised maths and science roles go unfilled.

And further:

... regions suffer the greatest recruitment challenges.

And where is the shortage? To quote another media report:

... the number of Victorian teachers applying for jobs in Queensland has grown from 0.1 per cent in 2019 to 2.9 per cent this year.

This bill does attempt, almost three years into a pandemic, to address that. There is a crisis, just like there is a crisis in health, and this bill attempts almost three years into a pandemic to do something about it, so perhaps within the next year or two years there will be an effect, with the changes made in this bill. This bill is dangerous. This bill hides dangerous changes to the democratic system in what is being put up as an omnibus bill, a simple omnibus bill that makes regulatory reform. How many media

releases have you seen about the bill and the electoral reform—how much fanfare from the government of fanfare? None. We will oppose this bill, and in government we will restore the right for people to choose to vote through post and provide them with the information they rightly deserve.

**Mr STAIKOS** (Bentleigh) (10:37): It is my great pleasure to rise to speak on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2021. This is a bill which covers a wide range of matters, as we have just heard, and it has very clear objectives: to modernise our regulatory system and support Victoria's economic recovery. I will respond to some of the member for Brighton's remarks around electoral reforms a little later in my contribution.

Small business owners, teachers, regional Victorians, Victorians with disability, Victorians in financial hardship and voters entering polling stations and voting booths—they are all, in my view, winners from this important piece of legislation. This is a bill that reduces physical waste and administrative burden. It introduces electoral reforms that will in fact strengthen democratic processes in Victoria. It will ensure our regulatory system is more efficient, effective, resilient and flexible, and it will make our regulatory system more responsive to current and future emergencies. There is always a need for appropriate regulation that keeps Victorians safe and prevents people from gaming the system, without adding unnecessary cost and red tape.

Before I get into it, I notice that the lead speaker, the member for Brighton, who I suppose was the lead speaker of the opposition because he is the Shadow Assistant Treasurer, has just left the chamber. He did not want to hear a clear rebuttal of the rubbish he spewed for 30 minutes. But given he is the Shadow Assistant Treasurer, it unfortunately does mean that I am going to have to sit through a lot of these very, very tired and annoying contributions on legislation for the rest of the year, which does not really do much for me, but nonetheless we will soldier on.

I would like to draw members' attention to the breadth of measures contained in this bill. Parts 4 and 5 help schools that may be dealing with an undersupply of registered and suitable teachers by making permanent the ability of the Victorian Institute of Teaching to extend provisional or non-practising registration for teachers or early childhood teachers from six to 12 months, consistent with other types of registration—a key reform that will assist in us, while this pandemic still rages, keeping our schools open and keeping kids at school.

Parts 6 and 7 put in place electoral reforms ahead of the upcoming state election to ensure public confidence in the electoral system. A little later in my contribution I will respond to some of the statements made by the member for Brighton on that particular part of the bill, given he did speak for 22 minutes out of his 30-minute contribution on the electoral reforms.

Clauses 31 and 32 in part 8 ensure regulators are able to provide fee relief to Victorians doing it tough during a declared emergency such as the current pandemic. Part 9 strengthens the governance of registered housing agencies by streamlining reporting arrangements and ensuring board oversight of performance standards. Parts 11, 12 and 13 and clause 51 in part 14 extend the benefits of digital technology in our regulatory system. There are a number of other provisions, including more technical and uncontroversial amendments, that address a variety of additional regulatory improvements. This expansive package of measures is yet more proof that the Andrews Labor government delivers for all parts of the economy, in all parts of state. We deliver skills, jobs, education, housing and infrastructure. We also deliver consistent improvements to the state's regulatory system to ensure it remains fit for purpose and that taxpayers get value for money.

In particular I would like to focus on the digital reforms in the bill. I commend the Assistant Treasurer for his diligent work in this area. Last year the Assistant Treasurer delivered *Victoria's Cyber Strategy 2021* to ensure we can all work safely and securely in the online environment. The government is ensuring Victoria is a leader in the digital economy. One of the measures of this bill is that it modernises our regulatory system by providing the flexibility to hold virtual meetings for local government, regional libraries and joint investigatory committees of Parliament. The bill also removes

impediments under the Pharmacy Regulation Act 2010 to the Victorian Pharmacy Authority conducting meetings, inspections and panel hearings by virtual means.

The bill also modernises public notice requirements. Any public notice that currently needs to be published in print newspapers will have their publishing requirements satisfied by publishing online on a designated website. This will save up to \$1700 per public notice. The change will be balanced by an enforceable guideline for government agencies that ensures public notices will be published in a medium which is most equitable for its target audience, including regional, multicultural and elderly audiences where print newspapers may continue to be the best communication method.

I do want at this point to perhaps insert some facts into this debate following that contribution by the member for Brighton. That is to say, despite what he said and the catastrophising that he presented on regional newspapers, nearly 90 per cent of government spending on regional newspapers is from the government communications budget and will not be affected by the proposed changes. Less than 10 per cent of spending by government on regional papers is made up of public notices. Under the Local Government Act 2020 local governments are already not required to publish public notices in print newspapers; however, in practice many still choose to do so. So the catastrophising and the crocodile tears on behalf of regional communities that we heard from the member for Brighton are, I think, particularly unfounded.

In regard to digital meetings, temporary provisions allowing virtual meeting technology were inserted into many regulations in Victoria, and really across Australia and across the world, to ensure participation and access to services could continue while protecting the most vulnerable in our communities. We know, particularly with local councils, for instance, many of them are to this day, even two years into this pandemic, still holding their meetings virtually. In fact it has promoted greater public access to those council meetings. I know both the City of Glen Eira and the City of Kingston, in my electorate, continue to hold meetings virtually, and under this bill they will continue to have the opportunity to have that choice to hold those meetings virtually and, frankly, be more accessible to their communities.

In the time I have remaining I want to address what the member for Brighton said with regard to the electoral reforms in this bill. He said, and I quote, that they 'are designed to run sandpaper over the Victorian electoral cricket ball', which is quite bizarre. I am pretty sure he practised that in the mirror last night to make sure he had such a very smooth and cutting delivery today, but it is bloody ridiculous to say the least, for a couple of reasons. Firstly, in my view it pretty much just clarifies the practice from the last election, particularly around the signage. Before the last election we did away with bunting, and hallelujah. I mean, none of us love bunting. It is useless, and we put it up the night before and then hire security guards to guard it overnight, and then it gets blown away in the wind and people walk right past it. I think that was a very good electoral reform. But he was of course mainly talking about changes to the laws around postal voting. And frankly we have an independent and unimpeachable Victorian Electoral Commission, and we will uphold the Victorian Electoral Commission's independence. Having an independent electoral commission is what sets us apart from some of these other countries around the world, including countries like the United States.

Now, I have never been comfortable with the practice of political parties, whether it is my own or that of those opposite, sending around postal vote applications and processing postal vote application forms. It is the role of the Victorian Electoral Commission to facilitate the democratic vote of a voter. We intended not doing this last time, and in fact my political party did not send out postal vote application forms, nor did it process any. Of course those opposite in certain seats decided to send out postal vote application forms and make them look like they came from the electoral commission and confuse voters. That is up to them. But what I will say in the final 15 seconds is these changes were endorsed by the Electoral Matters Committee, including the Liberal members on that committee, including the Leader of the Opposition. I commend this bill to the house. I wish it a speedy passage.

**Mr McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (10:47): I am delighted to rise and make a contribution on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2021. As you have heard from the member for Brighton, we will be opposing this bill, and there are many reasons to oppose this bill. If for no other reason, after we heard the explosive comments yesterday from the former minister of the Andrews government, it is clear to me that this government should not be making any changes at all to the election procedures in this state. They simply cannot be trusted and certainly cannot be trusted as they manipulate the election procedure. And although we are told the aim of this bill is to ensure that Victoria's regulatory system continues to be effective in managing harm, what we have seen with most bills that come into this place is that the name of the bill rarely reflects the substance that is in the bill. The narrative that the minister argues is that this will be achieved by having different bodies that are more resilient and flexible in the face of a crisis such as COVID-19. In reality the bill covers a variety of issues that are very loosely held together and attack the electoral procedures in this state. As with most Victorian government bills, some of the proposed measures are not contentious at all but others are highly risky and have been inserted into the bill with the hope that they are glossed over and waved through.

The bill will increase the flexibility for regulators and agencies to provide fee relief to businesses during emergencies by amending the Financial Management Act 1994. That on face value seems fine to me. It will modernise requirements for public notices to be published in newspapers by amending the Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 and those requirements for the publication of electoral boundaries by amending the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act 1982. Well, to me that is not fine, and I will talk about that in a moment. It will implement the government's response to the recommendations of the Electoral Matters Committee into the conduct of the 2018 state election by amending the Electoral Act 2002, and again you should never leave Dracula in charge of the blood bank. It will streamline reporting arrangements for registered housing agencies and ensure the boards of registered housing agencies certify reporting against performance standards by amending the Housing Act 1983.

Now, the bill is reacting to the changes that organisations and public bodies were forced to make to accommodate the government's response to COVID-19, including online meetings, AGMs, fee relief to accommodate loss of earnings and things like the lack of tobacco inspectors because they have been roped into COVID-compliance work. The bill is also reflecting the change to a more digital world and the changes to print media by online forms of communication, but there are consequences, and the government has either overlooked them or ignored those consequences, including the changes that mean public notices can be online instead of in print newspapers, which I will mention again shortly, and electoral maps will be online and printed upon request.

The bill is a response to the August 2020 report into the Victorian state election. Can I say, the Electoral Matters Committee is stacked in favour of sitting Labor MPs, so the outcome was always predetermined. The bill claims to fix issues raised in the report in time for the 2022 election. It dictates the number of posters that can be displayed, sets a 100-metre ban on mobile advertising near a polling place and prohibits any person or entity other than the Victorian Electoral Commission from providing postal voting applications, which the member for Brighton discussed in detail. Allegedly the reform was requested by the VEC in its submission to the Electoral Matters Committee inquiry based on 77 complaints.

After the admissions by the former minister yesterday, the admissions of corruption by a former senior minister, one wonders how this government should have any say on future changes to the election process. The behaviour of this government is nothing short of corrupt. No further changes should be allowed until the red shirts rorts are thoroughly investigated and those responsible charged and brought before the courts. The red shirts scandal is again in the headlines due to one of Labor's own MPs, someone game enough to stand up to the dictators and not afraid of the consequences. The direction from Labor powerbrokers to MPs to not cooperate with police is living proof of the corruption that exists within this government.

**Mr Fowles:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member for Brighton had a very wideranging contribution, but I think it is the practice of this place that subsequent contributions are generally more confined to the subject matter at hand. The member for Ovens Valley has well and truly walked off the reservation in the last couple of minutes, and I would encourage you please to encourage him to perhaps return to the matter before the house.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you, member for Burwood. Can you be succinct in your points of order, please. I think the member for Burwood was referring to relevance. Member for Ovens Valley, I ask you to come back to the bill.

**Mr McCURDY:** Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I was just trying to draw parallels between what happened at the last election and changing the rules going forward. I think it is unwise that we allow this government to change those rules because history has suggested they have a very strong record in their corrupt manner. That is what I was going to with that.

I also want to talk about the signs that cannot exceed 600 by 900 millimetres, or another size as prescribed by the regulations, and if there are two or more candidates endorsed for the Legislative Council by one party, they do not get extra signs. This would result in major parties having six posters at a centre: two for the lower house, two for the upper and two for the party itself. There are new rules for billboards: they cannot be displayed within 100 metres of a voting centre, but certain premises such as homes and electorate offices are exempt from this rule.

Early votes will be counted at 8.00 am on election day instead of 4.00 pm, and the bill will prohibit the distribution of postal votes. As I say, that was well covered by the member for Brighton. Again, these changes are being determined by the Andrews Labor government, which worries us, particularly after we heard the explosive comments yesterday. I do have concerns around a central—

**Mr Fowles:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member for Ovens Valley is misleading the house. He asserts that these are recommendations solely of the government. The Electoral Matters Committee, on which there is a minority of Labor members, has made these recommendations. Specifically it made the recommendation regarding prohibiting the distribution of postal vote applications to which the member for Ovens Valley has referred.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Burwood, that is not a point of order.

**Mr McCURDY:** I have also got concerns around the central website with a vic.gov.au domain. The choice to print in newspapers is a discretionary one, but some regional communities rely on their local newspapers, and the minister's discretionary power can declare a new website for approved publications. I have been contacted by community members and businesses about this legislation because there are concerns about just this. The reforms will take away the government-legislated mandate for local councils to place their public notices and community information classifieds in regional Victorian local newspapers—papers in Swan Hill, Yarrawonga, Bairnsdale, Horsham and others will be affected. I heard the honourable member say before it is 10 per cent of their income. Well, 10 per cent of their income is a substantial amount, but if you have never been in business you probably do not understand that.

This will take away another revenue source and effectively negate even more council connection with the local communities, and it will potentially lead to all government classified advertising migrating to the purpose-built government website. This will weaken our regional newspapers, some of which will certainly die because of this. Just to give you an example of that, recently I have been dealing with an issue in Mount Beauty where North East Water claimed to be having a consultation and put out an offering for people to put submissions in, and when we got to the bottom of it we found out their consultation and their mode for communicating was in the North East Water newsletter. Now, who reads the North East Water newsletter? It turns out nobody does. That was their way of communicating with the community, and by this I mean the public notice has been and is—

**Mr Fowles:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance.

**Ms Staley:** On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, briefly, this is clearly a clause in the bill that goes to how things are advertised. The member is clearly being relevant.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I do not uphold the point of order.

**Mr McCURDY:** Thank you, Deputy Speaker. This is why we need to make sure that public notices remain in local papers where the message can get out, rather than on a government website which is not exactly mainstream.

Can I say that the interference with postal voting is a concern. We believe this legislation should be voted down, and I certainly cast my eye across the chamber to see whether there is anybody over there who has the courage to cross the floor and do what happened in the other place. I doubt that will happen, but certainly we live in hope, because this legislation should be voted down.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh) (10:57):** It is a pleasure to speak on a reformist bill, because that is the brand of this government and in fact the party. Just to take up the previous member's final element of debate where he asked us to have the courage to cross the floor, I would ask his colleagues to have the courage to stick to their convictions that they expressed during the cross-party committee that came up with this really good reform, particularly as it comes to the postal vote elements of the bill. But I will get to that in a minute.

Let us just be really clear about what this is: this is us keeping up to date with the modern economy, putting into practice some glimmers of innovation that we found during the pandemic—the ability for people to meet online rather than in person, for example—and getting rid of statutory limitations on simple things like that. If it is not the role of government to address market failure or keep up with how statute books relate to modern life—for example, the public notices: why is it that businesses have to be lumbered with the cost of advertising in a bunch of different publications rather than having a central portal where they can acquire their legislated responsibilities? It reduces costs for business. We are listening to business in a range of areas.

Let me just remind the house that this is the first government to appoint a minister in the cabinet with express responsibility for regulation reform. It is very different to the perception that side of the house has about this side of the house: that we just love regulation. No, no—we actually appointed a minister to cut red tape. They talk about red tape reduction; we have cut it by 25 per cent, and we are still only part way through our agenda in that regard.

Just to give some examples of that, over the last seven-odd years of government we have reviewed and reformed regulation in liquor, environment protection, essential services, electricity, building and construction, planning, consumer affairs, owners corporations and more. We have touched most areas of public policy. We have legislated regulatory improvements through automatic mutual recognition, which we debated in this house not too long ago, cladding safety, wage theft, gender equality, casinos and gaming, worker screening and professional engineer registration, to name a few. As I said, we have gotten on with the job and reduced regulatory burden by 25 per cent. We have invested \$60 million over 60 regulatory reform projects across local and state governments through the Treasurer's incentive fund and through the Assistant Treasurer's Regulation Reform Incentive Fund. There is almost \$400 million a year in estimated growth in the Victorian economy because of the reforms we have made.

We have invested \$100 million in reforms to Victoria's planning system, boosting the state's economy by \$775 million over five years. We have also been working with local governments to pilot automatic approvals for low-risk permits. So check this out: automatic approvals for low-risk permits means that some permit approval times have gone from seven days to 10 minutes. Literally you go online, you get your permit, you get on with business. That is a hallmark of the Andrews Labor government. That is a hallmark in terms of regulatory reform. I met the Assistant Treasurer only yesterday, and I know

he has enormous appetite for reform, as does the Treasurer. That is what we are talking about here, not the courage to cross the floor to do something that is against business; we have got the courage to stand by our convictions and support business.

Obviously there are other elements of this bill in relation to holding meetings of government agencies online—the public notices, as I said previously. And I hear the concerns of some of the speakers in relation to regional media, but those concerns are not going to be solved for any length of time by not doing this. Those concerns come from a far deeper issue and the decline of print media generally.

But I do want to comment obviously on an issue that I just find astounding the opposition are voting against, not only because it is a good reform but also because it stands in contrast to those same members on that committee who supported it. You could not imagine that they did not have an opportunity to put an alternative view forward, because there was a minority report.

**Mr Newbury:** I just gave you 30 minutes of my view.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS:** No, no; member for Brighton, I am not talking about your view today. The member for Brighton's comment just reminds me of how they flip and flop all over the place. So he just said in an interjection, 'No, no. I'm not talking about my view yesterday, I'm talking about my view today'.

**Mr Newbury:** No, I did not say that. Do not misrepresent me.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS:** Okay, you may not have said yesterday, but you did say 'I'm talking about my view today'. I am left with the impression that there was an alternative view at some other point in time that was not today.

So my point is that the member for Brighton may not have been on the committee, but some pretty heavy hitters were on there, like the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Bulleen, and in the other place Mrs McArthur, Mr Atkinson and Ms Lovell. A bunch of people who are heavy hitters in the opposition had the option of a minority report but did not comment. In fact they were supportive of the report which said that effectively—in my words—the relationship between the Victorian Electoral Commission and the voter should be protected. It should not be polluted by political competition—on both sides, on all sides. I think the member for Brighton talked about how there were only 77 complaints. What he did not mention was that there was a 275 per cent increase on that same topic from the year before. What actually matters is the pattern and the growth of those complaints—a 275 per cent increase in complaints about postal voting.

Political parties have corrupted the relationship between the Victorian Electoral Commission and the postal voter. We all know how it works. I have volunteered on campaigns. We send material to Mr Dimopoulos Sr and say, 'You need to vote, otherwise you'll get a fine, and here's the way we think you should vote', and Mr Dimopoulos gets concerned about not paying a fine and wants to dispense with and acquit his responsibility to vote and has the easy Liberal or Labor or whatever card in front of him and just does it. Now, that is not the way it should be. We should not be frightening old people. We should be saying to them, 'Your right to vote is just as sacrosanct as everybody else's, just because you can't get out to the polling booth and you need a postal vote'. This is the best reform, and that is why you supported it.

**Mr Newbury:** The best reform?

**Mr DIMOPOULOS:** The best reform, and that is why you supported it. What has happened is at some point somebody left the committee and a few months later said, 'Who allowed that to get through? Don't you know that most postal voters'—apparently—'vote Liberal? Who let that reform go through?'

That is what they are upset about—the fact that they missed the opportunity. They missed the opportunity. It beggars belief that a properly constituted committee of the Victorian Parliament, cross-

party, comes up with a uniform recommendation and the same people come to this chamber and say, 'This is objectionable. This is atrocious'. I mean, at the very least have some integrity and say, 'You know what? We've changed our mind'. Can you associate your view on that committee with your view today and at least be honest about it—that you have changed your mind because it is politically important for you to do that?

This is a good reform. Even if it targeted Labor voters apparently it would be a good reform, because the voter who is at home with the postal ballot deserves the same choice in terms of paraphernalia. Every political party will be informed by the electoral commission when that voter, who is a registered postal voter, will get their ballot paper. So your volunteers, member for Brighton, still have the opportunity to advocate for their cause. There is nothing like good, competitive tension in politics. What is not appropriate is hoodwinking a voter into thinking the only tangible option, viable option, is the one that they have received in the letterbox because you just happen to be providing them with a postal vote application. This is good reform. The reform generally in this bill is a part of what this government does: reform areas of the economy and public policy that require reform, keep up to date with modern life and strengthen democracy in the case of postal voting.

**Mr SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (11:07): Acting Speaker Morris, it is a pleasure to see you in the chair today. I rise to speak vehemently against this proposal by the Andrews Labor government to effectively short-change many of those people that have relied on postal voting. I particularly make reference to those in my electorate of Caulfield—which has the largest postal vote of any seat—for a whole range of reasons. We have an ageing population, and for health reasons they have no other option but to postal vote. We have a very strongly Jewish population—30 per cent of my electorate is Jewish—and they have no other choice than to postal vote. Certainly for a number of other health reasons people choose to postal vote as well. That number is growing, and I know that those people rely on the postal vote. Without it they would not vote; simply, they would not vote. What this government is effectively doing is taking that away and not providing those people with the opportunity to exercise their democratic right. This is quite scary, and I know that many of my constituents in Caulfield are very, very concerned about what this government is currently doing and proposing to do. For example, there is a 7.5 per cent average across the state of postal voting, and it is 14 per cent in Caulfield.

The government preach on a whole range of things about how open and transparent they are. They are so far from that it is not funny, and this is a classic case of one of these as an example. What really confuses me about this more than anything is that we have just experienced the longest lockdowns of anywhere in the world. This government has incited a whole range of fears in people, particularly the elderly, to stay home, to not wander out, to not go about their lives. I know many of the constituents in my electorate have been quite scared about getting out and about. So why would, on the one hand, this government scare people or put out this fear to say, 'Be careful. Don't leave your homes. Stay at home. Work from home', and on the other say, 'Well, you can't postal vote, so you've got to actually get out and turn up to vote at election time'. It just does not make sense. Why wouldn't you during a pandemic make it easier for people to postal vote, not make it harder? I mean, that just does not make any sense at all, and it is very clear that this government, the Andrews Labor government, has a political agenda to actually disenfranchise the elderly and disenfranchise those with a religious perspective.

**Ms Green** interjected.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** The member for Yan Yean can interject, but I am more than happy to take the member for Yan Yean to my electorate of Caulfield to meet many of the Orthodox community in Caulfield. Member for Yan Yean, you will understand why, for religious reasons, my constituents have no other option. Member for Yan Yean, you can talk about equality and all kinds of things in your normal contributions. This is the most inequitable thing we have ever seen by this government. It is a disgrace that they are taking people's right to vote away.



**Ms Settle:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, if the member at the table could speak through the Chair, please, rather than to members in the chamber.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Morris):** The member for Caulfield.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** And again, the fact that the government will take points of order, trivial points of order, about something that is so important as voting shows what they are trying to do. They are trying to trivialise something that is so important. It is so important to give those people the right to vote. All we are asking is to give people fairness and equity when it comes to this, to give people the same opportunities no matter where they come from, no matter their situation. We will continue to canvass many people in my constituency just to understand the extent of what this government is actually trying to do. It is nothing but a censorship to say to those people, ‘Unless you are able to get out and about to vote on election day, your postal vote rights have effectively been taken away from you. You are not going to be informed ahead of time’.

Yes, there are some people that register for a permanent postal vote. We have a number of those in my electorate that register, and they will get that information. That is fine, but what about everybody else? What about everybody else that comes into the electorate, that actually turns 18? I think many of those people will have no other option. They will not be informed about their postal vote options. We have a lot of people that immigrate to my electorate for religious reasons. They will come from another place. They will get their permanent residency. They will get their citizenship. They will get their right to vote, but they will not have their opportunity to vote because they will not have their postal vote. That is what this government is doing. They are taking that away from our constituents in Caulfield.

**Mr Dimopoulos:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I think there has got to be some accuracy in this debate. Because the member for Caulfield lost the election on election night and only clawed his way back on postals he is particularly personal about this, but someone not having the right to vote—that is a complete lie.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Morris):** That is a matter for debate. It is not a point of order.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** On the point of order, Acting Speaker—

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Morris):** I have ruled. Move on.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** Okay. It is very, very important, particularly for my constituencies in Caulfield. I know the member for Oakleigh, who is in a neighbouring seat, would know many of those constituents, that he would have met, that actually rely very heavily on a postal vote. And the fact, as the member said, that there are so many people that do vote after election night from Caulfield is not something to trivialise. It just further points out the fact that that is the way that people in Caulfield vote. For a significant 14 per cent, twice that of every other constituency, that is how they vote, and the government politically, for no other reason than politics, is taking that right away from the elderly, from those with health reasons and from those with religious reasons. They know it, and that is why they are doing it.

This has got nothing to do with fairness or equity. It is a disgrace, quite frankly. It is a disgrace that they are taking people’s democratic freedoms away from them when we should be encouraging people to vote, to express their opinions, to express their views during these times. We should be looking at more ways to get people to vote, not less ways to get people to vote, and for a government to claim—

**Mr Taylor** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Morris):** Member for Bayswater, you are out of your seat, and you are interjecting. You should not be in either place.

**Mr Taylor:** I am not interjecting.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Morris):** You are certainly out of your seat. If you are going to be yelling across the chamber, at least do it from your own spot.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** We feel so strongly about this that we will be reversing this in government. That is what we have said we will do. We will scrap this because we feel it is absolutely unfair and undemocratic to take this opportunity to postal vote away from the voters. As I said, in a country like Australia and a state like Victoria, we should be proud of what we do in terms of being able to exercise our democratic rights and freedoms. We should be doing everything we can to do that. We should be encouraging people to vote, not taking that opportunity away from them.

This is a disgrace. It is a disgrace, quite frankly, that the government would even stoop so low as to take the vote away from the elderly, from people who have health reasons, from people who have work reasons and from people who have religious reasons. People cannot vote on election day for a whole range of reasons, and for those reasons they should be entitled to a postal vote and they should be entitled to the information about a postal vote. The government are effectively taking that information away.

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** Now, the government can rant and rave and carry on and try to trivialise what we have got here, but this is an absolute attack on democracy. It is an attack on our freedoms and our rights and it is an attack on my constituents of Caulfield that rely on postal votes and that rely on that opportunity. They cannot vote on Saturday, they cannot vote on election day, many of them, and they require that postal vote to be able to do it. I will be making sure that every one of my constituents is aware of what the government is up to—effectively censorship, effectively trying to manipulate a voting outcome. It is a disgrace. It is an absolute disgrace. Every single member of the government should be ashamed of themselves for taking the democratic right to vote away. They are clearly embarrassed at the way they have handled things over the last four years when they have got other members from the upper house crossing the floor and voting against them. We ask them to do the same on this, because they should. It is wrong to take the democratic vote away, and we ask those members of Labor: cross the floor, do what is right and give people that have the democratic right to vote the chance to vote.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Morris):** Just before I call the member for Frankston, this is a debate. A debate is about standing up and putting forward your point of view, and if you do not agree with it, you stand up on the other side and you rebut it. It is not about shouting people down. It is not about making frivolous points of order in order to disrupt people. That is why we have standing orders. A lot of what has gone on in the last 10 minutes, 15 minutes, from both sides, has been disorderly. Now, whatever the practice has been, I am not going to cop that. I will have no hesitation in asking the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker to come in and turf you out if you do not abide by the rules.

**Mr EDBROOKE (Frankston) (11:17):** It is fantastic to see you, Acting Speaker, make those rulings and make it 100 per cent transparent to those opposite that making these frivolous points of order, as was done yesterday when I was on my feet, just is not acceptable. I have sat here and I have heard how serious this bill is to people.

I do note with a sense of irony that the three opposition members that were just at the table—the member for Ripon, the member for Caulfield and the member for Brighton—seem to be putting across this dialogue that we are taking a vote away from people. In reality what this bill is doing is making sure that people still have the vote, but it means they do not have the campaigning and marketing, I guess, tools that go with it. It is not politicising their vote; it can be misinformation. But it is with a sense of irony that I note that for all three of those members the only reason they are sitting here is that they won on postal votes, and that is a fact. It is also with a sense of confusion that I think many of us listening to this debate are listening to members who are seemingly undermining their leader. We have heard about Dracula and blood banks, we have heard about cricket balls and whatnot.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Morris):** Some relevance to the bill would be appreciated.

**Mr EDBROOKE:** I am getting there, Acting Speaker. I am getting there.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Morris):** Please get there quickly.

**Mr EDBROOKE:** It has been quite a wideranging debate, I am sure you will appreciate, but I do respect your rule, Acting Speaker. The misinformation during this debate has been tantamount to really leading, as we have heard, some possibly vulnerable elderly people down a path which is not reality. And it should be put out there very, very plainly that we have heard people misrepresent this bill and mislead this house during this debate.

It is also with a sense of irony that I note we have had opposition speakers talk about the Electoral Matters Committee. Now, I love my committee work. I was on the Family and Community Development Committee for many years; I was the chair. We changed things for the good of many vulnerable Victorians. I follow closely the Electoral Matters Committee. We have heard that there was a Labor majority. There was not a Labor majority on the committee. It was not a Labor majority; that is misleading the house. In fact I note with a firm sense of irony that the Leader of the Opposition was on that committee, and I am led to believe that the report and the recommendations that form this bill were supported unanimously. There was no minority action at all. It was a unanimous vote that this should be put to this house by that joint committee and voted through. To hear members of the opposition now making up stories about how this bill is so wrong, how it takes the vote away from people, how it is undemocratic—I totally disagree. This actually embraces democracy more than we ever have.

We have heard people on this side of the house put the record straight for sure, but I cannot understand how people can stand up on those opposition benches and say, ‘No, the Leader of the Opposition was wrong. We think this’. The Leader of the Opposition was on that committee. It was a Labor minority committee who put this forward. It was unanimously voted through. The recommendations were put up by that committee and here it is today and we have got opposition members telling us that we are wrong. They are actually saying that they are wrong too and the opposition leader is wrong. There has been some miscommunication somewhere. The member for Caulfield showed yesterday that we really have to go past the media releases to get the information. You cannot believe everything you read on the internet or you find yourself in some very dire and very embarrassing situations.

We must remember that this bill is an omnibus bill. We have just seen the ultra-marginal member for Caulfield make a pitch to people in his community that is totally untrue. I am very passionate about the truth, and I believe that to take advantage of elderly citizens like that, to take advantage of people in a different cultural position to us, is the low road—it is absolutely the low road. To tell people who come from different cultures, who may have experienced no democracy, fascism, that they are in Victoria and there is a government that is taking away their vote—does anyone actually believe that? No, not here, but there are some vulnerable people, possibly in Caulfield, that might believe that. That is very misleading, and those opposite should be absolutely ashamed of themselves.

It is also very hypocritical I think to suggest that the situation allows for no democracy or an erosion of democracy when that sacrosanct relationship between the Victorian Electoral Commission and the voter is being strengthened by this bill. It is—there is no doubt about it. If you go past the media release and read the bill, read the second-reading speech from the minister, you can be in no doubt that that is what this is doing. These changes mean that all registered parties and candidates will receive notice that a postal vote has been sent so all registered parties and candidates can send their own how-to-vote cards, again strengthening democracy.

I see some confusion on the opposition benches. It is not all that confusing. You have just got to do your damn homework and read these bills properly. I am not suggesting for a moment that there is unprofessionalism over there from the shadow minister, but what I am suggesting is the member for Caulfield needs to stop embarrassing himself, because if I see these cuts on Facebook suggesting that

people are having their votes taken away, that is literally—especially for people who are vulnerable—the lowest of the low.

We heard about the newspaper issue where people believe that is being taken away from regional newspapers. I guess once again you can maintain an argument based on very little at all, but in reality we have heard from the fantastic member for Oakleigh and the fantastic member for Bentleigh about the fact that nearly 90 per cent of government spending on regional papers is from the government communications budget and will not be affected by these proposed changes. Less than 10 per cent of spending by government on regional papers is made up of public notices. In fact the tangible benefit of this is that the proposed changes will have guidelines that will mean that in practice the effect on regional paper revenue from government will be even less.

It is still amazing, even after almost eight years in this house, to hear people on the other side of the chamber, people who have been in the judicial system quite recently over their business dealings, suggesting that people on this side of the house might not know anything about business. It is quite bizarre, because I look around and there are people here—it cracks me up—like the member for Mount Waverley behind me here, who have had their own businesses. I am looking around and I am still seeing people who have had their own businesses. I was part of a family business—certainly not one that was dragged through the courts, certainly not one that went through the judicial system. But I digress. It is still very funny hearing those opposite say that we do not know about businesses and, in this regard, local papers.

Another issue that has come up in this omnibus bill is about the teaching profession. Again, there are many teachers on this side of the house who understand that as far as this legislation goes, what this legislation is doing in regard to teachers is making temporary changes permanent. It is only making temporary changes that are already in place permanent. It is pretty simple, people. It is really simple. It is hard to stuff up. It is really hard to stuff up, just like it is hard to read this bill and interpret that this is actually taking the vote away from vulnerable people.

I sum up my contribution with a sense of shame, having to stand here and listen to these terrible, terrible contributions that seem to be talking about another bill. They should be ashamed of themselves. It is very, very hard, even in Frankston. It is not Caulfield, but in Frankston I might get emails in regard to this bill because of promotion regarding, ‘You’ve taken our democracy away’, because of the misinterpretation of those opposite and the shadow minister. It is very shameful. It is not the intention of the bill. They actually agreed to all the recommendations in this bill at one stage. It is funny how they have changed their minds. Is it that they change their minds or that they are just confused? Is it that they are feeling very vulnerable leading up to the next election? We have got the marginal seats manager here. He did pretty well, didn’t he? You did. You were amazing.

**A member** interjected.

**Mr EDBROOKE:** He can have a laugh in the mirror, but it was not funny for the other members of the opposition, I assure you. The three members who were standing there were indeed only elected on postal votes alone. This bill is not just about postal votes, this bill is about many other things, but it is shameful seeing people misrepresent that and actually take advantage of vulnerable people in their own community who they represent. I commend the bill to the house.

**Ms STALEY (Ripon) (11:28):** I rise to speak on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2021. I plan to address three sections of this large omnibus bill. The first clauses that I want to address are clauses 23 and 25. Clause 23 has the postal vote changes which have been very well ventilated in this debate. In relation to Ripon, I have one of my local government areas where over 20 per cent of people postal vote, and as an electorate, over 10 per cent postal vote. It is true to say that there are larger or higher rates of postal voting in country electorates than in most city electorates, with the electorate of Caulfield being an exception.

The problem I have with this reform or change or amendment that we have before us is that people are used to getting forms from political parties and filling them out, and now they are not going to know that they are not going to get one. They are actually not going to be advised that they have to go a different way to get the form. It is actually that lack of advice that I think is the problem. People will be waiting for their postal vote application forms. They are used to receiving them, and they will not receive them this time.

I find it curious that the government, in moving this, usually do not like to stand with Donald Trump, but in this regard they are, because Mr Trump has previously said that he believes postal voting allows voters to cheat—unlike the Democrats in the US, who have been working very hard to increase postal voting accessibility by having postal votes mailed to every voter. That also brings me to the fact that we remain in a pandemic, and I would have thought there would be an increased number of people who want to postal vote. So to me it is about increasing the accessibility, whereas this provision reduces the accessibility, and that is why I oppose it.

I now move to clause 25, and in some ways this could be called the Ripon 2018 memorial clause, because what this clause does is it puts provisions into the Electoral Act 2002 that require the commissioner to declare in certain words and give certain notice to all parties if he or she is planning to re-count a seat. Of course this arose out of what happened in Ripon at the 2018 election, when a re-count was called and political parties and candidates were only given an hour's notice to get their scrutineers to the re-count. This is a worthwhile reform to put some time lines in requiring 4 hours notice, and I support the changes that are in that clause.

I now move to clauses 37 to 39, and this is the amendment with the Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 changes. What these clauses do is remove the requirement for advertising in print newspapers. Now, like all country members, I would expect, we have all received correspondence. In my case I have received it from Craig Wilson, who is the publisher of the *Pyrenees Advocate* and the *Ararat Advocate*; from Chris Earl, who is the managing editor of the *Loddon Herald*; and from Peter Marland, who is the owner and editor of the *North Central News*. All three of them have written to ask me to oppose this bill purely on the grounds of these provisions, and they did so because they note that if these reforms are passed it will take away the government-legislated mandate for local councils to place their public notice and community information classifieds in regional Victorian local newspapers.

Now, government speakers on these provisions have talked about government advertising, as in state government advertising, but this goes further, from the publishers' perspective, to include local government advertising. And a lot of my newspapers do have in particular planning changes and other local government notices that make up a considerable part of their revenue. Yes, print is declining, but it is a hugely important mechanism for so many people in country towns to get local news. They value their papers; they buy them. The trouble is the costs are high. They need the advertising that comes from these areas, and this takes this away. So I can assure the readers and the publishers of the many local newspapers that cover Ripon that I do oppose these changes. I absolutely understand why local news produced by local people for locals is what is really important in so many of the communities that I represent. And once again the government has clearly not consulted with the Rural Press Club of Victoria or the rural publishers, because they have all come out and they all oppose it as one. So again, the government has not done its homework here.

The final part of this bill that I want to discuss is clause 66, which makes some amendments to the Electricity Industry Act 2000. The amendment that it makes is it changes the COAG, because COAG is no longer with us, and creates a Ministerial Council on Energy within legislation. The reason I raise this is that the Ministerial Council on Energy is the overseer of the Australian Energy Market Operator, and AEMO is Victoria's state jurisdictional planning body. I note that it is a body nominated by the energy minister of the relevant jurisdiction. So in Victoria the reason that AEMO is planning the grid is that that has been nominated by the Labor minister as the network planner. In the case of other states that is not the case. In the case of Victoria AEMO is the jurisdictional planning body.

We need to understand that therefore the government has control when AEMO comes in and wants to do transmission line upgrades such as the one that is going through my electorate at the moment in the face of incredible community opposition. The Andrews Labor government cannot run away from this being their project. These changes in this legislation make it very clear that the energy market body that the Victorian Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change sits on is the oversight body, and this is what this legislation does. There is no question, I think, that the government needs to recognise that what it is doing in western Victoria has a direct relationship to its ministerial body membership.

As a result of the actions of this government we have a very large transmission line project which is overwhelmingly opposed by the community in my electorate and other communities affected by that line, and yet the government are pushing on with this and trying to argue—various members have attempted to argue—that it is a national body doing this and it is not to do with them. But this bill in front of us now makes it very clear that it is the Victorian energy minister who sits on that council and who nominates AEMO, which is overseen by that council, as mentioned in this bill, to do the energy transmission network upgrades.

It is time the government went back and said to the communities ‘We hear you’ instead of putting them through a brutal environment effects statement process, a process they are finding very difficult to negotiate. They are finding it increasingly difficult to deal with AusNet—that is the Labor government’s contractor for this project—who is invading their properties against their will. At every point the government is trying to run away from their responsibility here, but they cannot run away. This is their project. They need to fess up and admit that—admit to those communities that it is them doing the terrible things that are being done—and find another way.

**Mr HAMER** (Box Hill) (11:37): It is a delight for me to speak today on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2021. I was going to make a few comments about various elements of the bill—it is quite a broad bill. Probably until the start of the week I had not intended to speak a lot about clause 23, until I got a few emails in my inbox saying, ‘What’s this I hear that the government’s not going to allow postal voting at the election?’. I said, ‘Where did this come from?’. I see a few articles in the press and have a look at the Facebook pages of some of the members opposite and I see in big black and red writing ‘Government is taking away your right to postal vote’. And we have heard here today from speaker after speaker that postal voting is not going to be allowed, and that is just completely wrong—

**Ms Settle** interjected.

**Mr HAMER:** You are right, member for Buninyong; it is shame on those members opposite for creating more confusion amongst those who need to access the vote.

I will go and touch on the committee report, because the committee report is very instructive.

**Mr Newbury:** Read the bill.

**Mr HAMER:** I have read the bill, member for Brighton, and I want to have a look—

*Members interjecting.*

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Morris):** Order! This is not an opportunity to have a conversation. The member for Box Hill has the floor.

**Mr HAMER:** I want to touch on the number of complaints that were received about this form of solicitation of postal vote applications. The total number of postal votes at the 2018 election was a touch under 8 per cent. The member for Brighton did touch on the number of complaints that were received in total by the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC), so there were 861 complaints of which 9 per cent complained about parties distributing postal vote applications.

**Mr Newbury:** Seventy-seven.

**Mr HAMER:** Seventy-seven; that is right. The member for Brighton has asked us to believe that this is a very small number and we do not really have to worry about those people. I hope that the member for Brighton does not take that approach with his constituents—that it is only a small number, it is only a small fraction of the population who are actually registering complaints with his office, so he can just ignore them. The member for Brighton said that there was a very small number of complaints and it was not necessary—

**Mr Newbury** interjected.

**Mr HAMER:** Not only that, if you look at the percentage, postal votes make up a fairly small proportion of the total number of votes which are cast, but of the complaints that were made there is a greater proportion of complaints made specifically for that purpose. Of all of the complaints that the VEC received, the proportion of complaints that were made in regard to this particular element was greater than the proportion of postal voters in the entire election. We would not expect that everybody is going to be complaining, so of those complaints you have to look at the proportion of the people who are complaining about this particular element of how the election is run.

The postal vote applications done through the political parties also make up a minority of the total postal vote applications, and the largest way that people applied for postal votes at the last election was online. The process for applying for postal votes is still going to be through the VEC, online or through the post. Parties can even tell their individual members, all of their electors, that if they want to get a postal vote these are the ways that they can get a postal vote. Let us be absolutely clear: postal votes are not being banned by this legislation.

I do want to get back to the specific elements of the committee. I do want to draw on what was particularly put forward by the Victorian Electoral Commission to the joint Electoral Matters Committee. We should be mindful of and very proud that the VEC is an independent electoral commission. I know that the members on the other side pine for some of the electoral commissions that are run in America, but very few of them are independent electoral commissions. I think it is one of the most important elements of our electoral systems—in Australia and in all of our states—that we have independent electoral commissions. The Victorian Electoral Commission has consistently raised this as an issue after each of the elections for which there has been an inquiry: removing the ability of political parties to send out information about postal voting because of the concern that it is confusing and misleading to voters.

I do want to just reiterate the finding that was made at the committee stage. As has been pointed out by other members, this was a recommendation and a finding that was supported by the entire committee of 11 members, only four of which were Labor members—so including Liberal members, including the Leader of the Opposition. The finding says:

The VEC received an increased number of complaints regarding political parties distributing postal vote applications in 2018. Electors find the practice misleading, believe it must be against the rules and sometimes believe the VEC has sent party political material, demonstrating bias. Legislative change ahead of the 2018 election limited, but did not prohibit, this practice.

The recommendation says:

That the Government amend the Electoral Act to prohibit any person or organisation other than the VEC from distributing postal vote applications.

That recommendation was adopted unanimously, and the government in its response also fully endorsed that recommendation, and that is what is reflected in clause 23 of the current bill.

In the 1 minute or so that I have remaining I do want to touch on a number of the other changes and clauses in this bill, particularly as they relate to changes to the Local Government Act 2020, the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 and the Pharmacy Regulation Act 2010, amongst others, really to re-enforce some of the changes that have been implemented over the last two years as temporary measures—to enable the online functioning of committee management council meetings et cetera. I

think we have all learned an enormous amount over the last two years about how to just better use the technology and how much of a benefit that technology is in actually running the conduct and enabling that governance to occur. We do not necessarily all have to be physically present and all in the same room. I commend the bill to the house.

**Dr READ** (Brunswick) (11:47): I would like to give the Greens perspective on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2021. Among other things, this bill allows local government, councils and parliamentary committees to meet online, it allows mandatory public notices to appear online instead of in print and it allows regulatory agencies to waive or reduce fees during emergencies, particularly welcome after the 2020 bushfires and while small businesses and individuals are still suffering extraordinary losses from the pandemic. But today I want to focus on two aspects: the changes to the Tobacco Act 1987 and the extent to which the bill implements the recommendations of the Electoral Matters Committee inquiry into the 2018 state election.

The bill allows the Department of Health to appoint tobacco inspectors from a wider range of people than just council environmental health officers, and this is a sensible measure to increase the pool available from which to recruit these inspectors. It would help, though, if these inspectors had an up-to-date register of all the premises licensed to sell tobacco and nicotine products. The licensing of tobacco and nicotine outlets would help inspectors find them; enable the state, for example, if it wanted to, to prevent the sale of cigarettes near schools; and create an easy way to sanction sellers that break the laws around the supply of nicotine or tobacco to children. Any shop in Victoria can sell cigarettes, but most other states require these premises to be registered or licensed, a bit like a liquor licence.

Tobacco kills between 4000 and 5000 Victorians every year, considerably more, for example, than have been lost to COVID. In fact about six months ago I asked the Minister for Health in an adjournment speech to set up a registration or licensing scheme for cigarette and nicotine vendors in Victoria, and it is time that Victorians got an answer to that. If opponents to such a scheme are concerned about excessive red tape, think about the red tape for getting hold of home oxygen or getting a disabled parking sticker if you have got emphysema, or employing a nurse. Think about the red tape for that. Even undertakers need a licence, so why shouldn't cigarette and tobacco vendors?

As I say, the bill broadens the pool of recruitment for inspectors, but there is one particular type of tobacco vendor that should not be inspected—it should be abolished, it should not be allowed—and that is tobacco vending machines. These are particularly common in pubs. Banning tobacco vending machines, as has occurred in some jurisdictions, would break that nexus between smoking and drinking. It would reduce the availability of tobacco. It would mean that you would have to buy from a person who can check your age.

I am hearing more and more reports of shops selling nicotine for vaping, cigarette supply shops that seem to be near every tram stop. Teachers are saying that nicotine vaping is increasing in schools. We have a little bit of data, but it is always out of date—usually national data. We do not have good real-time data, which could easily be obtained from an annual survey of a representative sample of high school students to find out exactly how quickly the prevalence of nicotine vaping is rising in Victoria. Then there is the small matter of doing something about it, but the first step would be establishing a licensing scheme for vendors.

**Mr McGuire** interjected.

**Dr READ:** Indeed. I would like to turn now to how this bill implements the recommendations from the Electoral Matters Committee in their recent report. The Electoral Matters Committee recommended that political parties no longer be allowed to send out postal vote application forms, something that both the Liberal and Labor parties have done for many years. They have done this, apart from the obvious reason—for people to be able to apply for postal votes—to harvest the data from the voters. It is something that only big parties with the budget to send mail to every voter have been able to afford.



Around the time of the 2018 state election a growing number of people did complain to the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) about political parties mailing out postal vote application forms. This did come up in the committee deliberations. For years the Liberal and Labor parties—

**Mr Wynne:** Do the Greens not put out postal vote applications? I think you do.

**Dr READ:** I would like to take up the interjection from the member for Richmond. It is not something we have been able to afford on a large scale.

**Mr Wynne:** Yes, but you do do it.

**Dr READ:** I believe it has been done.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Morris):** Order! The minister at the table will desist. The member for Brunswick, through the Chair.

**Mr Wynne:** Just for accuracy, that is all.

**Dr READ:** I am grateful for the attention of the minister. Nevertheless I would like to return to the issue, which is that this has been done on a large scale over many decades by both political parties, and I commend the government for bringing this practice to an end. For years parties have sent these out to people offering to obtain postal voting packs from the VEC in a manner designed to blur the role of the VEC and that of the parties in the minds of voters. It compromised the appearance of the VEC as impartial, and to many people it crossed the line. It was a misleading practice that should never have been allowed, and I support the government's move to ban this. And while I understand why the Liberal Party would want to retain this sleight of hand, I am surprised that they are willing to say so publicly.

However, the bill misses an opportunity. It fails to implement the reform requested more frequently than any other by those who made submissions to the Electoral Matters Committee's inquiry, and that is the abolition of group voting tickets. There are members in Victoria's upper house who got there with microscopic votes, defeating others who had 10 times their vote. To just give one example, in the Eastern Metropolitan Region someone was elected with 0.6 per cent of the vote, ahead of a Greens candidate who got about 8 per cent of the vote.

Eight upper house MPs won seats with tiny votes amplified by a complex preference deal brokered by Glenn Druery for a success fee of around \$55 000. Preferences are listed on group voting tickets, which are rarely examined by voters, yet 91 per cent of voters used them in 2018 to allocate their preferences. So voters, for example, for the Animal Justice Party in much of Victoria would be surprised to know that their preferences were used to elect pro-gun Liberal Democrats. This bill that we are debating today removes any risk of confusion about postal voting but allows this confusing group voting system to continue. The 91 per cent of voters voting above the line generally had no idea where their preferences went, and those voting for micro-parties had no idea who they had elected.

Victoria is now the only state in Australia using this system. It has gone from federal elections. Western Australia has just abolished it after a daylight-saving candidate was elected with 98 votes. When you can buy a seat in state Parliament with more dollars than votes—for \$55 000—that is corruption. It is legal, but it is corrupt. The Andrews Labor government had a perfect opportunity in this bill to simply allow those voting above the line to list their preferences above the line. They have chosen to stick with a corrupt system which leaves many voters unrepresented and may well put more anti-vaxxers or worse into Parliament at the end of this year. The Greens support this bill, but we do lament this missed opportunity.

**Ms CONNOLLY (Tarneit) (11:56):** Thank you, Acting Speaker Morris. I got a bit of a surprise, but it is very nice to see you in the chair today. I too rise to speak on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2021, and as someone who spent quite a long period of my career working on regulatory reform, rewriting legislation and trying to make systems and processes a whole lot better

in the energy industry it gives me a great deal of pleasure to speak on regulatory reform and the regulatory reform agenda of this government.

No doubt colleagues on this side of the chamber will know that when we came to government in 2014 we inherited a whole lot of problems and systems in crisis from those opposite. 2014 was certainly a very big year for our side of the house and our government back then. It was certainly a very big year and step forward for Victorians. I would like to say we inherited some great things in 2014, like full shelves and a full program of works on road, rail, hospitals and most importantly schools from those opposite when we came to government, but unfortunately we inherited things like a regulatory system in absolute crisis. The previous coalition government did slash indiscriminately at regulations in this state, regulations that were created to protect Victorian citizens and, really importantly, the businesses of the mums and dads right across this great state of ours.

Being in government, as I have said this week and as the Premier reminds us on a regular basis, is a gift, and we cannot afford to waste a single day. That is why it was very disappointing in 2014 coming in on the back of a government that had slashed at regulations, that had no plan, no goal, to achieve an overarching narrative or a vision for this state, including in regulatory reform. But when we came to government in 2014 we did have a plan, and having a plan is really, really important. When you do not have a plan you end up with a state and suburbs and areas like out in my patch that had very little done to roads and rail during the previous government's time in power, but we also did not have one single school built in my patch during that time, and in fact—

**Ms Green:** Shame.

**Ms CONNOLLY:** Shame. It was absolutely horrendous for my community as we were continuing to grow in number. The population forecasts for the area in which I have the privilege to serve were well known right across the state and certainly by the government at the time, and yet not one single school was built. It took six years in fact for the first school to open in Tarneit, and that was with Tarneit Rise, a great local primary school. It has certainly grown over the years since it opened in 2016.

**Mr Wakeling:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I understand it is a wideranging debate, but I would ask that the member be brought back to some semblance of the actual bill and not talking about facilities in her own electorate.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** On the point of order?

**Ms CONNOLLY:** I do not have a point of order.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I have not been in the chair to hear the member's contribution, but I do ask the member to speak to the bill.

**Ms CONNOLLY:** The member for Ferntree Gully is right: I digress. Let us go back to talking about the regulatory system in crisis that we picked up in 2014. The overall objective of this bill before us today is to do a couple of things. It seems to have components ranging from, yes, electoral matters to education, training and reform, the Pharmacy Regulation Act 2010 and a number of other things. But there are really four main objectives to this bill.

The first is to ensure that regulators are prepared for the next emergency. What we have realised during this emergency is that preparation is everything, and it was a global pandemic the likes of which we have not seen in 100 years. We have learned a lot in the past two years, and one of those things is to be prepared and to make sure our regulatory systems and processes in this state are prepared and well equipped to be actioned and in place to deal with the next emergency.

It is also to embed regulatory changes that were made temporarily in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The bill is also going to support technology-neutral legislation that does not impede the use of digital and other technologies by businesses, government or citizens. For many of us, I know, in this house and, depending on where you work, in this state—indeed I know local councils have had to

embrace digital technology, quite often having their council meetings via Zoom—things have really changed. We have come a long way in the past two years in how we use digital technology. We need to make sure our regulatory systems are keeping up with that.

The bill is also going to make simple, uncontroversial amendments to a whole lot of other acts to ensure efficient and effective regulatory systems, and this will include simple changes to reduce regulatory burden, which is really important. In my past life looking at the national electricity rules and reducing regulatory burden was a major part of my job. We are looking at making simple changes to reduce regulatory burden without compromising the effective management of harms.

I have to say we have done a lot in the past eight years in improving regulatory processes and removing red tape. Those opposite have really talked a big game about red tape, but the Andrews Labor government, like always, we do what we say we will do. We have gotten on with the job and reduced Victoria's regulatory burden by a whopping 25 per cent. That is really big deal. That is a 25 per cent reduction in the regulations that those opposite left us in 2014.

Investing in regulatory reform is really important because we know that good reform needs a kickstart and a helping hand to get savings for the Victorian community both now and, most importantly, into the future. I want to talk a little bit about what we have done in terms of removing red tape and regulatory reform. We have invested \$60 million in over 60 regulatory reform projects across local and state government through the Treasurer's incentive fund, the Regulatory Reform Incentive Fund, which is now estimated to grow Victoria's economy by almost \$400 million per year and give back to Victorians just over 293 000 days per year in saved time. That is quite a big number.

We have invested \$100 million in reforms to Victoria's planning system, boosting the state's economy by \$775 million over five years. That is really important, because that has also been about creating new construction jobs and shortening permit approval times by an entire month, so it is getting things done and getting them done quicker. We also looked at streamlining screening checks for our wonderful NDIS workers, and that is saving 2800 days per year for applicants. That is a lot of saved time. We are getting these workers into jobs so that they can get on with supporting our very vulnerable disabled Victorians to live with dignity and respect. I am very proud to be part of a government that has spent a huge part of its legislative reform agenda here in this place helping enact legislation and amend legislation that will help provide better protection for vulnerable Victorians, including those with special needs and disabilities.

We know that some of the most onerous regulation for Victorians is at the local government level, and we have partnered really closely with local government over the past couple of years across the state to streamline and digitise their approval systems, and this has worked really well for local councils and ratepayers inside their LGAs. It makes it simpler and faster for local Victorian businesses to have their applications processed faster. This is a great piece of legislation. It is tidying up a lot of temporary arrangements and either putting them in place permanently or making sure that they are easily accessible in times of crisis and when we need them. I commend the minister for bringing this bill to the house, and I wholeheartedly support it.

**Mr WAKELING** (Ferntree Gully) (12:07): I am certainly pleased to rise to contribute to this debate on the bill before the house. The starting position I just wish to make is one about the general legislative agenda of the government, which of late seems to be a continual introduction of omnibus legislation. Now, I understand grouping like changes into one bill may be sensible, but we are seeing significant pieces of legislation cobbled together in an omnibus bill which historically would have been split up and separated by respective portfolios. I just place that on the record because this is not only something that we have seen in this piece of legislation and in previous bills before the house but something that we will see in future bills that I know are coming before the house, where clearly there are a range of issues that have been cobbled together which have no commonality, and that makes it very challenging to properly address the issues before the Parliament.

This bill is predicated on regulatory reform, and those opposite have been championing the government's reform package. I would have thought in this era, in this day, in this year, post COVID, the government would be in fact seeking to introduce legislation which is going to unburden our business community and others throughout the community to recover, to rebuild and to ensure that they are best placed to stay open and to grow or potentially to open. That is critical at this time in a post-COVID environment. I have surveyed businesses in my own community, and 80 per cent of those businesses indicated they are financially worse off during COVID as a consequence of COVID. Now, that is not necessarily saying it is all due to the actions of the government, but what it says is they are struggling to stay open. Some are closing, some want to grow, and what they are looking for from the government is reform to assist them to grow. They are not looking for new legislation, they are not looking for new regulations, they are not looking for new taxes and charges; they are looking for reform to make their job easier.

I put that on record and say that I would have thought, as a starting position, that the government would introduce into this house at the start of this calendar year reform to help our business community thrive and grow. I had a business operator approach me recently when I was out talking to local residents, and they have a business operating in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, a manufacturing business. They live in the community and they employ people in the community, but they are struggling to stay open. They have been approached to go to New South Wales and relocate their business to Parramatta. They do not want to go to Parramatta. They do not want to sack their staff. They do not want to have to relocate their business, but the New South Wales government is providing them incentives to relocate. So we should be ensuring that we see reform come into this house under the guise of legislation like this that provides that help and support for those businesses.

Obviously the bill before the house seeks to make a range of amendments to a number of different aspects of current acts of Parliament. I just want to touch on a couple in the period that I have. Change in regard to the way in which information is disseminated into the community by use of the internet is going to have a detrimental impact on regional Victorians, particularly those publications and those newspapers in regional Victoria which rely on that information to be disseminated to their local communities through those newspapers. As the member for Brighton articulated in his contribution, stakeholders in that sector have made it very clear that the government's decision to basically take that information away from newspapers and to put it online is going to, firstly, impact the viability of many of those country papers. I say that because when I was first elected to this house in 2006, we had two newspapers, the *Leader* and the *Journal*, which were distributed in my community every week, and here we are in 2022 and we have neither newspaper distributed throughout my community. The only way people can actually get a hard copy newspaper in my community is through a community newspaper, which in good faith is prepared by local communities.

**Ms Britnell:** We don't have one.

**Mr WAKELING:** Well, I think that just highlights the point. Country communities rely on their country newspapers, and they are wanting their government to work with them to assist them. But here is a situation where that is going to be taken away. And actually when we look at it with information being put online—

**A member** interjected.

**Mr WAKELING:** I will not take up that interjection—I think that is offensive to those country newspapers. Deputy Speaker, it is unruly to take up interjections, and I do appreciate that. When they talk about the information going online, there are many of us who can access information online and know how to access information online and can do it very easily, but there are a lot of people in our community that cannot do that. We saw that recently with the government's \$250 rebate, where I had a proliferation of residents contact my office trying to access a service which they were told they could only access online. They could not access it online and in fact wanted to come to our office and have our office do it for them. Now, that is ridiculous. This just highlights part of the challenges we have in

our community when this government is seeking to make changes which actually impact on local communities.

One final point I just want to make on the very concerning nature of this bill is with regard to postal votes and the changes. As we heard, five people in Victoria made a complaint in regard to postal voting—five people in this state made a complaint. And on that basis the government is putting in place a provision that prevents tens of thousands of Victorians from being able to make a postal vote application. We know information about applying for a postal vote is not disseminated to Victorians and that many people rely on that information being provided to them so they can apply for a postal vote. Their response was, ‘Residents will be able to apply for it either online or at their local Australia Post office’. That is cold comfort for many people in my community who cannot access that information, because firstly, they are not online, or secondly, they will not know the information is even at the post office. You may just naturally think, ‘This will be solved. Nothing to look at here’. What this will result in is the disenfranchising of tens of thousands of Victorians. The government says, through the Victorian Electoral Commission, there are 80 000 registered voters who receive postal vote information. But we know that in the last election 300 000 people accessed postal votes, so 300 000 people voted via a postal vote but they only have records of 80 000 people. So even if you presume that we can rest assured that the electoral commission will guarantee that those people who have utilised this service are going to be contacted, we already know that 220 000 people will not receive that information, and that is just the people who used it at the last election.

The member for Box Hill said, ‘Postal voting is on the decline’. Well, in 2018 people were not fearful of going to a polling booth, as people will be fearful now in a post-COVID environment. There is a presumption that everyone will go back to a normal life. We know there are people in our community, older members of our community, who are less willing to go out and vote in those circumstances. This is clearly an attack. People in my community are gravely concerned. We will make very clear to them this attack on their right to receive postal voting information.

**Ms KILKENNY** (Carrum) (12:17): It is a pleasure to rise to speak on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2021. This is a really important bill, not least because regulation is important and regulatory reform impacts nearly every single Victorian. Regulation is about balance. It is not about rants, it is not about hysteria, the likes of which we have been subjected to today, and it is certainly not about misinformation and confusion. I have to really call out those opposite for some of the misstatements that they have made, particularly in relation to postal vote applications.

Regulation is actually about good government, and it is about helping government achieve social, economic and environmental objectives—really, really clear objectives—to make sure that there are net social and economic gains to drive job growth, to improve the lives of Victorians. Contrary to those opposite—and I call out the member for Brighton—regulations are not there to serve particular personal interests or particular views of political parties. Indeed where we know that a framework or regulations may be creating confusion, may be leading to a lack of confidence in our public systems where they are causing concern, then it is incumbent upon good governments to act on that. I do pick up the example of the postal vote applications where we have got an independent electoral commission, the Victorian Electoral Commission, which has called for, not just once but consistently, the prohibition on any person or organisation other than the VEC distributing postal vote applications. It is incumbent upon us that we listen to that recommendation. That is the independent body that has been tasked with the oversight, the administration and the running of elections. It is so important that the public has confidence in that body, and that goes to the very core of democracy here in Victoria.

Recommendation 46 of the Electoral Matters Committee report into the conduct of the 2018 state election recommends the amendment of the Electoral Act 2002 to do just that—to prohibit any person or organisation, other than the VEC, from distributing postal vote applications. This was a joint parliamentary committee. We had members from all sides as part of that committee. That recommendation was made to government, and this government now accepts that recommendation. I point out that in its compelling submission on this issue the VEC reported that the distribution of postal

votes from political parties is a cause of concern and is undermining the impartiality of the VEC across multiple elections. As I said, this is concerning for democracy in this state. Yet those opposite are now wilfully refusing to accept that position. They are refusing to accept that position because it does not serve their political interests, and that is not how regulations work in Victoria. That is an example of a great disservice to Victorians and a great disservice to democracy in this state. Frankly it is why we always have to remain vigilant, absolutely vigilant. We cannot ever allow the Liberals and The Nationals to hijack regulations—never ever—to serve their own political purposes.

We know that regulations, as I said, are here to make things much more efficient and fair in Victoria. The Andrews Labor government knows this. In fact we came to office in 2014, we came to government, to make regulations more efficient and fair. We appointed the first ever Minister for Regulatory Reform, and this is compelling in its own right. We have now seen regulatory review, reform and improvement across the entire government. We have seen it in local government. We have seen it in essential services. We have seen it in gender equality. We have seen it in the protection of workers against wage theft. We have seen it in energy regulation. In small business the cutting of red tape has been so significant.

Of course review of regulation must be ongoing, because we know that things cannot last indefinitely. There are always changing circumstances. Economic conditions change, social views change, communities change and most recently there has been COVID. It has had the biggest impact on all of us. It has impacted every business and every single person in Victoria. We have never experienced this level of risk to public health ever before. Needless to say, in that environment regulatory reform and a review of the regulatory framework is absolutely crucial, and it is crucial because it is critical to our economic growth and Victoria's future in coming out of this pandemic. But it is also crucial in being able to address and respond to further challenges as they may arise, whether that is COVID, another variant of concern, or whether it is other natural disasters, like bushfire, for example.

It is absolutely critical that we get the regulatory framework right but that we get it to a point where it is flexible, where it is nimble and where all of our agencies and departments and bodies are best able to respond as needed and are best able to put in place the very services and responses that are going to be most effective and most efficient. Indeed our entire competitiveness, our entire livability, depends on getting that right, and that is why this bill is so important. This bill, as part of our suite of regulatory reform, ensures that we are maintaining constant attention on good regulatory design and ensuring that we are continuing to maintain and keep Victoria in the best possible position going forward.

We have seen that the bill will seek to amend quite a number of acts, which include the Financial Management Act 1994, the Housing Act 1983, the Electoral Act 2002, the Local Government Act 2020, the Essential Services Commission Act 2001 and the Education and Training Reform Act 2006. Whilst some of these amendments might seem quite small, I think taken together they really go to the continual modernising of the regulatory framework and, as I said, helping us best prepare for whatever might lie ahead.

I mentioned COVID earlier, and obviously given the significant impact that COVID has had on all of us it is absolutely crucial that we are able to best respond on time and with the best and most efficient services. One of those is obviously dealing with financial hardship. I think it is something that no member in here is blind to. We know that our small businesses have really suffered, and it is crucial that in being able to support those small businesses even small things, like the ability to waive fees or to defer fees, are able to be put in place very quickly to assist and support those businesses to avoid severe financial hardship.

I heard also the members opposite were raising issues with the proposed amendments to the Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 which will see that public notices are able to be published online. This bill, contrary to what those opposite said, will not prevent governments and businesses from using regional newspapers. In fact in some instances regional newspapers are going to be the best way to get that information across to those rural communities, so let us ensure that the debate is

clear and factual at all times. As I said, this bill is to support economic growth and recovery here in Victoria, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Ms SHEED** (Shepparton) (12:27): I rise to speak on the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2021. At the outset I would like to say that I do have some concerns in relation in particular to that aspect of the bill that seeks to amend the Interpretation of Legislation Act 1994. I will come to the reasons for that shortly, but to commence with I would like to move a reasoned amendment. I will do that now in the following terms. I move:

That all the words after ‘That’ be omitted and replaced with the words ‘this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government conducts further consultation on the impact on regional newspapers of ceasing to publish notices in print newspapers’.

This is an omnibus bill, and it seeks to amend numerous other acts of Parliament, some of them quite significantly, but today I will mainly concentrate on the issue that arises because of this amendment that seeks to remove that requirement to publish notices in print media.

Just briefly, I will refer to a number of other amendments which are encompassed in the bill. During the pandemic temporary allowances were made for parliamentary committees, local councils and libraries to meet virtually, and this is now a process that will become permanent as a result of this legislation when it is passed. Another important element of this bill is giving regulators permission to offer fee relief in times of crisis. We have seen many instances of that during COVID, but often with a need to have particular legislation to do it. This will create a facility to enable organisations to step in more quickly and have some flexibility in that regard.

The problem that I have with this bill is really one that I have spoken about many times in this Parliament, and it is about the future viability of regional newsprint. It is an issue that is continually being brought to our attention in regional areas as more and more media outlets withdraw or close their doors. The changes in this legislation remove the requirement for Victorian government public notices to be published in newspapers—just to be published online. So the scheme is really one where currently statutory authorities and all sorts of bodies, including local government and the Victorian state government, publish these notices in the print newspapers.

There is now an intention to set up a single website and everything will go there and there will no longer be the need for the print to occur. It has been removed from the legislation. It is not even going to be a regulation that occurs. The very best that will come out of this is there may be a guideline set up by the minister wherein there can be certain circumstances where it goes in the print media also. It is virtually discretionary as far as my reading of the bill goes, and I think that is not good enough. Accessibility for our communities to this sort of information is extremely important, and I just draw on one instance as a situation that would give people an idea of how important it is. Just before Christmas Greater Shepparton City Council agreed to the situation where they would look at selling the airspace above a car park in the CBD. Now, there are a whole lot of people who are not happy with that and a residents association has been set up. This is only because our local newspapers were able to see a notice that was published, to write a story on it and to bring it to the attention of the public in a way that has allowed everyone in the community now to make submissions to local government, for and against, and to really create an atmosphere of people feeling that they have some say in government at that level, and indeed every level.

It really is important also because it takes away just some of the base income that regional newspapers have. In regional areas politicians advertise regularly in their local newspapers. I know they rely on that as well. It is part of our way of sharing with the community what we have been doing, what we are saying and what we are involved in on their behalf as their representatives. But more importantly, all those government notices that go out and into the newspapers that we see all the time, whether they be planning, whether they be applications for tenders, all sorts of things, that are really important—we are now looking at a situation where they go onto one internet site, and I think it is a really big mistake to think that everybody will have access to that site.

I draw attention to the fact that recently the Victorian government set up a power saving energy grant of \$250, available to everyone. That was widely published—it was in newspapers, it was online and it has been extended now to 30 June, but there are so many people in our community who cannot go online and do what needs to be done to access that. So we have got our Mooroopna Education and Activity Centre in Mooroopna busy all the time asking people to come in and helping them fill out forms online to do these things, and quite a few of our community agencies are now engaged on behalf of these disadvantaged or elderly people who are not able to access the computers and the internet in a way that so many are. I do not think that is just a regional issue. I mean, if you do not use a computer on a regular basis, on a daily basis, then it can become difficult, it become hard to navigate, and there are many people in our community—not just the elderly—who are in that situation. But let me tell you that it is often the older, retired people who are really watching for those notices. They are on the ball, they are active community members and they want to know what is going on, and if they cannot access it in the local newspaper, then how will they?

Regional newspapers have suffered greatly in the past decade due to the increasing presence of online media and the decline in print newspapers across our regional areas. We have seen many of them close down. We have seen television stations removing their cameramen from our areas; the ABC used have a cameraman in Shepparton. We have seen WIN TV go to a weekly, whole-of-Victoria regional news bulletin; no longer does our area have its own. We are losing our stories. People are not telling our stories anymore and we are finding it really hard to share them, and this is something that has a really significant impact on every aspect of community life. WIN News also pulled out of Wagga Wagga, Orange, Albury, Bundaberg. We are seeing Sky News being streamed in. It is not local news. There is no capacity for them to do local news in the way that our smaller organisations have. So the impacts of just a simple few paragraphs in this omnibus bill can be devastating, and I am here to say that on behalf of regional communities something absolutely must be done about it.

Studies out of the UK and other countries indicate that where there is a loss of local media communities suffer a commensurate rise in corruption, political disengagement and heightened distrust in public institutions. Where newspapers stop reporting on what happens at their local council meetings, people become disengaged. Councils are not accountable. Councillors are not accountable. Council staff are no longer being held to account. For much of what happens it is really important that the light is shone on government at every level, and the removal of this simple aspect of bringing things to the forefront in people's minds, of letting them know what is happening, what the government is advertising, what they are intending is, in my view, a major encroachment on people's capacity to participate in society and really in a democracy.

So I have moved this reasoned amendment. I would think that any member in this place who represents a regional area would feel the same way I do. I think they know how important our regional news media at every level is, how much we have lost, what an impact it is having, and with the stroke of a pen we are being faced with a loss of security that was in the legislation and now will end up in some guideline.

**Ms HALL** (Footscray) (12:37): I am very pleased to make a contribution to the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2021. If you have listened to this debate and the member for Brighton's contribution earlier, you might think that there was great dissent in the Electoral Matters Committee around some of the recommendations that this legislation implements. The Leader of the Opposition sat on that committee, and we did a huge amount of work, collaborative work together, over many, many hours to produce the report, which I was pleased to table in the Parliament on behalf of the committee, but there was no dissent in that report. The opposition are now opposing recommendations that they supported, which is incredibly frustrating to hear, and as a member of the committee and on behalf of my fellow committee members I think it is particularly disingenuous.

The bill has a number of important reforms based on recommendations made by the Electoral Matters Committee into the conduct of the 2018 state election, and I am going to focus my contribution today on those recommendations. It is a comprehensive piece of legislation, and the reforms will include minor amendments to the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Act 2021, amendments to the



Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, amendments to the Local Government Act 1989, reforms to the Electoral Act 2002 and reforms to the Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984.

I am very familiar, as I mentioned, with the work that the Electoral Matters Committee did to prepare and present its final report, and I might add the government is in the minority on that committee. So it is incredibly frustrating to see that despite these important reforms proposed by the committee being wholeheartedly supported by the opposition, they are now seeking to use a bit of a political stunt to scare people into thinking that we are going to impact their ability to vote by post.

The bill implements recommendations that were based on three key questions: was the election inclusive, was the election trustworthy and transparent, and was the election competitive? The findings of these questions were very heartening. The committee found no evidence of deliberate fraud, interference or significant counting errors. Generally speaking, candidates, parties and voters rated the services provided by the Victorian Electoral Commission highly. The VEC is one of the cornerstones of Victoria's fair and open democracy, so maintaining public trust in their administration of elections is of the utmost importance. This bill is going to ensure that the VEC can continue to carry out its essential work maintaining public trust in what it is doing and why.

The amendments in the bill include: prohibiting the distribution of postal votes by people and organisations; clarifying the requirements relating to the use of political signage; allowing early voting to be processed earlier, at the same time as postal votes; and improving the process for notification of vote recounts to candidates and parties. I would like to speak a little bit about the processing of early votes. One of the findings of the Electoral Matters Committee was that early voting represented a significant proportion of votes cast in the 2018 election. 36.8 per cent of all votes counted were early votes, representing an increase from the previous election, and this trend has been replicated in other Australian jurisdictions as well as in New Zealand. Early voting is a very important thing to a lot of Victorians who find it difficult to vote on election day for reasons that can include work, caregiving, travel and health. However, a major factor for many people was the element of convenience. I can attest to this fact from my own experiences campaigning at the early voting centre in Footscray, conveniently located next to Savers and opposite Kmart. I can tell you how many people saw all of the volunteers, politicians and VEC officials camped out along the street and stopped, asked what was going on and whether they could vote early. And many, when they discovered that they had the option to vote early, did. In the context of a deadly global pandemic—

**Mr Fowles** interjected.

**Ms HALL:** I will take up the member for Burwood's interjection: they voted for me, and that was fantastic. I was very delighted to secure a 15 per cent swing to Labor in the seat of Footscray, in part because the Greens fielded an appalling candidate whose contribution to the election campaign I think is well known to people in here.

In the context of a deadly global pandemic early voting will be an important feature for many people in a way that we could not have predicted when we were writing the report. One of the important findings of the report was that the two-week early voting period places pressure on parties and candidates, but it does mean that Victorians find it easier to vote. Facilitating our democracy should be of the highest priority, and that is why the Electoral Matters Committee ultimately supported retaining the existing two-week early voting period.

Another amendment within this bill is to remove the current requirement for maps of proposed new boundaries—of course which Footscray will also have—to be distributed at every municipal council office in Victoria. This is an expensive exercise that does not reflect how Victorians in 2022 receive information from the Electoral Boundaries Commission. The maps of proposed boundaries will be displayed on the electoral commission's website, and I would expect that members of Parliament will be very happy to share that information with members of the public who wish to access it. In the 2013 redistribution the Electoral Boundaries Commission received no evidence that members of the public

inspected any of the maps of the proposed boundaries at municipal offices. Any change to the administration of elections and electoral boundaries cannot occur within a vacuum, and that is why the government has consulted extensively with the Victorian Electoral Commission and ensured that they are supportive of these reforms.

Five recommendations that arose from the Electoral Matters Committee report were directed to government, and as I mentioned previously, these were wholeheartedly supported by the opposition, which is now opposing them. These recommendations include recommendation 28, which pertains to the technicalities of re-counts; recommendation 41, to amend the Electoral Act 2002 to clarify rules about signage around voting centres and amend the status of mobile billboards; recommendation 45, to allow early votes to be processed from 8.00 am on election day; recommendation 46, to prohibit any person or organisation other than the VEC from distributing postal vote applications; and recommendation 47, to remove the requirement for postal vote applicants to separately declare that they understand their name and address may be provided to registered political parties and non-party aligned candidates. And recommendation 47 will ensure that postal vote applications are not rejected when applicants do not tick the declaration box.

I am very pleased to support this bill, and I will conclude on this point. But I just want to reiterate the frustration I feel as a member of the committee, which worked very hard on this report, when I see that the opposition is now opposing it.

**Mr BATTIN** (Gembrook) (12:46): I rise to oppose the bill before the house today, the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2021. I will first go to the reasoned amendment from the member for Shepparton and note that we will support her reasoned amendment. But I just want to clarify one thing. When the member for Shepparton spoke, she spoke about country, and I know she represents the country and she knows how important local papers are. I am in the growth corridor, and let me assure you, local papers are still exceptionally important in growth corridors, where we see continuous change, continuous development, new things happening in our community continuously. Rules are changing, councils are being moved around—obviously we have had issues with Casey council, and we have still got Cardinia council—with reports going into the papers, and the legislation ensured that those changes to rules and regulations were always put in those papers so people knew where they were.

Not everybody in the local communities, particularly in the growth corridors, will refer to their papers; some will go online. I was speaking to my friend from Gippsland East, and we were talking about some of the issues with people getting access to data online when we move away from regional papers and go to just an online service. Whilst I know some members on the other side say it does not mean the data has to go online and there is still the option for it to go in the papers, the reason the data was there was that people down through Gippsland East, when the fires went through, could not access information online. We learned so much from that, and the government need to listen to what the community is saying down there. They could not access online information, so newspapers, radio reports, the telephone were the way communication happened out in some of these regional areas. These are the most important people. They need these regional papers. These regulations and everything else should be printed in there. People who are looking it up in those communities should be heard here in the Parliament.

We know that Parliament is based in Melbourne. I know we always have the jokes around Labor and where they go and not thinking outside the tram tracks, but I do say to them that they have to start considering what is going to happen through regional Victoria when they remove access to information—information about our democracy. Our democracy is too important to be played with, and we need to make sure that information is going out there. It is also a lifeline for many of our regional papers. I know, Deputy Speaker, you would have many regional papers that would support you and you would support them up in your community, as many of us in our communities would. I have the Star News Group in my community. How important is it that they survive? We have seen campaign after campaign. The member for Shepparton, I know, would have run campaigns up there.

It is so important our regional papers can survive. This is something that ensured that they had funding coming through. At the same time that we have got regional papers across Victoria calling for a \$50 million support package, this is another huge hit on them. This is a government that is failing to listen to those communities out there and to those organisations and small businesses—mum-and-dad businesses—that go out and ensure that people know what is going on in their town, even the small things. It could be that you get your name printed up for batting 100 down at the local cricket club. But all those sorts of things support clubs; those clubs can go and get sponsorships. It is all these things that are part of that circular economy in what happens from a local newspaper—real estate, what is going on at your local school. I say to the government: we are going to oppose the bill, but seriously consider supporting, even at worst, the member for Shepparton's reasoned amendment, because it is so important to our regional newspapers.

I will go back to what we were talking about in relation to the changing of postal vote applications—how applications can be sent out, who can get them and who is allowed to get involved in that transition at the moment of how people get postal votes and also early voting. Postal votes and early voting—I know the member for Footscray said it—are so important now within the electoral cycle. Many areas have gone, as I said, above that 35 per cent. Some are up to 50 and nearly 60 per cent. With this election, probably more so than ever, there is a fear in the community about being in queues, in lines and in places of high density. So in this election—we will wait and see; I could be proven wrong—I think we will see a record amount of people who are either postal voting or early voting to try and avoid the queues, to try and avoid being out with mass crowds at the time, and we need be putting in a position where we can support that.

There are normally just under a million people with postal vote applications, but only about 80 000 are registered as permanent postal voters. It needs to be ensured that those people who use those postal vote services, who have used a postal vote in the past, still have that access but also have that information, because many of them are not aware of it. We send out letters. We have done that for a while. We send out letters to people who turn 70 to inform them they can go onto the Victorian Electoral Commission website, go through the details and then register to be a permanent postal voter. But if we do not tell them that, they will probably never be told, and there are a whole group of people who are 70 and above, going from the date this will come out, that will no longer get that information. The only organisation that can send it out is the VEC, and I have to ask: are the VEC going to be sending that out to every person who turns 70? We send them a certificate for their 70th birthday, and we give them all the details of the things that change in your life when you reach the age of 70—things that you can apply for, what you have access to, concessions, whether you can be supported with the government's \$250 grant. All of these things are things we communicate, and one of those is postal votes.

I also go shop to shop. I go to every shop throughout my electorate and make sure I knock on the door a couple of weeks before the election. I hand over a letter to all the staff there and say to them, 'Just to remind you'—and many of them would not live in my electorate, so it is not just about mine in there—'if you are working on the Saturday of the election, there are alternatives for how you can vote, and those alternatives may be that you can go to an early voting centre. If you work hours that won't even suit that, then there is the alternative of postal voting. But you have to apply, you have to go through a process with it'. That to me is all part of our democracy. Not once do I go in there and tell them everything about who to vote for, but I do give them that form. It goes to the VEC, and all parties get the benefit of that now. All parties are aware that that person is now a postal voter.

Why would the government—why would the Premier and the Labor Party—now want to interfere with that system? I did not 100 per cent agree with what happened in the postal voting applications last time, but what I will say is now you are interfering in such a way that it is going to take away the rights of so many people who use that postal vote system to ensure that their voice is heard. It is another thing here in Victoria that is tearing away at the democracy that we have been so, so proud of, that we all in this place, I hope, support and want to continue. I know there are parts of this legislation that

could be supported, but the reality is these are two elements of it that absolutely prevent us, because we cannot just let these things idly swing by. Democracy is too important.

I will finish off by saying the postal vote one is very, very important but I will go back to what was raised around the local papers. As I said, I have got Star News Group. The Star News Group has been around for over 100 years. The editor down there is Garry Howe, who is one of the most committed local community people that I have seen—CFA, sports clubs, making sure people's voices are heard, understanding his local community. I probably should not say, but he loves the races—not a real good punter. But he went as far as buying a race in his wife's name for their anniversary as a gift once. He loves his local community. He lives and breathes his local community. If we change these regulations and these rules of what can and cannot go in those papers or what the government has to put in those papers and there is a drop in income there, it does not just impact Garry, it impacts on the staff—the young staff who he has put through that place who have now come out and are reporters that many of us know. Mitch at the *Herald Sun* and Aneeka at the *Herald Sun*, who does the crime reports—these are people that have come through Star News Group, and I am sure there are many more. There are people from out in the regional areas and from these local papers who have come into the city to work in the major newspapers and gone on to do other things. Some of them are at Sky News, some of them are at channels 7, 9 and 10. They all start somewhere.

If the governments think that they can take away and rip away hundreds of thousands of dollars from these local organisations, all they are doing is adding to the unemployment through those areas or impacting opportunities for these young people. So I say to the government: have a think about this particular part of this legislation, have a think about who it impacts, and ensure when you make your vote today on this bill that you take into consideration that you are ripping the lifeblood out of employment and jobs in regional Victoria and opportunities for young people who can go on and make a major difference in our media. If you go and look at the history of plenty of people in senior positions within our media in Melbourne, you will probably find many of them came from your local country town.

**Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (12:56):** I am delighted to have 3 minutes on the run-in to lunch to address the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2021. I know we are all hungry—do not worry, this will be brief. I think the elephant in the room here is the fact that the committee that made these recommendations had four Labor members on it and four LNP members on it. One of those members is in fact now the Leader of the Opposition, so he has clearly been rolled on this. He has clearly been rolled because the committee came back—and it is not like there were not minority reports. No, the Greens had a minority report as part of this committee reporting process, so it was not like the door had not been cracked open to members of this committee expressing a different view—no, no. The four members of the Labor Party on the committee and the four members of the Liberal Party on the committee all supported the recommendations—all of them. So this is cognitive dissonance to an unbelievable degree.

One of the recommendations supported by the Liberal Party and supported by the Leader of the Opposition was that the government amend the Electoral Act 2002 to prohibit any person or organisation other than the Victorian Electoral Commission from distributing postal vote applications. Now, it does not affect a great many of the postal vote applications. Indeed more than 80 per cent of the postal vote applications are obtained by voters directly from the VEC anyway. What it does do is remove the frankly slightly odious practice, which my party and the Liberal Party have been involved in over a long period of time, of intersecting the relationship between those administering the election, in this case the VEC, and the voter. That is a very good reform. That is a reform that improves transparency. That is a reform that makes sure that the integrity of the electoral system is maintained. And despite some of the absolute nonsense put forward by the member for Brighton and the member for Ripon about this being some kind of Trumpian voter suppression effort, it is in fact a measure that improves the integrity of the electoral system because it removes party politics from the process of voting.

Clearly party politics can and should be involved in the process of electors making decisions about who they are going to vote for, but they should not be involved in the process of voting. That is why, for example, we have delineation at polling places. That is why we have distance between the act of voting and those canvassing for votes. And what we have seen today—it is extraordinary—from members of the coalition is them going against their own members, going against the Leader of the Opposition, who voted in favour of this recommendation, and going against all of that work of the Electoral Matters Committee and seeking to undermine it by coming in here and painting this dystopian picture of these reforms to Victoria's electoral process. It is at best disingenuous. At worst it is a cynical manipulation of this process in this place and the work of this chamber, and I think those opposite should be condemned for it.

**Sitting suspended 12.59 pm to 2.01 pm.**

**Business interrupted under standing orders.**

### Questions without notice and ministers statements

#### ELECTIVE SURGERY

**Mr GUY** (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Minister for Health. Sarah is 32 years old, from Melbourne's south. She is in excruciating pain and requires orthopaedic surgery to walk. Sarah has said, 'I'm halfway through my surgeries. They need to break a bone to straighten my leg. I'm upset and starting to be depressed because I can't move, and I can't sleep because of the pain'. Sarah was due to have her elective surgery tomorrow, before it was cancelled earlier this week. By limiting elective surgery, why is the minister continuing to deny Sarah and thousands like her the ability to be independent, pain free and have a better quality of life?

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:02): Can I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. No-one wants to see these measures to defer elective surgery in place for a moment longer than they need to be. No-one wants to see them in Victoria, no-one wants to see them in New South Wales, no-one wants to see them around the entire country. They are only in place as a result of the implications of what the care service is for those most critically in need of support for their COVID-19 hospitalisations—that is, those people who are the most unwell in our hospital system getting the support and care they need, be that either in the public system or the private system through the application of the national partnership agreement in this space that has been there since April 2020. It is only in that context that these measures are in place.

We have already eased those arrangements at the start of this week, as we indicated, and we have seen 50 per cent return for day and private hospital service systems in that arrangement. We have also foreshadowed that, should the reduction and stabilisation of our numbers continue, there will be more, and I get daily briefings on these matters from both private and public providers of these important services. In that regard, the measures that are in place right across the country, including here in Victoria, are critical to getting us through this global pandemic and the extraordinarily high pressures on the entire system, particularly for our public health services. In that regard the measures that are in place will not be in place for one moment longer than they are either needed or recommended, and they will continue to be eased on the directions that are currently happening. And when that easing happens we will see, as we have always seen from this side of the house, the support for our public health system, the partnership with our private health system partners, the support for the primary care arrangements, and in that regard the kind of circumstances that the honourable Leader of the Opposition points to of course will necessarily be prioritised with extra vigour, extra support and continued extra support from this Labor government.

**Mr GUY** (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:05): I thank the minister for his answer and remind him again that Sarah's surgery was cancelled just this week. The only thing standing between her having that surgery and remaining in a life of pain is the minister making a decision to immediately

resume elective surgery to full strength. With the minister refusing to do this, what does he have to say to Sarah and people like her living in constant pain?

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:06): As I have indicated on number of occasions in recent times, these measures that are in place see the unfortunate and indeed real-world implications of many, many people having to defer elective surgery whilst all category 1 surgery and all trauma and critical surgery is of course continuing through this period. In that regard, important partnerships that we have had with the private care systems will address precisely and in an ongoing way those kinds of measures that the honourable Leader of the Opposition has pointed to in both his substantive and supplementary question. No-one wants to see the kind of circumstances that the honourable Leader of the Opposition points to in place for a moment longer than they need to be. They will not be in place for a moment longer than they need to be, and I look forward to that outcome shortly.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for South-West Coast is warned.

### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: LGBTIQA+ EQUALITY

**Mr ANDREWS** (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:07): I am saddened to have to make a statement to again clarify the government's position when it comes to equality and support for those in the community who need, sadly, protection against bigotry, against hatred and against real threats to their safety, their inclusion, their dignity and their respect. They need that protection it would seem from none other than the commonwealth government. So I do regret having to again put on the record our government's position when it comes to these matters.

Last Sunday Cath and I marched down Fitzroy Street, St Kilda, not just as a symbol but as a practical measure to show everyone in the LGBTIQ community across Victoria that you are loved, you are respected, you are equal, you are entitled to be safe, you are entitled to be respected and you are entitled to have laws that guarantee that. That is what this Parliament says because we as a government delivered and introduced those laws. They had been once defeated, but we brought them back and they went through this Parliament late last year. We will not sit by and see anything out of the commonwealth government put at risk the protections that we wrote into Victorian law.

It is pretty simple: all kids, whether they are gay or straight, whether they are trans, need support and protection, and all kids ought be protected. Anyone who cuddles up to me and says, 'Don't worry. We'll protect the gay kids and we'll get around to protecting the trans kids later', I do not believe them, I do not trust them and I do not think they ought be trusted. Same-sex attracted young people in this state have five times the rate of self-harm. If you look at trans kids, it is 15 times the rate of self-harm. How is it that in 2022 we cannot protect all kids for all reasons at all times and in all places? That is our record, that is our policy, and the federal government ought to be ashamed.

### LATROBE REGIONAL HOSPITAL

**Ms KEALY** (Lowan) (14:09): I agree with the Premier: all kids need protection; they absolutely do. My question is to the Minister for Health. The Agnes parent and infant unit at Latrobe Regional Hospital is a dedicated service helping new parents struggling with living with a newborn, including with feeding and sleeping disorders, and also with postnatal depression and anxiety. For the third time over the pandemic this parent and infant mental health unit has been closed, this time indefinitely. Why are new parents and babies in the Latrobe Valley being denied vital mental health support through the government's closure of this life-saving service?

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:10): Can I thank the member for Lowan. I think the reference was to Latrobe Regional Hospital, the same Latrobe Regional Hospital that was privatised by those opposite, the same Latrobe Regional Hospital that had the keys thrown back at the state by a private operator in this space—that

Latrobe Regional Hospital, which is now back in the hands of the people of Victoria and the people of the Latrobe Valley.

**Ms Kealy:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question. Being a mum that has suffered—

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I need to be able to hear the member's point of order.

**Ms Kealy:** The minister is debating the question. As a mum who has suffered from postnatal anxiety, I ask you to address this very important question about the closure of a parent and infant unit in the Latrobe Valley.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The minister has only recently begun his answer.

**Mr FOLEY:** I thank the member for Lowan for her question, and, yes, the Latrobe public hospital delivers fantastic services to the people of its community as a part of a network of hospitals which it leads in the Latrobe Valley, with partnerships through a health partnership arrangement that that hospital leads right across the Gippsland community.

During the course of this global pandemic and particularly over the course of the last few months we have seen very, very high levels of infection right across our community, and indeed the Latrobe Valley in this area had this implication some time back with the delta wave, but certainly over the course of 2022, in January, the omicron wave has seen many, many, many staff furloughed and many, many others having to step down. And in that regard, when you do not have staff in your hospitals, despite the great surge workforce support that had been put in place by local government in that area—and I want to call out the relevant local governments in the Latrobe Valley and their maternal and child health support services—

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I am going to warn members on both sides of the chamber. There is too much shouting so members will be removed from the chamber without warning.

**Ms Kealy:** On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance, the minister is not responding to the question of why new parents are unable to get mental health support in Latrobe Valley with the closure of this hospital ward.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I uphold the point of order. I ask the minister to come to answering the question.

**Mr FOLEY:** Thank you, Speaker. I was trying to point to the fact that to run quality health services in public hospitals you need staff. We have seen over the course of the last few months in particular a large number of staff in our public health system, and indeed right across the Victorian community, having to be furloughed for all sorts of COVID-related reasons. At the same time we have also seen the network of partnerships from the maternal and child health support system step in in local government in a big way. I want to thank local government and the wonderful maternal and child health support system—the most qualified maternal and child health support workforce in the country—for their help. They have stepped in to support precisely the kind of services the honourable member for Lowan refers to, not just in the Latrobe Valley but right across the Victorian population. That has been really, really important in keeping the delivery of these services in the community happening while we get through these important furloughing arrangements to get all of our health services back operating at an optimal level. I look forward to this government's continued investment in maternal and child health support services delivering results for families and particularly young children.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Eildon can leave the chamber for the period of 1 hour.

**Member for Eildon withdrew from chamber.**

**Ms KEALY** (Lowan) (14:15): Because the minister closed this service new parents and their babies in Gippsland now have nowhere to go to get the inpatient parenting and postnatal mental health support they need. The staff are ready to work and distressed that they cannot support these families in need. Will the minister commit to reversing his decision to close the Agnes parent and infant unit?

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:15): I thank the member for Lowan for her supplementary question. This is a government that is investing more than any other government in our history in maternal and child health service supports right across the healthcare system, and indeed the support of this particular area has been highlighted in the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, of which this government is actually supporting full implementation. We are seeing mother and baby units right across the state being—

**Ms Britnell:** On a point of order, Speaker, I am pretty confused, but is there an understanding of the difference between a mother-baby unit and a maternal and child health service? They are very different.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for South-West Coast is not raising a point of order.

**Ms Kealy:** On a further point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question is particularly around when the minister will reopen the parent and baby unit at Latrobe Regional Hospital.

**Mr Cheeseman** interjected.

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

**Member for South Barwon withdrew from chamber.**

**The SPEAKER:** The Minister for Health is being relevant to the question that has been asked.

**Mr FOLEY:** Whether it is at Latrobe Regional Hospital or in the community health sector, right across the state in the whole field of support for vulnerable parents and their children, particularly at the earlier stages of life, this is a government that has a proud and enduring record of investment and continued reform. In regard to how these services at a particular local level are staffed and delivered in these very challenging times of a global pandemic, I will back Latrobe Regional Hospital every step of the way for the informed decisions they make.

#### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: SCHOOLS FUNDING

**Mr MERLINO** (Monbulk—Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health) (14:17): I rise to update the house on the delivery of the Andrews government's 100 new schools commitment for communities right across Victoria. Our student enrolments continue to grow. Last week I was delighted to visit some of the 14 new schools that opened their doors for the first time for day one, term 1, of the 2022 school year. All schools opened in a COVID-safe way, including with air purifiers, vaccine mandates, masks indoors except when you are addressing students—much like this place. It is very simple to understand for most people. On the first day of term 1—

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! When the house comes to order—there is too much excitement—the Minister for Education has the call.

**Mr MERLINO:** On the first day of term 1 I joined the Minister for Health for the opening of Port Melbourne Secondary College and the member for Bentleigh for the opening of the McKinnon Secondary College east campus. For the rest of the week I joined the member for Bass and the member for Cranbourne in opening Clyde Creek Primary School and Clyde Secondary College. In Bass Coast



the member for Bass and I opened the new San Remo campus of Bass Coast College. In the north-west the Minister for Youth and I opened Greenvale Secondary College and for Kalkallo families the new Gilgai Plains Primary School. We have opened Strathulloh Primary School in the member for Melton's electorate as well as Willowbank Primary School for the Gisborne community in the Minister for Agriculture's electorate. To put it in perspective, 14 stunning new schools in one year for 6000 students—numbers that will continue to grow. They are part of our 100 schools by 2026. There are alternatives. You could promise four, which is what those miserable people opposite did.

### ELECTIVE SURGERY

**Mr GUY** (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:19): My question is to the Minister for Health. On 13 January this year Paul from rural Tolmie, who suffers from motor neurone disease, required critical surgery to assist his eating ability but was denied private health treatment at St Vincent's Private. The government's code brown prohibited this procedure from being undertaken despite a private surgeon agreeing to perform the surgery using the private hospital facilities. This resulted in the deterioration of his health to the point where the surgical procedure is no longer viable. If facilities were available, surgeons were available and nursing staff were available, what was the harm in letting this man get the surgery he needed at the time it was most vital for his health?

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:20): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. I think the Leader of the Opposition said that 13 January was when this matter was with St Vincent's Private, if I heard that correctly, and I think the Leader of the Opposition referenced that being the result of the code brown declaration. It may come as a shock to the Leader of the Opposition, but the code brown declaration did not come in until 19 January, so it always pays to check your facts before you get up in this place and make accusations about what does and does not happen. You might always think that the basics should be done as to what you are accusing someone of doing.

But allowing for that error on the part of the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Opposition does touch on a very important issue, which he has touched on on a number of occasions over the course of this week, and that is the implications of the COVID-19 global pandemic right across our healthcare system, be it our public health services, our private health services or indeed our primary healthcare services. In that regard the record numbers of positive cases that we have seen of COVID-19, in the hundreds of thousands of the omicron variant, have had a huge impact right across our healthcare system, including—I know from discussions between my department and St Vincent's Private—the private hospital system. Can I say how well St Vincent's have actually done with both their public and their private arms in the course of responding to that global pandemic. It is nonetheless an inescapable point of truth that what has happened as a result of that global pandemic is that the most unwell people have needed support along the way.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Gembrook can leave the chamber for the period of 1 hour.

**Member for Gembrook withdrew from the chamber.**

**Mr FOLEY:** That has seen some 43 000 public patients admitted for care in our private partners' services, including St Vincent's. They have done an extraordinary job, but even at the height of a global pandemic which saw hundreds of thousands of cases and thousands of healthcare workers furloughed, even the great work that St Vincent's do—

**Mr Walsh:** On a point of order, Speaker, during the 30 seconds of the 4 minutes left could the minister please address the question and tell Paul, if the doctors were available, the nurses were available and the hospital could do the surgery, why couldn't he get that surgery when he was in a condition when it could be done?

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The minister is being relevant to what was a broad question.

**Mr FOLEY:** A very broad question. In those circumstances it is not just a question of having support on the surgical wards, which was actually problematic at that period of time anyway. You have also got to have the support staff once you are out of the surgical facility. And guess what? Those nurses in particular were, more than any other group, furloughed in record numbers.

**Mr GUY** (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:24): Noting Paul’s referral on 13 January for surgery in late January, he is now too weak to have this surgery and is being visited by palliative care nurses. Minister, why has it come to this? Why is a Victorian who needed urgent surgery scheduled for late January and whose doctor was able to perform it but banned by the government from doing so now facing end-of-life care because the government banned surgery that was able to be conducted?

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:25): As I understand the honourable Leader of the Opposition’s supplementary question in the context of his primary question, the issue of banning surgery through a code brown was not in place at that time. What was in place at that time was the application of the national partnership agreement that allowed the public and the private systems to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, and that has seen a substantial dislocation and deferral of really important surgeries whilst at the same time the continuation of the important category 1—

**Mr Walsh:** On a point of order, Speaker, Paul does not really care about the national partnership agreement. He and his wife actually care about the fact that he could not get the surgery when it was required.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I ask the Leader of The Nationals what his point of order is.

**Mr Walsh:** Could I ask you to bring the minister back to answering the question from the Leader of the Opposition, please, and to show some respect to Paul and his wife.

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

**Mr FOLEY:** No-one wants to see these measures in place for one moment longer than they need to be. They are in fact already being eased, and we have a 50 per cent return in private hospital day surgery arrangements at the moment. These measures will be in place for not a moment longer than they need to be.

#### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: PORTABLE LONG SERVICE LEAVE

**Mr PALLAS** (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (14:26): It gives me great pleasure to rise to address the house and to update you on the outstanding success of the Andrews Labor government’s portable long service leave scheme. Today I had the great pleasure to celebrate a milestone: over 200 000 workers have been signed up to this scheme since it came into operation in 2019, ensuring that some of our most vulnerable workers in the cleaning, the security and the community sectors have access to the entitlement of long service leave that other workers in this state have come to take for granted.

As the Premier said, these workers are heroes. They have kept us safe and secure during this pandemic, and they need the recognition and reward that this entitlement provides them. The scheme gives workers the opportunity to accumulate long service leave entitlements even as they move between employers. Now, significantly, two-thirds of these workers are women, and they have been over-represented for far too long in low-paid jobs with limited long-term security. Let us not forget that those opposite voted against this legislation to establish the scheme in 2018. If they had had their way, these workers would have not been able to access this important entitlement—workers like Cameron, who had multiple cleaning roles and currently works as a cleaner at Flinders Street station. And Thealas, a security guard who had nine different employers over nine years in the industry, told the media today that when his long service leave entitlement vests over six years he will be able to take that as a deposit to buy his first

home. So this initiative speaks volumes for the government's respect for workers who have kept us safe during this difficult time, and it is nothing short of what they deserve.

### LATROBE VALLEY EMPLOYMENT

**Mr NORTHE** (Morwell) (14:28): My question is directed to the minister for energy. Minister, as you will be aware, AGL has announced today that it is intending to bring forward the closure of its Loy Yang A coal-fired power station from 2048 to between 2040 and 2045. This announcement follows the abrupt closure of Hazelwood in 2017 and the scheduled early closure of Yallourn in 2028. Can the minister advise the Latrobe Valley community what the state government is doing and intends to do to support workers, contractors, businesses and suppliers through the closure of these power stations and in particular what future employment opportunities will exist for individuals and families impacted by power station closures in my electorate?

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (14:29): Can I thank the member for Morwell for his very timely question given the announcement this morning by AGL with respect to not just of course the power station here in the Latrobe Valley but also one of the ones that they own in New South Wales. Certainly AGL's announcement today really does point to the importance of governments to be prepared, to think ahead, to work with communities and to invest in a future that is bright and provides confidence and provides a sense of optimism. And that is exactly what is at the heart of our actions as the Victorian government. Nothing is closer to our heart as a government than jobs, whether it is jobs in the Latrobe Valley or whether it is jobs in any part of this great state, and what I will say is that we need to have a look at the record that we have in that regard. The member for Morwell certainly raised the circumstances, or at least the events, of the closure of Hazelwood and of course the closure of Yallourn in 2028 as an indication of how things should not be done and how things can be done. Certainly when the privatised Hazelwood power station was announced for closure, a decision made on the other side of the world, we stood ready, intervened and created a significant opportunity for—

**A member** interjected.

**Ms D'AMBROSIO**: Absolutely right. We created the Latrobe Valley Authority and have invested \$2 billion since 2014 in the region. Since 2016 alone 4000 jobs have been created thanks to the Latrobe Valley Authority and the investment that we put in, but of course these things do not just start and stop at a particular time. We know that transition for areas of our community, including the Latrobe Valley, is years in the making. Creating jobs that are sustainable and the skills that come with that on the back of an industry that has served all of us very, very well for many, many decades needs a transition, and it is only this government that will deliver that.

In terms of the future, I can say to you that the future is one that we absolutely are committed to. We have designated the Latrobe Valley and south of that to offshore in the Gippsland region as one of our six renewable energy zones. We have already allocated \$540 million to develop these renewable energy zones. These will be the future, and the Latrobe Valley and its residents are well placed to take advantage of that. We have made some announcements around offshore wind. Two of those proponents that received grant funding from us are off the shore of Gippsland, and there will be a really fantastic story for jobs, maintenance and skills that will come in the not-too-distant future.

**Mr NORTHE** (Morwell) (14:32): Minister, in addition to the early closure of power stations in the Latrobe Valley which have had and will have a massive negative economic impact in our region, the government is also intending to end native timber harvesting by 2030, which will further erode employment opportunities and business confidence in our community. Given the potential for further massive job losses in the Latrobe Valley through the energy and timber sectors alone, and nearly five years after the closure of the Hazelwood power station, why has the state government failed to work with local industry, business and community members in developing a transition plan for the Latrobe Valley, and will the minister and the government finally commit to undertaking this critical piece of work with urgency?

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (14:33): I thank the member for the supplementary question, and I will disagree with the member on some of the assertions in that, respectfully. The fact is we established the Latrobe Valley Authority. It is about working toward the future and consulting with the communities. The Latrobe Valley Authority has a really strong presence in the community. With any areas of our economy that are subject to transition—there have been many in the past decades and there will be more into the future that happens with innovation and that happens with technology; there is nothing new there—the commitment from this government is that we will continue to work with those communities and create the jobs, the local skills and the local employment opportunities. I simply refer to the record that we have, and it is a strong record. Never do we want to see the things we saw in the mid-1990s when in the Latrobe Valley unemployment hit 14.7 per cent. It is far from that now, and I know that I, the Minister for Regional Development and other ministers in this government stand ready and are delivering for those people.

#### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

**Mr CARROLL** (Niddrie—Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:34): I rise to update the house on how the Andrews Labor government's road maintenance blitz is delivering smoother and safer journeys for motorists while also delivering important local jobs in local regions. We know that roads are the arteries of our local economies. Since 2014 we have invested more than \$35 billion in road upgrades right across our state—\$35 billion. Since September last year some 500 road projects right across our state have been delivered. More than 600 kilometres have been delivered. And the good news is we are only halfway through our road maintenance blitz: we have got another 500 projects to come right across our wonderful state. A great example: with the member for Macedon and the Minister for Regional Development—

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I ask the member for South-West Coast to leave the chamber for the period of 1 hour.

**Member for South-West Coast withdrew from chamber.**

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I warn members on both sides of the chamber that they will be removed for shouting across the chamber.

**Mr CARROLL:** With the member for Macedon, the Minister for Regional Development and the Minister for Agriculture, I inspected the Calder Freeway just last week. Some 4 kilometres of road have been resurfaced under the Andrews Labor government that were badly damaged last summer. But it is not just about resurfacing and rebuilding roads, it is about delivering local jobs for local people right across our state. By ensuring these works are being delivered by local crews, we are also making sure that the money is being reinvested into those local economies—in the hotels, the shopping strips, the cafes—right through our great state.

I want to put on record the record of the Andrews Labor government. Since the last election 6800 kilometres of roads have been rebuilt, 900 in metropolitan Melbourne. Since 2014 some 12 000 kilometres of roads have been rebuilt, 80 per cent in regional Victoria. When you consider that the Victorian government is responsible for some 25 000 kilometres of roads, it gives you a very clear understanding that under this government we have put a record investment into roads and road maintenance. While the other side continue to cut and want to roll back the Big Build, we will get on with delivering local jobs and supporting regional economies.

### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: SUBURBAN RAIL LOOP

**Ms ALLAN** (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (14:37): At the 2018 election Victorians voted overwhelmingly to endorse the Andrews Labor government's plans to build the Suburban Rail Loop. Since then we have not wasted a minute in planning the biggest transport project in Victoria's history, which is more than just a rail line. It is a transformative city-shaping project that will bring public transport to new areas, slash travel times and provide connections to jobs and education.

We had a big year in 2021, which I am very happy to recap, that shows how we are moving into the delivery phase. We extensively consulted with communities. We confirmed the station locations and the alignment of the Suburban Rail Loop east part of the project, released the business and investment case, passed the enabling legislation to establish a dedicated authority and started the environment effects statement process.

2022 will be an even bigger and better year for the project. Construction starts later this year on the early works package. We have already awarded the contract and, most importantly, not only does this government have a pipeline of projects, we have set up a pipeline of skilled workers as well. Fourteen per cent of the people working on the early works package will be reserved for trainees, cadets and apprentices. In 2022 we are moving through the major contract phase. We have committed \$9.3 billion in funding for this part of the project. We are getting on with delivering this project while we see those opposite fumble and fail at every opportunity this week—getting information wrong, missing the call; they cannot even organise themselves to stand up in question time. They cannot even put on a mask—schoolkids can but not those opposite.

### MEMBER CONDUCT

**Ms STALEY** (Ripon) (14:39): I appreciate the opportunity to be the final speaker in question time. My question is to the Premier. Documents obtained by the opposition under FOI reveal that in relation to the red shirts scandal Victoria Police recorded that they received a call from the general counsel at the Department of Premier and Cabinet, who represents the Premier, Deputy Premier and the Minister for Water. It goes on to say:

I am advised they appreciate the offer to provide a statement but decline to do so for these matters.

Will the Premier give a guarantee that he and all Labor members of Parliament will this time cooperate with any investigative body that seeks evidence from them?

**Mr ANDREWS** (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:40): I do feel obliged to point out that the only people being investigated as we speak by Victoria Police are those opposite, who think that if you do not like the rules you can just do a morning radio blitz and somehow change them. No, no, you need to get elected to change the rules. You need to, well, ignore advice to change the rules. So they have got half that equation right—always happy to ignore advice. The laws of this state apply to every Victorian—

**Ms Staley**: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. He is not answering it. It is a serious question about corruption in this state, and I would appreciate a serious answer.

**The SPEAKER**: Order! I understand the point of order. The Premier is coming back to answering the question.

**Mr ANDREWS**: As I was just saying, the laws of this state apply to all Victorians equally, and it would be my expectation and my practice to comply with those laws. If you find yourself having made an error, even if it might be an innocent error—perhaps not wearing a mask a couple of times out in the back car park—then you fess up and you pay the fine the day it is issued. You do not go and try and change the rules because you do not like the rules by doing a morning radio blitz. That is not how it works. I just say respectfully to the member for Ripon: do not hold your breath waiting for me to—

**Ms Staley**: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I note in *Rulings from the Chair*:

When responding to a question a minister must address the question rather than responding generally.

I specifically asked about the red shirts rorts scandal, which I have not yet heard the Premier address in any way, a serious matter of corruption. I ask you to ask him to answer the question.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I thank the member for her point of order. The Premier has been relevant to the question and has concluded his answer.

**Ms STALEY (Ripon) (14:42):** Premier, during the Ombudsman's previous investigation into the red shirts rorts, your government fought all the way to the High Court to prevent the Ombudsman's inquiry proceeding, squandering over \$1 million in taxpayers funds in the process. Will you assure the house today that there will be no further legal challenges to the Ombudsman's power and the conduct of any further inquiries?

**Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:43):** I am not sure that there is a link between the supplementary question and the principal question—

**A member** interjected.

**Mr ANDREWS:** Are we taking lectures from this one about corruption? How is that office of living it up going—the office of living it up? If you want to talk about Ombudsman's reports, mate, there was one written about you, and it is a doozy, and you never paid back any of the money.

**Ms Staley:** On a point of order, Speaker, I appreciate the Premier has not had a good week, but question time is not an opportunity to attack the opposition.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Bentleigh can leave the chamber for the period of 1 hour.

**Member for Bentleigh withdrew from chamber.**

**The SPEAKER:** I remind the Manager of Opposition Business if she wishes to raise a point of order to do so in the correct form.

**Ms Staley:** Indeed. The Premier should well know that question time is not an opportunity to attack the opposition. That is all he has done so far in his response to this supplementary, and I ask you to—

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I uphold the point of order. I also ask members to cease shouting across the chamber.

**Mr ANDREWS:** Thanks very much, Speaker. They are doing a fantastic job of that themselves, I think, really. There has been a referral made to the Ombudsman by a chamber of this Parliament. Whether there is an investigation by the Ombudsman is entirely a matter for her. So the question asked by the shadow minister, who could not even stand up at the right time—

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr ANDREWS:** Well, what a week you have had: basic facts all in error, trying to dodge your responsibilities and now asking questions that are at best hypothetical or inviting me to intrude upon what is properly the province of the Ombudsman. That is a matter for her. That is the thing: when you refer things, they are then referred.

**Mr Wells:** On a point of order, Speaker, in regard to unanswered questions, I have a number of unanswered questions. 5885 to the Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers—can you believe it?—was due on 7 July last year. Other questions unanswered by the Minister for Health: 5945, 5971, 6000 and 6100. And there are a further two: 6144, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and 6174, Minister for Child Protection. I would ask for you to follow up those unanswered questions, please.

**The SPEAKER:** Thank you. I will follow those matters up.

**Constituency questions**

**MURRAY PLAINS ELECTORATE**

**Mr WALSH** (Murray Plains) (14:46): (6196) My constituency question is to the Minister for Industry Support and Recovery. What advice can the minister give to businesses in my electorate as to how they can get their skilled worker visa renewals done in a timely manner? I have a manufacturing business in Kyabram who submitted their skilled worker visa renewal application to the Victorian government five months ago, and they have not heard anything. The five workers have now relocated to New South Wales businesses, where their visa renewals were done within days. Unless the Victorian government process of skilled visa renewal improves, they will lose another two workers to New South Wales. Please, Minister, advise what your government can do to improve the skilled visa renewal process so we do not lose more staff to New South Wales.

**BASS ELECTORATE**

**Ms CRUGNALE** (Bass) (14:47): (6197) My question is to the Minister for Early Childhood in the other place. What is the latest information on the rollout of three-year-old kinder in my electorate of Bass? As the minister may be aware, there are nearly 100 babies being born into the City of Casey every week, a classroom each week in Cardinia, and Bass Coast is seeing a rise in the number of new families moving into our region as well. Last week it was wonderful to welcome the minister to the south-east and visit the newly opened Eliston Family and Community Centre, meet the early childhood educators, speak with parents and tour this amazing service and facility. We are getting on with delivering the three-year-old funded kinder rollout reform. I look forward to the update and thank the minister for her hard work in making sure our nation-leading reform gives every child the best start to their early education.

**POLWARTH ELECTORATE**

**Mr RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (14:48): (6198) My question is to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and my question to the minister today is: who is actually responsible for the lease at the Cape Otway Lightstation? Much was made in recent years about the establishment of the new GORCAPA, the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority, and that they were going to be in charge and seamlessly manage the wonderful natural assets we have along our coastline. But the community has been told that they are in fact not responsible and it is in fact her department, Parks Victoria, who are responsible for the lease. On 30 June this year that lease comes to an end and a wonderful 23-year management of that authority by a local business will come to an end. That asset to the community, that driver of many tourist visitors to our region, will be stripped of all its assets and left abandoned. And I ask the minister: can she please clarify who is responsible and who the community can look to for leadership and control of this asset?

**BOX HILL ELECTORATE**

**Mr HAMER** (Box Hill) (14:49): (6199) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education. What steps are the Andrews government taking to manage the challenges of the COVID pandemic in the school environment and ensure that schools can remain open this year? The last two years of teaching and learning have been unprecedented. Our students, parents, principals and teachers have shown amazing resilience through this time and have continued to achieve fantastic academic results. Last week Victorian schoolchildren returned to school full of hope. Whether they were just starting prep for the first time or beginning their final year of formal education, it was great to see so many smiles at the start of a school year that will hopefully progress with greater certainty and a level of normality. I acknowledge the tremendous effort in distributing more than 50 000 air purifiers and over 6 million rapid antigen tests and an allocation of 1800 school shade grants to provide students and staff with a safe learning environment from the first week back, and I look forward to the minister's response.

### BRIGHTON ELECTORATE

**Mr NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:50): (6200) My constituency question is to the Premier, and I ask: is the state Labor government considering committing financial support towards the upgrade of three childcare centres in my region before they are forced to close? Port Philip council is being forced to close three childcare centres, including the Elwood childcare centre. The centres are aged and need significant upgrades which the council cannot afford. Labor has been using weasel words and will not commit to financial support. For background, the Elwood childcare centre is a community-run centre that has operated since 1985. It offers 35 places per day. Currently there are 16 full-time staff, 55 families and 65 children enrolled. The centre's closure would have a significant impact on Elwood. Council has previously confirmed that there is already a shortfall of childcare places in Elwood. Elwood knows the state government does not invest in our area and remembers their plan to kick Lady Forster Kindergarten out from the Elwood foreshore. Premier, will you save the kindies? Yes or no?

### THOMASTOWN ELECTORATE

**Ms HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (14:51): (6201) My constituency question is for the Minister for Early Childhood in the other place. Minister, the electorate of Thomastown is part of the northern growth corridor and has thousands of young families and their children moving into the area every year. Our Andrews Labor government promised that all three-year-old children across the state would have access to government-funded kindergarten programs led by teachers. This year completes the rollout of at least 5 hours of funded kindergarten for all three-year-olds. Can the minister tell me how children in our area will benefit from an additional year of kinder and how it will increase access?

### MELBOURNE ELECTORATE

**Ms SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:51): (6202) My question is to the Minister for Education. Over the past months I have heard from many residents with questions about the redevelopment of the site on Abbotsford Street and Molesworth Street in North Melbourne. The site is soon to become home to the new North Melbourne Primary School campus. No-one is questioning the benefit of the school or the social housing on the site, but residents feel like they are being totally overlooked by the government agencies working on the developments, especially the Victorian School Building Authority and the Department of Education and Training. They are being given very little information about the height and form of the proposed buildings, the impact of shadowing on their homes, traffic modelling, what the landscaping will look like, how the asbestos is being dealt with and several other issues. Residents are raising very reasonable questions. They are often raising them through the proper consultation channels they are given, but they are given virtually no information or answers back; they are just shuffled from contact to contact. So my question is: will the VSBA and/or the department of education join an urgent meeting with residents to enable them to ask and also get answers to the questions that they have?

### CRANBOURNE ELECTORATE

**Ms RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (14:52): (6203) My constituency question is to the Minister for Agriculture. How is the Victorian government continuing to support Pacific Island workers, especially those from Tonga since the Hunga Tonga eruption and tsunami earlier this year? Cranbourne is home to a significant Pasifika working population, some of whom have family and loved ones that have been severely impacted by the communications challenge between Australia and Tonga after the eruption on the island. The contribution of the Pasifika community to Victoria's culture and industry should be recognised, especially at a time when more support might be needed by this important sector of our community. I ask for an update on how this government has delivered on this need. I thank the minister for her education and advocacy for this community, and I welcome her response.



**ROWVILLE ELECTORATE**

**Mr WELLS** (Rowville) (14:53): (6204) My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, what extra measures has the government taken to prevent staff shortages in schools of the kind which we have seen cripple our health system with the omicron outbreak? Parents in the Rowville electorate, like so many others across the state, are anxious to see their kids return to school with a sense of certainty. With the high transmissibility of omicron and the shortages of RATs we have seen at the start of term 1, this has been a big concern for parents. Parents have also told me they are worried about yet another school year being disrupted by COVID outbreaks and how potential staff shortages and a return to homeschooling would impact on their children. After two years parents are crucially aware of the importance of certainty for their kids' education but also the need for social time with their friends and the importance of being at school for their kids' mental health.

**YAN YEAN ELECTORATE**

**Ms GREEN** (Yan Yean) (14:54): (6205) My constituency question is to the Minister for Community Sport, and I ask: when can the minister visit the Yan Yean electorate to meet with sporting clubs in the Shire of Mitchell to see how well they are making use of our government's investment in community sport based at government schools and at council facilities, such Wallan's Greenhill Reserve, where we have supported infrastructure development for football, netball, cricket, bowls and more; at the neighbouring Wallan Secondary College for football; and also the fabulous new two-court stadium that has been funded at Wallan Primary School?

**Bills****REGULATORY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2021***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

**Ms VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (14:55): I rise to oppose the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2021. I will focus my attention on part 6 of the bill, which is particularly troubling and concerns the amendments to the Electoral Act 2002. Specifically my comments are directed to clause 23 of the bill, which the explanatory memorandum says seeks:

... to prohibit any person other than the Victorian Electoral Commission from distributing a postal vote application to an elector, whether by physical or electronic means.

This bill represents another disgusting assault by the Andrews Labor government on democracy here in Victoria. It represents how far this Andrews Labor government will go to game the system and change the rules to suit their own political interests, to cling to power in this state by applying bans in relation to the mailing out of postal vote applications that residents across Victorian communities are used to receiving and in fact are expecting. This will disenfranchise around 1 million Victorians at least—quite possibly millions—who are used to receiving postal vote information in this way. They will have no knowledge that this longstanding practice is being banned by the Andrews Labor government.

It is another example in a string of examples where the Premier has shown contempt for people. They do not trust or back Victorians to have the capacity to make up their own minds about whether to postal vote, about who to vote for or about when they open the mail from their letterbox, so Labor, astonishingly, is going to ban in it. The provisions in this legislation make it harder for Victorians to vote, not easier. The bill limits the ability for people to vote from home, which smacks of hypocrisy from a government that for two years has wanted Victorians to stay home—to work, school and play from home—and to avoid gatherings, like queues at polling booths on election day. It discriminates against vulnerable members of our community—the elderly, the immunocompromised, the culturally and linguistically diverse and those living in remote locations.

This is a bill that supports voter suppression over voter engagement and represents a desperate attempt by the Premier and his Labor government to keep silent those voters who they know might not vote

for them. This Labor government know that Victorians have had enough and cannot wait to vote them out of office. With this proposed new law the Labor government are trying to game the system in their favour and limit voting options and ways to receive information about postal voting. But none of this should come as any surprise to any of us, because this is the government who gave us the outrageous red shirts scandal in which they fraudulently used taxpayers money to get themselves into power. Another Labor MP, we know, yesterday jumped ship to expose this corruption. This Labor government filled out those time sheets, getting electorate officers paid with taxpayers money when they were actually working on re-election campaigns for Labor MPs. And now in this legislation—

**Ms Settle:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I was not sure that that was relevant at all to the bill.

**The SPEAKER:** I do ask the member for Evelyn to come back to the bill being debated.

**Ms VALLENCE:** In this legislation they want to strip away from Victorians legitimate ways of receiving voting information and stifle their voting options. The basis for this change is an absolute sham. The minister, in his second-reading speech, said this amendment had been introduced on the basis of recommendations made by the Electoral Matters Committee in its report on the conduct of the 2018 Victorian state election, so I decided to have a look at that particular report that the minister was so moved by to make this undemocratic change. Of the 268 pages contained in the report less than two pages are dedicated to analysing postal votes in Victoria. Pages 194 and 195, right near the back of the report, are the only references you will find as the basis of this change in the bill. This report states that the change was suggested after the 2014 election, but it was not implemented back then. The only change between the elections in 2014 and 2018, according to the report, is the number of complaints received about postal voting applications.

The report found that in 2014 there had been 28 complaints about postal vote applications. That was 28 people out of 3.5 million Victorians who voted in the 2014 election. And at the 2018 election there had only been 77 complaints. That is just 77 people out of 3.7 million Victorians who voted who were not happy about receiving postal vote information in this way. So Labor have decided to change the law and apply bans on distributing postal vote information to millions of Victorians just because 0.002 per cent of the Victorian population complained about receiving information in this way—and only five of the complaints, I understand, were due to uncertainty around who the sender of the information was. This obscure statistic is the sole basis for this undemocratic legislative change. A vastly higher proportion of Victorians made complaints about Labor's pandemic lockdowns, but we did not see the Premier or his Labor government stopping or changing the lockdown laws. Instead they pursued longer and longer lockdown laws.

The changes in the bill also fundamentally are inconsistent with everything this government has been telling us for the last two years during the pandemic. The Labor government have constantly berated Victorian people about remaining at home and reducing their movement and contact with people. They are so drunk on power. This government installed the ring of steel, fenced off children's playgrounds and locked up 3000 of the most vulnerable people in housing commission towers without any notice or consultation. But having increased and broader access to postal voting through assistance from political parties, whether it is the Greens, Labor, Liberal or independents, allows Victorians who do not want to stand in line for hours at polling booths around people to exercise their democratic right without the fear of potential infection. By applying bans on how postal vote information can reach voters the Andrews Labor government is discriminating against older and immunocompromised Victorians in particular from exercising their ability to vote from home, which is especially cruel in the midst of a health pandemic. And nothing has been said in the bill, by the minister or by the Labor government that they will increase funding to the Victorian Electoral Commission to communicate with Victorians to fill this void that will be left by prohibiting political parties from undertaking this important task.

In New South Wales the difference could not be starker. The New South Wales government is issuing postal packs to everyone at the moment, even if they do not request a postal ballot. That is emblematic of a government committed to strengthening the democratic processes and values and providing people with every opportunity to cast their vote. They want to make it easier for people to vote even if that means it is easier to vote for the opposition. In a disgusting contrast, the Andrews Labor government is looking for any way possible to deny people their right to vote, particularly if they might not vote for Labor. It is absolutely astonishing.

The bill continues a raft of electoral prohibitions this Andrews Labor government has put in place to maintain control—desperate control—in this state. We have had donation laws imposed by the Andrews Labor government that prohibit people from exercising their freedom of speech and association and donating to political candidates. But paradoxically these prohibitions do not apply to trade unions, which donate as much as they like and can still donate as much as they like—and unsurprisingly that is always to the Labor Party, providing an outrageous advantage in campaign funding which only seeks to undermine any integrity left in our electoral process.

This bill is an affront to our democracy. It is truly frightening how far the Andrews Labor government—the Premier and his Labor government—will go to stay in power. This bill is bad for democracy, it is bad for Victorians, and we will oppose it. We urge all members in the house to vote against this bill. We encourage Labor members to cross the floor, as Ms Vaghela did in the upper house just recently. We just want to stress that this is another example of the Premier's and Labor's contempt for Victorian people. Again, they do not trust Victorians. They do not back Victorians to make their own choice. Just receiving information in their letterbox does not mean they are going to necessarily vote one way or the other. It means that they are receiving information, and it is a democratic way for the political process to be able to occur in Victoria. But because Labor are so desperately worried about the prospect of the next election and because they do not trust the people that they are meant to represent, they are going to ban this longstanding rule. It is outrageous, and I urge everyone to oppose this damaging bill.

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (15:05): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.**

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

### **INDEPENDENT BROAD-BASED ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSION**

#### **VICTORIAN INSPECTORATE**

##### *Performance audit*

**The SPEAKER** (15:05): I have received a message from the Legislative Council indicating they have agreed with the Assembly on the appointment of Callida Pty Ltd, 'Callida Consulting', to conduct performance audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate.

#### **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (15:05): I move:

That the consideration of orders of the day, government business, 3 to 6, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

## Bills

**JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (CRIMINAL PROCEDURE DISCLOSURE  
AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL 2021**

*Council's amendments*

**Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:**

1. Clause 1, page 2, after line 26 insert—  
 “(ca) to amend the **Victims’ Charter Act 2006** in relation to information required to be given to victims; and”.
  2. Page 61, after line 12 insert the following new Part heading—  
 “**Part 4A—Information required to be given to victims**”.
- NEW CLAUSES
3. Insert the following New Clauses to follow clause 117 and the heading proposed by amendment 2—  
 ‘**117A Victim impact statements**  
 After section 13(1) of the **Victims’ Charter Act 2006** insert—  
 “(1A) The prosecuting agency must inform the victim, as soon as reasonably practicable after commencing to deal with that victim, of the victim’s entitlement under subsection (1) to make a victim impact statement.”’.
  - 117B Compensation and financial assistance for victims**  
 After section 16(2) of the **Victims’ Charter Act 2006** insert—  
 “(3) A prosecuting agency that is dealing with a victim must inform the victim of the victim’s possible entitlements under Divisions 1 and 2 of Part 4 of the **Sentencing Act 1991** and refer the victim to any legal assistance available to them.”’.
- AMENDMENT OF LONG TITLE
4. Long title, after “sentence indications,” insert “to amend the **Victims’ Charter Act 2006** in relation to information required to be given to victims,”.

**Mr PEARSON** (Essendon—Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services, Minister for Creative Industries) (15:06): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

This bill makes a number of amendments that will strengthen our justice system. The bill supports the government’s public commitment to complete all of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants, firstly, by introducing a statutory obligation for informants to provide to the Director of Public Prosecutions all information, documents or things relevant to an alleged offence in proceedings conducted by the DPP, and where the material is subject to a claim of public interest immunity, privilege, statutory immunity or statutory disclosure restriction, the informant must notify the DPP of the existence of that material and provide it on request, delivering against recommendation 62; secondly, by requiring the informant to complete a disclosure certificate identifying relevant material not contained in the brief of evidence that is subject to a claim of privilege, public interest immunity, a legislative immunity or publication restriction, delivering against recommendation 63; thirdly, by clarifying that information relevant to the credibility of a prosecution witness must be disclosed to an accused, delivering against recommendation 66; and finally, by introducing a statutory mechanism for applicants to apply for a court order that excuses disclosure of relevant information to an accused person in a criminal proceeding non-disclosure order, delivering against recommendation 67.

The bill supports the government’s public commitment to complete all of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence by, firstly, clarifying the jurisdiction of the Children’s Court of Victoria to make commonwealth family law parenting orders, delivering against recommendation 133;

and secondly, by permitting family violence victim-survivors to give evidence from a place other than the courtroom by means of remote technology, delivering against recommendation 71.

The bill will enable applicants to make public safety intervention order applications online to maximise the safety of victims of assault, sexual assault and harassment, property damage or interference with property, stalking and serious threats. This will improve access for these applicants, support more efficient court processes by allowing online applications and create consistency between public safety intervention order application and family violence intervention order application processes.

The bill will also give the office of the Chief Magistrate equivalence of seniority with the heads of jurisdiction of other generalist courts and tribunals, namely, the Chief Judge and the president of VCAT. These reforms recognise the significant demands of the Chief Magistrate's role and will ensure that the position continues to attract candidates of the highest calibre.

Finally, the bill will expand the role of sentence indication hearings in the higher courts so as to support the continued effective and efficient functioning of the justice system and its recovery from COVID-19, including helping courts to manage and reduce a significant backlog of cases.

The bill was also admitted in the Council with amendments to the Victims' Charter Act 2006 which will require the Office of Public Prosecutions to inform victims, firstly, as soon as reasonably practical after commencing to deal with that victim, of their entitlement to make a victim impact statement, and, secondly, of their possible entitlements to compensation under the Sentencing Act 1991 and to refer victims to any legal assistance available to them.

**Mr BATTIN** (Gembrook) (15:10): I rise to speak on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Criminal Procedure Disclosure and Other Matters) Bill 2021 in relation to the amendments that were put forward in the Legislative Council by the Justice Party, and I rise to say that we will be supporting the amendments here in this chamber. I note that the minister raised some of the issues around the backlog in the courts. One of the reasons some of these amendments and the bill have been brought in is the mismanagement of what has been happening in our court system here in Victoria.

What we are seeing is a backlog in cases going to court, and the impact of that is on the victims. As we know, justice delayed is justice denied. It is creating a lot of pressure throughout our community, but it also places pressure on the justice system and the prison system, our corrections system. Currently our corrections system here in Victoria operates at just under \$1 billion. That is \$134 000, approximately, per person that goes through our system per year. If you compare that to other states, the average is around \$99 000. It is about 35 per cent more here, and we have a higher rate of repeat offenders. We have got worse outcomes and we have got more problems within our system, and the backlog is part of the problem there. I do not get up to defend offenders very often, but if someone is put on remand and the remand is longer than the sentence they believe they could get in the system, that is a fault in the system. That is a fault and it is causing the delays, and that is why this bill was originally obviously put through.

One of the things we wanted to raise as a concern from this side is some of the amendments that have been put forward, which are amendments that if the government had done the proper consultation would have been resolved before this originally came to the Assembly here in Victoria, before it went through the lower house. It ended up in the upper house because the government just failed to listen. There are people on the crossbench from minor parties, obviously with the Liberal Party and the National Party. Not all good ideas directly come from the government. What we do say to the government though is that when you are bringing through such important and vital legislation that impacts so many, you will find on both sides of the house there are people who have an understanding in that area. That could be from the police due to the informants side of this. There are lawyers in this place who have been involved in courts. There are people in here who have been involved in the administrative side of courts. There are so many different areas of expertise within this place, and all

we say to the government is: you do not have to rush to make yourselves out to be the heroes when you can get it done correctly and therefore the outcome is going to be better.

These amendments will impact on victims, and at the end of the day our entire Parliament should be standing up and protecting our victims rights. They go to the compensation and financial assistance for victims, and again it is something that is so important, because every single person in this place has had someone who has come into their office who is a victim of crime. They have already been treated badly enough due to a crime, but when they get treated poorly by the court system or an outcome that puts more pressure on them, that can actually be worse than the crime itself. So when you have legislation coming through around protecting victims rights, ensuring victims are heard, then every government—and this government particularly—has to make sure that those amendments are put through the correct process, or the bill is put through the correct process, and to stop relying on just those on the government benches.

The Justice Party has put these amendments forward. The Justice Party are not with us, and they probably vote with the government more than us, but they have put amendments forward during the committee stage in the upper house, and at every stage they denied by the Victorian Labor Party. It had to be forced to get these changes through. If only Labor had listened to them, it could have been something where there is an open and honest discussion on how our Parliament works and how the democracy should work.

Nothing will ever be perfect. We always know nothing will be perfect, but all we say is: you do not have to be so arrogant that you push it through without listening to those people with the expertise in the fields that are there. This is like groundhog day, because we are continuously seeing mistakes now. And the longer a government is in, the more they think they can just force things through without listening to those people and the others elected in this place, and that ends up with amendments like this. Obviously the arrogance of this government at the moment is just to force everything through without listening to anyone.

In the upper house at the moment it is probably going to be harder now that they have lost another member who decided to cross the floor and I understand is no longer a member of the Labor caucus—someone who stood up against the Victorian Labor Party, someone who has gone out and said they needed to be investigated for corruption. Congratulations to her. Well done. That is going to make it more difficult now, and I hope if there are any consequences of that, other than the poor treatment of the upper house member, that the Victorian Labor Party understand they now have to consult more broadly. They are going to have to find ways to get votes to ensure things are done correctly. I will tell you now: we will be willing to stand at the table and talk to them about legislation to ensure the outcomes for Victorians are better, that the outcomes of legislation are there to protect the people they are there to protect. If the government do not wish to do that, they are going to have more and more issues in the upper house, now that their numbers are looking harder and harder. The outcome for that at the moment is good for Victoria, because we are going to have a government that cannot force things through no matter how much they try.

I would say that the Labor Party now will probably prevent anything that is controversial from going through the upper house between now and the election and will just stick with what they have to have go through just to keep this place operating to ensure they can keep their pay cheques coming in. What they should be doing is still have everything go through this place to ensure that everybody is heard. We do not want to end up in this place again dealing with amendments because this government is failing to listen. We challenge the government from today on to use this as an opportunity to ensure that for legislation going through there is an opportunity for everyone to discuss it. When it is about victims of crime, when it is about Victoria Police, when it is about the law reform system, find people in this place who have the expertise and the skills to assist them to make sure that we do not end up in this position again where the government has tried to ram through legislation that is faulty and it has ended up back in this place, making them look silly when it comes back because they failed to speak to those that know best.

**Motion agreed to.**

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Richards):** A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house's decision.

**Motions****BUDGET PAPERS 2021–22****Debate resumed on motion of Mr DONNELLAN:**

That this house takes note of the 2021–22 budget papers.

**Ms CRUGNALE (Bass) (15:17):** This is the third year I have had the honour of rising and responding to the Victorian state budget. This one is the 2021–22 budget. I want to thank the Treasurer for the budget and what it brings to my electorate of Bass. When I rose to respond to the budget in 2020, I made the comment that I did not want to dwell on how hard the year had been for all of my constituents, their friends and families and networks. None of us had any inkling really that the economic and health stresses our communities were feeling would still be continuing 12 months later and are continuing obviously as I speak.

Creating jobs and caring for Victorians is what we are doing as a government. We care for all Victorians. We do not hit the nightly news complaining about others and we do not go on about how it could be better. We work tirelessly and constantly to make lives better for all Victorians. We value our workers and the work that they do. One such example of this is the announcement that Koo Wee Rup Primary School in Bass is one of the 52 Victorian schools that will be upgraded as a result of the budget. This means 3500 Victorian jobs will be supported and Koo Wee Rup Primary School will receive \$6.87 million to build a new competition-grade gymnasium. It was only last year that I was reading that Koo Wee Rup had been named the fourth most affordable suburb for housing in Victoria. It is a great town, and the local community is exemplary in how it comes together across all age groups and across all interest areas as well.

Those students who have been following their dreams—we recently watched the Olympics, the Paralympics and now the Winter Olympics—will have a state-of-the-art gymnasium at their own school, not just for now but in 20, 30, 40 years from now. That building will stand as a reminder that this government cared. Meanwhile up the road the two primary schools and a secondary school will be built thanks to our government's funding for land acquisition in Clyde North. More jobs will be created and supported as the bricks are laid, the gardens are planted and the technology is installed. More jobs will be created when they throw open their doors to new teachers and administrative staff, all part of this government's \$3.5 billion commitment to education.

Caring is at the heart of any community, and education is a vital component of community. It is where families meet and lifelong friendships are made. It is where people are welcomed and invited to join in and they make those connections. We all know stories of when we met—'We met when the kids were at school together'. When the school bell rings many in my electorate head to the beach for the summer holidays as they take hold, and the lifesaving clubs come to life. They come alive. The red and yellow flags come out of storage and the nippers head for the water. Thanks to this budget, which was delivered last year, the Wonthaggi Life Saving Club will be rebuilt following the devastating hailstorm of 2019. That is \$4.5 million to rebuild these much-loved facilities in Cape Paterson. I call on the council and the federal government to partner with us, as they did with the rebuild of the Cape Paterson Surf Lifesaving Club. What can say more about jobs and caring than rebuilding this facility that has protected its community for over 80 years? Founding members were honoured with Order of Australia medals in 2021. The new build will allow schools and community groups from the region to use the additional hall space at Cape Paterson bay beach.

Last year I said that my constituents, when asked, said that they wanted a job, good health care, roads and a sustainable environment, and this budget continues to deliver on these. My constituents are all

for health services closer to home, and our community hospitals will do just that. Pakenham Community Hospital has had funds allocated for construction, and proposed services include general medical, specialist appointments, allied health, social supports, paediatric care, diagnostics, including pathology and imaging, public dental, mental health services, alcohol and drug services, family safety and crisis support services. It is planned for the centre of town, and it will be an easy to get to focal point right close to the rail line—what an amazing level crossing removal program we have in Pakenham—which goes up and connects either side with a massive open space beneath, which is walking distance to the soon-to-be built new main train station, bus interchange and everything associated with all things public transport.

The hospital complements the My Place youth facility, which has been renamed Cardinia Youth Hub—we were doing the sod turn there just last week—being built down the road, for which Cardinia council put up the land and \$1 million, with our Growing Suburbs Fund contributing to a healthy tune of \$3 million, and the feds funded it too. They threw in \$1.5 million—a great partnership with all levels of government. Also our youth have an expanded facility which will offer programs and services for young people aged 12 to 24, with dedicated training rooms, counselling rooms, showers, laundry, recording booth, basketball, computers, multicultural services and a fabulous rooftop recreation space.

Still talking health, it is wonderful to have you in the chair, member for Cranbourne, my neighbour. This budget has us building \$100 million new paediatric emergency department zones dedicated to children, including at Casey Hospital. It is great also to have my other neighbour here in the member for Narre Warren—South? North?

**Mr Maas:** South.

**Ms CRUGNALE:** South, right. There is nothing more reassuring to a parent than to have medical help close by, and we want our youngest Victorians to get the best care. No parent wants to be sitting in an emergency department at 3 in the morning, and any of us in this chamber who have had that experience know it all too well. To have a dedicated children's emergency department close by makes sense, and it will make a difference to know that help is at hand without driving an hour. It gives such peace of mind in an emergency. With 22 000 presentations each year at Casey, it is busy and this is warranted. It means more local jobs too, with 300 being created at the peak of construction. Nightshift nurses, doctors, cleaners and administrative staff can stay in their community and not face long drives home after long shifts.

The commitment to funding the planning and business case for a new adult ED at Casey—and, by the way, also Maroondah, Northern, Mercy and the Austin—is another statement that this government cares about Victorians: quality health services close to home. Paediatric emergency departments are also being built at Maroondah, Northern, University Hospital Geelong and Frankston. It is a big health infrastructure build to deliver better care for local families, and it will also drive the creation of more 2400 new jobs—local jobs.

The southern part of my electorate thanks this government for the ongoing commitment to the Phillip Island Community Hospital. We should hopefully have all the designs out and start working on that from mid this year. The future of health care on the island is assured, with our community hospital adding to the facilities that this government built at the health hub. With everyone coming down over the holiday period as well, the urgent care centre was pretty flat chat this summer, and it is wonderful to have out of the community hospitals a 24-hour urgent care centre. It is all part of the overall budget package of more than \$7.1 billion to continue improving our hospitals and healthcare system. Proposed services include those referenced when speaking to the Pakenham Community Hospital. And of course there is the Cranbourne Community Hospital, which services my Clyde and Clyde North communities. Work is already underway.

We will not forget the \$115 million expansion and upgrade to Wonthaggi Hospital—not this budget, not the last and probably not the one before, but it was a commitment in the last term. Works are



happening at a ridiculous pace actually, and I really cannot wait for the stop-motion film to see that all glued together in what will be quite an amazing sort of stream of footage as well. It is on track to open in early 2023, but at this pace I think the building itself will be commissioned later this year so Bass Coast Health, who have done an amazing job as well, can get into that building and get all set up for the summer period. It will have a new ED, 18 additional treatment beds, three new theatres and a new 32-inpatient ward and be able to treat 26 000 emergency patients every year.

With the Regional Health Infrastructure Fund being loaded up a further \$20 million it means my Kooweerup Regional Health Service and Bass Coast Health can put up more projects as well. We have already seen this fund Armitage House and Griffiths Point Lodge—operating equipment, air conditioners, firefighting equipment and so much more for these two vital health services. I love this fund. It is up there with the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund. To speak to those projects is a story in itself.

Recognising the key role of schools in supporting the wellbeing of our students, this budget also invests in the new School Mental Health Fund, and I am really pleased that in the drop-down menu there is mental health first aid, which will be delivered by the wonderful Live4Life group. This investment will support schools to implement mental health and wellbeing programs that best meet the needs of our students. The mental health in primary schools pilot was also announced in the budget. That was to be expanded to include 100 government schools. All the primary schools in Bass Coast come into the mix mid this year, with Casey and Cardinia the year after.

To roads and the environment, the locals around Inverloch have watched the erosion over the past few years as the waves lapped over the coastal Bunurong Road. It used to be 40 metres from the high-water mark, and it has gone down to about one. So this budget included \$30 000 to investigate an alternative route on more stable land to ensure that buses, cars and emergency vehicles will be able to connect the coastal towns of Inverloch and Cape Paterson well into the future. It forms part of the \$78.6 million in upgrades to metropolitan and regional roads.

Back in the north of my electorate again, the two new bus routes, the 897 and the 898, were welcomed by commuters when they commenced in March last year. Locals were thrilled with this budget announcement to extend the routes in the rapidly growing areas of Clyde and Clyde North, and we recently had the 881 come online as well, part of the overall budget allocation of \$74 million in public transport, adding to cleaner environments by allowing commuters to leave their cars at home.

When we reflect on the past few years, we see the enormity of the commitments this government has made across so many areas of the portfolios—the promises made to the community of Victoria, and how we have kept those promises. I reflect on the courage it took to hold a royal commission into the state's mental health system, and I think now of the \$3.8 billion that we have committed to transforming the way mental health support is offered in Victoria: rebuilding a broken system from the ground up, transforming it with early intervention, providing a dedicated stream of care for our kids, recruiting thousands and thousands of new workers, acknowledging the severity and complexity of mental health and its many manifestations and allowing people to seek help in their local communities, staying close to home.

Last but by no means least, importantly this budget continues our government's commitment to *Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy*—\$4.3 million to ensure that outcomes for women are measured as part of the budget decision-making strategy. No matter what electorate you are in, this budget cares about you. Our government, the Andrews Labor government, cares about you, whoever you are, wherever you live and whatever your needs and interests are.

I just want to thank the Treasurer again for a budget that creates jobs and cares for all Victorians, and I thank everyone that has been part of that journey to get the budget released—it sort of feels strange that we are about to go into another budget round soon—strengthening communities at work and at play. To my constituents in both the outer metro suburbs and the rural communities, thank you as well.

Irrespective of age or gender, background or location we continue to look out for our community today and for tomorrow.

**Ms VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (15:31): I rise to speak on the 2021–22 state budget take-note motion. I note it is some eight months since this budget was handed down by the Andrews Labor government, after months and months and months of lockdown—the longest lockdown in the world by the Andrews Labor government—and mismanagement even in this chamber by the Labor government of the government business program, so that we are still debating and discussing last May’s budget some eight or nine months after the fact.

**Mr Pearson:** You’re discussing it. You didn’t have to put yourself on the speaking list.

**Ms VALLENCE:** Thank you, minister at the table. I would like to discuss it because there is a lot to discuss in it; it is a very, very bad budget. The latest Andrews Labor government budget is, sadly, weighed down by more waste and by more taxes—job-destroying taxes which will hurt families, young people, women and our vulnerable at the worst possible time. It is sadly a budget that proves that when Labor runs out of money we all know what happens: they come after the money of the Victorian people. This budget has nearly \$6 billion of increased taxes, and net debt is forecast to soar above \$156 billion—a record level of net debt—and that will significantly hurt Victoria’s recovery out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Let us look back at some of the damning newspaper headlines in response to the Andrews government’s job-destroying budget last May—and of course it was last May, so perhaps members of the Andrews Labor government need reminding of the media reports at the time. ‘Victoria’s horror budget’ said the *Australian Financial Review*, ‘Business shakedown’ said the *Age*, ‘Labor budget a “risk to recovery”’ said the *Australian* and ‘Divided we spend’ said the *Herald Sun*.

Labor’s job-destroying budget has been universally condemned by economic commentators, business groups and Victorian families, and all this budget does is put Victoria’s economic recovery at risk and thousands of Victorian jobs in jeopardy. Let us not forget that this budget was all well before the crushing third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic—the delta variant back then—the seven-day-turned 77-day lockdown last year, the sixth lockdown, and the subsequent outbreak of the omicron variant of COVID that still to this day keeps businesses closed and people out of work in a troubling shadow pandemic. The Andrews Labor government I note has failed to offer any financial support to those businesses that are still closed at this time and those people that are still out of work as a result of this shadow lockdown.

The 2021–22 Labor budget is nothing but a sea of taxes, with Victorian businesses and households being crushed by Labor’s waves of deficit and out-of-control spending. It is all waste and mismanagement over on the Labor benches. At the heart of this budget is a new \$3 billion payroll tax on Victorian employers. Employers who spend more than \$10 million on wages will now be forced to pay a surcharge, another new tax. I think that was Labor’s 39th new or increased tax despite the Premier saying he would not introduce any—another lie. At the heart of this budget, as I said, is that new tax. We are not talking about BHP, we are not talking about Telstra and we are not talking about any of these big companies having to wear this extra cost; we are talking about those smaller businesses, those medium-sized businesses that worked hard to keep Victorians employed during two years of the pandemic only to see this Labor government punish them for doing so.

This new job-destroying tax will hit Victorian universities. Remember that? It was some time ago now. There was lots of hoo-ha at the time and lots of distress in the university industry that Victorian universities will have to pay an additional \$40 million in taxes to this Labor government at a time when universities are already shedding hundreds of jobs and have lost millions of dollars in revenue as a result of the international students being unable to travel to study here due to the COVID pandemic. It is clear all this Labor government cares about is taxing money from anyone they can and that it has a complete disregard for the financial consequences this will have on businesses here in

Victoria—universities or any other business. It really has left universities on their knees. They are still struggling to get back on their feet.

The Labor government have attempted to justify this massive job-destroying tax on the basis that we need to fund mental health challenges. Mental health is critical to every Victorian, and we all need to commit to this more. We all need to do more to support people with their mental health challenges, especially young Victorians, but all Victorians, and especially as we look to rebuild and recover from the COVID pandemic. But to use mental health as an excuse to justify imposing billions of dollars of taxes on Victorians is an insult to every Victorian who suffers from mental health issues. How dare this government use them in this way? This Labor government has no shame—has absolutely no shame—to tax Victorian businesses in this way.

One of the main drivers of Victoria's mental health problem is of course that Victorians suffered the longest locked down days in the world. That is one of the drivers of the mental health problems. The disruptions to education, the lockdowns and shutdowns of business—it is the Andrews Labor government's failed response to COVID that has driven a spike in mental health concerns in the last two years. And that is proven. You do not need to listen to me or the Liberal Party or the National Party; you can listen to experts like Professor McGorry and many other experts in this field. The spike—the Murdoch Children's Research Institute in their recent report on children and adolescents blames it fairly and squarely on the lockdowns imposed by this government.

Of course we know that this was as a result of the second and third waves. We also know that this was as a result of the underprepared and underfunded healthcare system, which is causing stressors for people right across Victoria, which in turn is causing mental health issues. The only reason Victoria was the only state in the country to suffer a second wave—and we will go back to the second wave because that is timely in terms of the budget that we are speaking about—was that this government botched hotel quarantine. Remember that government program? Remember that government workplace? More than 800 Victorians tragically lost their lives as a result of that scandal-plagued government program, which saw the government instituting private security guards and putting them in charge of infectious diseases quarantine without any PPE and without any infection control training—and it was all the Labor government. This saw Victorians locked in their homes for 23 hours a day, unable to travel more than 5 kilometres from home and prohibited from being outside past the curfew of 8.00 pm at night. Remember that ridiculous one? It was not based on any health advice whatsoever.

Enduring lockdowns have caused so much damage to the mental health of Victorians, and now this Andrews Labor government wants to tax them more to fix the fatal mistakes and failures it caused. This Labor government has no shame. More than 9000 Victorian businesses are now going to be forced to pay this extra tax, destroying any hope these businesses have of creating new jobs for Victorians. Funding mental health is crucial, but something that this Andrews Labor government has completely missed is that it should be funded as a core function of government.

**Mr Pearson** interjected.

**Mr Riordan:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I was just wondering if you could ask the table-duty minister if he might just provide a little bit of courtesy and allow the member for Evelyn to put her case without rude and unnecessary interruptions.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Richards):** There is no point of order, but I do ask that people keep their comments at a level perhaps below my hearing so that I can hear the member for Evelyn.

**Ms VALLENCE:** Thank you, Acting Speaker. As I was saying, funding mental health is crucial, it is vital, but it should be funded as a core function of government. It is something that this Andrews Labor government has simply failed to do. On this side of the chamber the Liberals' and Nationals' policy could not be any starker, any more different or any more contrastive to that of the Andrews Labor government. We see that this should be funded as a core function of government, just like health,

just like education and just like police, not the lazy levy that Labor is lumping on Victorians because they have got no better way to deal with issues than to lump another big new tax on Victorians.

This budget has forecast a net operating deficit of \$11.6 billion for the 2021–22 financial year, with the total net debt increasing to a massive \$102.1 billion. Have you got anything to say about that? It is ridiculous. In fact Victoria's net debt is set to more than double to an eye-watering \$156.3 billion in 2024–25—an astronomical debt, a record debt that this Labor government is leaving to our children and our grandchildren to pay off. It is astonishing and outrageous. The Parliamentary Budget Office in its independent analysis of the 2021–22 budget noted that:

... the government's forecast fiscal position over the medium term is deteriorating.

This is a Labor government that is addicted to taxes. It is drunk on debt and reckless spending. There is no plan for how this government is going to repay this debt or how it is going to rein in uncontrollable spending. It is all about waste and mismanagement over on the government benches. Labor knows no other way than debt-fuelled projects in the inner city. Look at the West Gate Tunnel Project: it is well over 2½ years into that project and they still have not even started tunnelling. I think they should change the name—'West Gate Tunnel Project' is a complete fallacy. This is a Labor government that has lost complete control of its spending, and it is sending Victoria into an economic abyss.

Public sector wages are exploding under this Labor government and are set to rise by 17.8 per cent by June 2025. The public sector wage is rising by an extraordinary 9.6 per cent in the next financial year alone, and there is no way these wage increases can be justified. We have seen multiple times in the media the increase to the bureaucracy and the fat cats at the senior levels getting paid more than even the Premier. That cannot be justified. These wage increases cannot be justified to the level that this government is doing. And the implementation of new senior bureaucrats and new whole bureaucracies cannot be justified. This government is totally out of step with what private employees are receiving in the context of a pandemic and a challenging economic environment. Our public service continues to bloat under this Labor government without a shred of evidence of increased productivity or efficiency. On the contrary, we saw hundreds of hotel quarantine workers who continued to be paid in full wages without doing any work at a time when there was no international return travel, costing taxpayers \$1 million for hotel quarantine whilst no-one was quarantining in it. Only the Andrews Labor government could design such a flawed system.

As if this job-destroying payroll tax surcharge was not enough, this Labor government is also slapping on a \$2.4 billion increase in property taxes. At a time when our economy is only just turning the corner after this Labor government subjected us to a second and third and fourth wave of the COVID pandemic and the mismanagement that went with that, they are determined to punish families and businesses for the mistakes that they have made in order to sustain their appetite to spend and waste taxpayers money. When the Treasurer spoke in defence of his truckload of new taxes he said:

Many big businesses have continued to profit through the pandemic—pocketing taxpayer subsidies ...

and it was time for them to:

... help out their community ...

These are the same businesses that kept people employed during the second wave of the lockdown. The subsidies the Treasurer refers to that these businesses received came from the federal Liberal government through JobKeeper, which made it possible for employers to remain open during Victoria's second wave. It now appears that the Labor government wants to do all that it can to claw back any of this commonwealth money in order to try and prop up its debt-laden budget.

Now, I want to look at a couple of things in my local electorate. I am really pleased to have helped secure \$4.7 million in much-needed funding for Manchester Primary School to upgrade classrooms and the administration wing—under the watch of this Labor government those buildings had deteriorated with asbestos for years and years and years—and I congratulate the school community on that. And further, working with Seville Primary School principal James Burnside and the school

community we managed to campaign for \$187 000 of much-needed funding to construct overhead court covers. But beyond that the 2021–22 budget leaves residents in the Evelyn electorate completely and utterly behind. When will the government spend the money from the federal Liberal government to fix Killara Road and Maroondah Highway in Coldstream and the Warburton Highway?

**Mr McGuire** (Broadmeadows) (15:46): We are confronting the catastrophes of our times. We are creating opportunity and we are looking to spread prosperity. I want to in this contribution go to some of the seeds that were sown in the budget that have already delivered results. The Victorian government invested \$400 million in an Australian infectious disease institute and then added another \$50 million offer for mRNA vaccine manufacturing. Now, this defined national and international leadership, and what has already happened is that the Victorian state has won the national highly contested bid to manufacture mRNA. This is an investment that will be defining for generations. This is how the government has seen the big picture, pursued it, aggregated our assets and delivered life-saving and life-changing results for any other pandemic and for a whole host of other opportunities.

It has been my humbling experience as the Parliamentary Secretary for Medical Research to work with some of our best and brightest world leaders, and we have to really identify how important that is. Australia is not world leading in many things outside of sport; in medical research we are. So, first of all, by seeing the vision, the plan, and making the investment, taking the risk, it has paid off. We have representatives from Moderna who are here looking to see where they can help manufacture this next generation of technology and breakthroughs. This is the advocacy that we have needed, and it delivers and it links to another opportunity that we have. We have the connection with the White House through the Cancer Moonshot, and what President Joe Biden is doing now is he is looking to access the intellectual property that was used in a defence force department that was for national security in the US that developed the internet and GPS and to actually take that intellectual property and get a social dividend through health. That is for cancers, it will be for COVID as well, and it is for Alzheimer's disease and diabetes.

So this is how Victoria has been able to take national and international leadership, and these are the investments that were made in that budget and how they are already providing outstanding results for our future, and doing that gives us a position for a lucrative export industry. If you have a look at countries like Indonesia—it is the fifth-largest population in the world, it is on our doorstep—and right through South-East Asia and other countries, we can provide that.

We have also been able to extend CSL's benefit of manufacturing more than 50 million doses of AstraZeneca to save lives here and abroad. The Prime Minister came to Broadmeadows, and CSL have done another deal that means that there will be manufacturing of new vaccines for influenza nearby. So this is how the government has set up the vision, the plan, the strategy, and how it is being executed and the results that are being delivered.

So, yes, we have to fight relentlessly against a new virus that has variants and the issues that that presents on a daily basis, but I think we need to pause and say 'Well, here is what is being done on the big picture as well' and not miss that in the day-to-day churn of events and headlines and decisions, and see that this is how this government is setting up our state and taking a leadership position. I want to acknowledge the Premier, the Treasurer, the minister and—you should never underestimate—we have got a Nobel Prize winner in Professor Peter Doherty. Professor Sharon Lewin is outstanding. I mean, she is probably somebody who will get nominated for a Nobel Prize in the future. The way that our institutes, the Burnet and the Doherty, have come together with the University of Melbourne to deliver on this is outstanding. There are not many countries that actually manufacture vaccines. So if we want to move to being the smart nation, which is what we are attempting to do, this is defining. I just want to start by saying we should sometimes step back from the hubbub of the day and see the big picture and understand what is being done.

Just on behalf of the community that I represent, I am also keen to deliver on creating opportunity zones, to look at how we drive economic and social development and how we go back into so-called

rust belt areas and turn them into brain belts. That is what I have been trying to do as the chair of the Broadmeadows Revitalisation Board, and I added '4.0' for industry 4.0, because we need the new industries and jobs. We need to harness technology and to fast-track through deindustrialisation. The policy is to look at the practical, creative responses to make the cultural, generational and systemic changes that are required, and the issue is something that I am proud to have beaten like a drum. I will continue to do it while I am here to change the so-called postcodes of disadvantage into postcodes of hope, and we can do this. We need to do this, because the pandemic has shown how it stalked inequality. You cannot leave any community vulnerable, so you have to actually aggregate the three tiers of government, business and civil society and go back into these little suburbs and postcodes and see how we have brought together a better system.

This goes to another issue that Australia must address. We have got two elections this year, so it is going to be difficult because of the contest, but if we are to rise above the contest of ideas, we do have to have a look at how we coordinate in a much better way. Next week marks the 11th anniversary of my election in a by-election, and you think about what has happened since then. The Brumby government was a good government that unexpectedly lost, and I had the humbling privilege to be able to have a chance to come to the Parliament to pursue the contest of ideas. But if you think about it, it was at a time of hyperpartisanship, hyperfactionalism. We had five prime ministers in as many years up to 2015—from both sides of politics. Then we had a time of counter-enlightenment. Facts, instead of being stubborn and cherished, were deemed even by the White House as being alternate. So we have had to walk through this minefield, establish and reconfirm the importance of facts being stubborn and cherished, the importance of science. Look at how well that has served the people of Victoria, with the government taking a rigorous approach to try to be factually accurate and evidence based.

Oppositions will argue that not everything was perfect. Of course it was not perfect. It never is, particularly in a time of the worst pandemic in more than a century and the worst recession since the Great Depression. And yet we have been able to move beyond that, and I think that is really what is the number one priority. That is what the people of Victoria look for us to do: to try to take responsible decisions. What I would look for in trying to establish creative opportunity zones is a way of having a regular audit of what is happening in these communities, to make sure that they are getting their fair share of any investments and to make sure that we can even up the set of circumstances. I say that because it will save us a fortune. I say this as the Parliamentary Secretary for Crime Prevention. We know where crime lives; it is the same place as poverty. That has been the saying since Marcus Aurelius was the last great emperor of Rome: poverty is the mother of crime. How do we bring this together? My view is to have it under law and have an annual report to the Parliament and an audit to see what is happening with these communities. I think it will be a major advantage for equality, for better opportunity and for spreading prosperity. That is something that I hope we can deliver in the near future.

Then it goes to industry policy, and I do want to cite what we tried to do with the Broadmeadows Revitalisation Board, because if you have a look at what happened, we had the demise of our once-proud automotive industry. Broadmeadows was hardest hit when the iconic assembly lines fell silent, and Geelong of course was devastated as well. We had a strategy from the Australian government that really managed the decline. The approach to Melbourne's north was the same as Margaret Thatcher's approach to England's north. There were no votes so you got the least amount. That is what happened. That sets up the proposition for social catastrophe, as it did in England's north.

We have had to fight through that. In Victoria's most disadvantaged communities, in the state district of Broadmeadows, we had unemployment at a rate of 26.4 per cent—a higher rate than Detroit during the US auto industry's demise in 2009—and youth unemployment at a perilous rate estimated at 40 per cent. Then we had the issue of one of Australia's leading companies, CSL, deciding to build a \$500 million plant in Switzerland for three new products instead of expanding its manufacturing in Broadmeadows after telling a Senate inquiry in 2014:

Australia is a relatively unattractive location ... to commercialise locally developed intellectual property into global markets.

I have advocated to change such follies for industry development, for independent supply chains and for national sovereignty. The Australian government refused at the time to reinvest an unspent \$1.32 billion from the automotive transformation scheme into Melbourne's north.

What we were able to do was to coordinate, to get the business community to come. I had a series of economic and cultural development conferences beginning with the Treasurer and we got the Business Council of Australia to come to Broadmeadows. That, during that time, inspired a \$500 million investment into the Ford sites. That is the catalyst investment. We have now leveraged that through the Broadmeadows Revitalisation Board 4.0 to get a billion dollars of shovel-ready and pipeline projects, and that is estimated to deliver 5000 new jobs at no cost to taxpayers where they are needed most.

Now, the next big-picture idea—and I am glad to see the Minister for Planning is here as well—is I have co-authored a strategy with two eminent professors from the University of Melbourne to try and look at how we can have a suburban and social innovation lab. The idea is to get more value out of the landmark projects of this Victorian government—the Big Housing Build, \$5.4 billion—and the Minister for Housing is in the chamber. This will change people's lives for generations. But we have to make sure that we add value. And I am reminded of a quote from Robert Hughes that public housing too often has problems, because whether it is from the left or the right, whether it was Franco's Spain, Brezhnev's Russia or Pompidou's France, we have to watch the element of greed and the lack of curiosity over time. So we have to keep creating the new ideas to build on these projects, to harness them and to deliver, and I think that this is an outstanding opportunity to look at what can be done, to look at a place-based model that embeds expertise across industry, civil society and government to deliver tangible, long-term solutions in partnership with the community. I have argued that there should be investment in this because I think that is the kind of innovation hub that will help 321 different suburbs. Hume City Council is interested in landing it in Broadmeadows as its home, but it will have an impact for everybody. They are the seeds of a great budget and our future under Labor.

**Motion agreed to.**

### **Bills**

#### **HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (QUALITY AND SAFETY) BILL 2021**

##### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed on motion of Mr FOLEY:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Ms CUPPER** (Mildura) (16:02): It is my pleasure to rise in support of the Health Legislation Amendment (Quality and Safety) Bill 2021. The importance of quality and safety in our hospitals does not escape me. More than any other region in the state we know what it takes to make a hospital safe. It takes a strong legislative framework and a system of management that promotes high standards of care and compassion. The return of Mildura Base Hospital to public management brought our management system into alignment with the legislative ethos of public health care, and the government's initiative in this bill enhances that ethos even further, giving validation and reinforcement to the safety revolution already underway at Mildura Base Public Hospital.

My electorate was home to Victoria's only privatised public hospital right up until 2020. In the heyday of neoliberalism, health bureaucrats of the day could be forgiven for thinking that you could outsource the provision of medical care and naturally a commitment to safety and quality would follow. But soon afterwards, in the proceeding years, it became very clear that paying a private company to run a public hospital would not extend to genuine care and compassion for either frontline staff or patients, nor an interest in learning and improving from their experiences. For the first 12 years of the privatised hospital, for the most part, patients and families who experienced safety issues suffered in silence and

isolation. It was difficult for any one individual to know the true scale of the safety problem, with hospital management typically telling individuals that their experience was an anomaly and that every hospital has its bad days.

Aside from the occasional quip—for example, from our then National Party federal MP who stated that he would not send his dead dog there after a member of his family was poorly treated—there was not a firm catalyst for the community to come together and compare notes about their safety experiences. But that catalyst came in 2012 when the late, great Dr Kevin Chambers, an internationally renowned surgeon based in Mildura, blew the whistle on the catastrophe that was the privatised Mildura Base Hospital. He knew what the general community was at that time unaware of, that negotiations for the renewal of the 20-year contract were due to begin and he was concerned that the government was counting on quietly renewing it. He knew this would not be in the community's interest, because he had a front row seat to the privatisation experiment and he saw with his own eyes a slow, steady and dangerous decline in standards of care since privatisation began.

He knew that patient safety was at stake along with recruitment, remuneration and retention of staff. On his own initiative he wrote a memo to the community and letterboxed it as widely as he could, warning of the impending renegotiation. It prompted the formation of a community advocacy committee, known as Reclaim the Base, led by a series of chairs, including former mayor Peter Byrne, former councillor Jill Joslyn and current Wentworth councillor Jo Rodda. The first order of business was a public forum where Dr Chambers and two of his medical colleagues addressed the community about the failure of privatisation and the need to get out of the contract. Hundreds showed up to that public forum, and they were all relieved to learn that their safety concerns were not a figment of their imaginations but a very real and widespread problem that was causing unnecessary pain and distress, all in the name of profit for shareholders.

Dr Chambers, Dr Barry Doughty and Dr Vasa Skorupanovic along with other key community activists took massive risks to question a model at a time when powerful corporate interests, backed by the then coalition government, pushed back hard. Legal threats, demotions and public ridicule were among the tools deployed to silence the debate. Dr Kevin Chambers's access to the theatre was cut back. But the tactics did not work. The community had started comparing notes on hospital safety, and the notes were not good.

The Mallee has a long history of political stoicism and will put up with a fair bit for a fair while, but once the flood wall bursts there is no stopping it, and we determined to fight for as long as it took. It would be a long fight, but this was not our first rodeo—our train activists can vouch for that. It was difficult for anyone, even Dr Chambers, to make the safety argument, however, because anecdotal accounts were really all we had. This was because monitoring systems that produce numerical statistical measures were calibrated to monitor publicly managed hospitals. These systems did not anticipate or account for factors such as the impact of the profit incentive, the corporate approach to risk mitigation and the absence of a community board of management that is specially attuned to community needs and safety issues.

It was not until a group of incredibly brave doctors, a nurse and a clinic administrator met—in secret, to protect their jobs—with a senior government minister in the Andrews government in early 2019 that the safety concerns, long expressed by patients, were finally vindicated, acknowledged and acted upon. I remember the words spoken to me by that minister on the way out of that meeting, and they said, 'That was compelling. There are safety issues at other public hospitals but nothing like this'. It was a pivotal moment. Someone was finally listening, and our community was being heard. It vindicated the conclusions of seminal research from the UK in relation to safety which found that you ignore patient accounts at your peril.

On 23 August 2019 news broke on social media that Mildura Base Hospital would be returning to public management. The news was announced prematurely after local media had broken the embargo, and that was only because the news spread like wildfire once elated staff were notified. Then at



midnight on 15 September 2020 the hospital was finally returned to public management. It was a triumph for democracy, but it was also a triumph for patient safety.

Since the return of Mildura Base Hospital to public management the most evident change has been its renewed commitment to safety. In the past 12 to 14 months the leadership team at Mildura Base Public Hospital—led by the first public board in 20 years, a dynamo CEO in Terry Welch and director of patient safety Andrea Floyd—have implemented a raft of strategies, including a new patient safety program, where patient safety information and awareness is proactively provided to staff every month, with content targeting key risks of patient care and how to improve patient safety and experience; a new bedside handover protocol on all shifts in all areas, where patients are engaged in the shift-to-shift handover and can ask questions; patient safety rounding, where hourly rounding is deliberately and proactively calibrated to meeting patient safety and care needs; and patient experience meetings, which are conversations between patients and senior managers about safety issues and adverse experiences, often in patients' own homes. The meetings allow patients and families to get the hearing they deserve, and all issues raised are investigated and responses are provided. There is a family test, which is actively promoted as a cultural thing, which requires staff to reflect on how they would view the patient's experience if that patient were a member of their own family to encourage adherence to kind, compassionate, thorough, attuned and empathetic practice standards; and there is the patient story program, which involves the preparation and presentation of video stories of patient experiences as part of regular professional development, and the videos identify the impact that the care issue presented and help to reinforce that family test message.

This change in culture driven by public healthcare values and excellent internal leadership will be strengthened and reinforced by the elements of this bill—for example, the establishment of the statutory office of the chief quality and safety officer; the establishment of the processes and protections for quality and safety reviews of health service entities by that chief quality and safety officer; the creation of a new statutory duty of candour, requiring health service entities to apologise and provide specified information to a patient impacted by a serious adverse patient safety event; an extension of protections for apologies offered by health service entities; and the introduction of new protections for internal investigations and reviews conducted by health service entities in relation to prescribed events.

These measures are a great leap forward for hospital safety in our state, and the synergies between the legislation and the safety revolution at Mildura Base Public Hospital are obvious. We thank the Andrews government for bringing Mildura Base Public Hospital back into public management and for its continued focus on patient safety across the state.

**Mr TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (16:11): It is fantastic to—

**Mr Rowswell** interjected.

**Mr TAYLOR**: Thanks, mate. What do they call this?

**Mr Rowswell**: A tie.

**Mr TAYLOR**: No, no. What is the pattern on it?

**Mr Fowles**: Paisley.

**Mr TAYLOR**: Paisley. Thank you, member for Sandringham and member for Burwood, for the clarification on my tie, and the Minister for Planning for telling me to get on with it. What a way to start my first contribution in 2022. I tell you what, you could take a summary of that 30 seconds, and maybe they will say in years to come this was my contribution in Parliament.

It is fantastic to rise and make a contribution in 2022, and there is no better way to start than to make a contribution on a health-related matter bill and to speak in favour of the Health Legislation Amendment (Quality and Safety) Bill 2021. It is all very well and good for us parliamentarians, in our

representation of Victorians in this place of Parliament, to take credit where we can, but I always like to thank the good Minister for Health; his team; importantly, the department, who have no doubt put countless hours—many, many hours of work—into this really critical piece of legislation; and all of the people that have contributed to this work, and I will get a bit into that in a tick.

I just want to acknowledge the absolute bravery and courage of the member for Tarneit. It takes a lot to share what the member for Tarneit shared about her personal story and the difference that legislation like this perhaps could have made in her circumstances and will do, as we know, for people moving forward. It was really, really brave of her to do what she did in this Parliament yesterday. And it is always wonderful to hear from the member for Melton about his experiences and how this will make a difference for everyday Victorians, and I thank the member for Melton for always sharing and being open and honest about his previous role as a paramedic.

I do want to just pay particular thanks to our healthcare heroes. This is a health-related bill, and our nurses, our paramedics, our doctors, our frontline healthcare staff continue to do amazing work, incredible work. I want to say, straight off the bat, a big thankyou to our healthcare workers not just locally in my area, in Bayswater and Knox, but right across this state for the amazing work they continue to do in trying circumstances. I am grateful that this bill will hopefully make their work that much easier, in making a safe workplace not just for them but for the care that they provide to patients. Our nurses and healthcare staff helped to build this legislation, based on the review that was done, because who knows safety better in hospitals and our healthcare settings than those who work in them?

A small anecdote I want to share with this place is about a nurse. I was out at a mobile office very recently, and I started getting heckled—let us say verbally abused—quite insistently by someone I will describe as an anti-vaxxer. As if our healthcare heroes have not done enough, have not stood up enough for themselves and for their patients—and done incredibly well in doing that—this nurse turned around and started telling this anti-vaxxer to calm down, saying, ‘I see it—get vaccinated’. They know safety and they know what a difference it makes to get vaccinated, and the work they put into this is all about safety and looking after patients and looking after our healthcare settings. I have got to tell you other community members turned around and came to my defence. I did not flee from the fight. I was there, and I was making sure that this person was being respectful to our healthcare workers. But it was just incredible and goes to show the efforts and the extremes to which our healthcare workers will defend themselves, their colleagues and their patients, so I thank our healthcare workers greatly.

Of course the overall purpose of this bill is to improve the quality and safety of health provisions in Victoria and facilitate more person-centred and accountable service provision in a number of ways: by increasing Safer Care Victoria’s ability to identify and assess quality and safety risks and support remediation, mitigation and improvement where risks are found; by encouraging and facilitating full and frank participation in candour and serious adverse patient safety event review processes to drive continuous improvement of quality and safety; by helping to foster an open and honest culture in health services by elevating obligations for open disclosure, candour and apologies; and by ensuring the Victorian Perioperative Consultative Council has the requisite independent powers and protections to operate effectively to reduce perioperative mortality.

We know that this bill is yet another example of the Andrews Labor government delivering on our commitment to improve the quality and safety of Victoria’s health system, which I have flagged probably half a dozen times already. You know, safety is at the absolute core of this bill—and of course patient safety and staff as well. And when we look at our commitment, this government’s commitment—hearing from the member for Mildura just before about our commitment to support the Mildura community—I am very proud to report some significant progress on supporting the safety of patients and backing in health care locally in my part of the world as well.

You know, there are a lot of things to be proud about, but something that sometimes flies under the radar—perhaps not for the last two or three years—is the provision of aged care. We do public aged care pretty bloody well here. It is not perfect; nothing is perfect. But I am so proud that we are building

a state-of-the-art facility—this thing is incredible—in the heart of Wantirna, on the corner of Boronia Road and Mountain Highway. I was out there. It is practically nearly finished. We will open this facility in April this year—about April, they tell me. I was there. It has got bathrooms for every suite, spacious suites—I am told sometimes double or triple what is standardly available now—four stories, open space, cafes and little memory boxes. It is pandemic proof, so we can actually keep things out. I know a number of my colleagues have been there. I was very lucky to see it closer towards the back end, and it has just been incredible to see the progress that has been made. To understand, to know and to get a sense from the healthcare professionals who took us around with the CEO of Eastern Health and to understand the difference in the quality of life and the dignity that will be restored for the elderly residents was just awe inspiring, and I am very proud this government has invested around \$82 million to deliver the facility.

Particularly on another matter close to home, I know the Deputy Premier, who is not here, has loved this hospital for a very, very long time. It is 81 years old—I went to its 80th birthday party; it had a birthday—but the Angliss Hospital is very much loved. It is a bigger hospital, but it has still got that community hospital vibe. It has been an absolute pleasure over the course of the journey to get to know the healthcare workers there. And look, they needed an upgrade of facilities, and I am very proud to report that planning is very much in its advanced stages for a major expansion of the Angliss Hospital—some \$100 million to deliver a number of new ward beds, a number of new operating suites and a new central sterilisation services department. I remembered that one; I stuffed that a few times in a video I tried to film. It is going to be absolutely state of the art, and it is going to ensure that we provide the best health care locally—not something you have to travel into the city for. Everyone should have the best health care locally without having to travel hours and hours and minutes and so on. This is an incredible project at the Angliss Hospital, and this bill is really another chapter in the story of how this government works with healthcare professionals and works with the sector to provide a first-class healthcare system in Victoria.

This bill does of course represent the final stage of legislative reform arising from the 2016 report *Targeting Zero* on the review of hospital safety and quality assurance in Victoria led by Professor Stephen Duckett. *Targeting Zero* was commissioned by the Minister for Health following the discovery of a cluster of tragically avoidable perinatal deaths at Djerriwarrh Health Services. We know the *Targeting Zero* review provided us with a detailed and extensive analysis of how the health department oversees and supports quality and safety of care across the Victorian health system, with ‘safety first’ being the mentality very much these days across the workforce—and so it rightfully should be. It certainly was when I was in the Victoria Police force—safety first, well and truly. We know it captured the views and experiences of patients, clinicians, hospital managers and boards about how to make Victoria’s health care safer. Gaps and failings in quality and safety systems were highlighted as well as the need for action and leadership to achieve change and prioritise patient safety. We know in 2016 the then Minister for Health committed in principle to adopting all the recommendations of *Targeting Zero*, including those which require legislative change, and we know that these reforms are the most significant overhaul of Victoria’s health system in decades.

This legislation will strengthen the role of Safer Care Victoria. This will foster an open and honest culture in health services. It is going to make our hospitals, our healthcare settings safer than they have ever been. It will encourage and facilitate full and frank participation in safety reviews. Of course as we know, as other members have detailed in this place Victoria should always strive to be at the forefront of health care in Australia and internationally. We know that many prerequisites for high-quality safe care are already in place here.

I will finish with the words of the minister from his second-reading speech and simply say that this bill is about openness, honesty and transparency. It builds trust between patients and health practitioners and improves quality and safety outcomes. It also leads to more learning and improvements that build a stronger and more accountable health system to benefit all Victorians. Like the minister, I commend the bill to the house.

**Ms BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (16:21): I rise today to speak on the Health Legislation Amendment (Quality and Safety) Bill 2021, but before I begin I would like to acknowledge the hardworking health professionals who have been working absolutely under enormous pressure in a system that is not well funded—but I will get into that in a minute—and putting them into extraordinary circumstances. I am very lucky to know many of the nurses who work very hard across South-West Coast, my electorate, particularly at South West Healthcare, where I trained. I would like to acknowledge today that in Queen's Hall is one of my friends who I trained with, Catie Asling, an exceptional nurse who has both theatre training and midwifery training under her belt. Catie and I, as I said, trained together, and it has been interesting listening to stories of my colleagues. Thanks, Catie, for the hard work you have been doing. I know you did 12 hours in PPE, which is hot in any circumstances, and swabbed my son and my daughter-in-law throughout the last 12 months and just spent three weeks in the COVID intensive care ward at South West Healthcare. You are one of many that I would like to thank and acknowledge. She is sitting out there with a couple of my dairy colleagues, so I had better acknowledge Rod and Lesley Sheen as well.

I think it is really important that we acknowledge the hard work of the health professionals, and this bill is a health bill that actually does a few things, but I am going to highlight two things, and the first one is that the bill permits the Secretary of the Department of Health to appoint a chief quality and safety officer. This new officer will be responsible for conducting quality and safety reviews of health and ambulance services, and these reviews will focus on systemic issues rather than the individual fault. Now, the question I ask is: is this bill an admission that the policies and procedures in place at health services right now are insufficient to deal with patient treatment problems? The question really is: why is a chief quality and safety officer needed? I would suggest that if we look at the Productivity Commission's report, it highlights just this week that we as the state of Victoria are the most underfunded state for health of anywhere in this nation. We have the least health funding per capita, per patient, of any other state. This is not because of the pandemic. This, according to the Productivity Commission, began long before the pandemic.

We have got a Premier who was the Minister for Health for three years and then became the Premier, so he knows very intricately the health system and he knows that he has not done his job. Yes, we absolutely are in a pandemic, and yes, we need to do things differently than we did two years ago, but the reason the health system is under pressure is the mismanagement of this government. I back that up with the statement that if we had have had the 4000 ICU beds when they were promised to us, we would not have the waiting lists we have today for surgery, because many of those surgeries cannot be done, because you have to have sometimes an ICU backup, and there is just not the capacity because we have not had that promise delivered on.

I will move on now to the second point I want to highlight in this bill, and it is about when we have had an incident—and these do happen, because nothing is perfect—and the doctor or the health organisation, the hospital, is able to issue an apology to the person without compromising themselves, without fear of incriminating themselves. I actually think this is very important.

When people go through a health situation it is a really, really vulnerable time in your life, and if something goes wrong or you believe something has gone wrong and people go to ground and do not actually give you a decent explanation, it is very, very hard for people to process and move to an acceptance stage and work with what the problem has left them with, or some people might lose someone, a family member, or they might actually—you know. I have seen it many, many times, and people just find it very, very disturbing. So I think this is really good, and I think it is really important. It is psychologically important to have an apology when you deserve one.

I think it is really a good segue to talk about the apology that is needed to go from the Premier and the health minister and the Labor state government to the 801 families who lost loved ones at the start of the pandemic as a result of the failure of this government to recognise that you do not put people in charge of quarantine who have no infection control training. I mean, really? That is the most basic thing. I do not—well, I do know why they did it. It was all about giving jobs to the boys. What on

earth was this government thinking? And 801 people died. So that is one of the first apologies that might hopefully happen, and what about apologising to all the people now who are on a waiting list—80 000 people on waiting lists for vital elective surgery.

It is not just the people on waiting lists, because that is going to grow. It is going to be a thousand next week on top of that and another thousand. By Easter it will be 90 000. I worry about the people who have put off things and are not on waiting lists. Those people who have a colonoscopy every two years, they have thought ‘I can’t go to the doctor. We’ve been told not to do that. There are other people out there more important than me. I’ll be fine’. And lo and behold, I am really worried about the fact that they will not be. Instead of having a polyp that was precancerous they get told they have got stage 3 cancer, and they begin their chemotherapy, and they begin their bowel resection and whatever treatment has to happen, and their life is more than likely severely shortened. And that is really not good.

I spoke to a very esteemed gentleman from my part of the world just last week, one of our senior clinicians, a senior physician. I said this to him, and he said, ‘We are already seeing it, Roma’, and he told me about a lady who got seen by telehealth because she thought she had sciatica. And you cannot really examine a patient really well. Telehealth is good, but when you need to go in, you need to go in, and the doctors were not able to do that. So she saw someone for her sciatica, which turned out to be a primary osteosarcoma in her hip, and by the time this fellow saw her she had a fungating cancer in her breast. That means the cancer broke through the skin and was oozing, a revolting wound, from her breast. You do not see that anymore. I saw that years ago. You do not see that anymore. We are seeing things again that we should not be seeing, and I think about all the men in the country. It has been so goddamn hard to train them to get to see doctors, to prioritise their health, to attend to their prostates before they have a problem that is untreatable. That is so important. That has been a really big campaign. Well, I can guarantee you most of the farmers I know would have put that off, and we will see so many cancers that we will not be able to treat.

I just cannot not mention either this callous decision that the government made about IVF, putting in-vitro fertilisation treatments on hold. These women have little chance, these families have a little window to be able to have these babies, and the government did not think—obviously—because they said it was about resources. But the minute the community went into an uproar, they reversed it. So it was all about politics, because if it was about resources, which they said it was, because they did not have enough nurses, suddenly we found out all the nurses had been put on holidays, and the decision was reversed. Well, sorry, but you are going to have a hard time telling anyone that that was a decision that was based on health advice: (a) because no-one will show us this health advice, and (b) how can the health advice then be flipped within two days and suddenly the resources appear? I am sorry. I can only think it is just pure callousness. That is all I can imagine. There are so many examples. I could go on for so long.

You know, in question time we heard about the mother-baby unit in Gippsland that has lost funding. This is when women who have postnatal depression or a mental health crisis—sometimes extremely sick—have to be hospitalised, and they cannot be hospitalised with their babies unless they are in a mother-baby unit. But let us just cut the funding for that.

The minister goes on about maternal and child health nurses. Like, that is a different subject, Minister. You must know that. And you have stopped that until 12 March anyway. I just cannot understand the callous, callous behaviour that this health minister is responsible for. The Premier, as I say, knows the system, and he is absolutely callous.

**Mr FREGON** (Mount Waverley) (16:31): It is my pleasure to rise today to speak on the Health Legislation Amendment (Quality and Safety) Bill 2021. I, like with the previous member’s contribution, will also start by thanking and acknowledging the very hard work of our healthcare workers. I think that we will in years to come really look back at this time and the amount of effort that all healthcare workers—from surgeons to orderlies to nurses to everybody—pitched in.

I know I, like other members, have had conversations with many. I remember back to what probably would have been April last year—not last year, the year before; it has been a while. It was during the first real lockdown. It might have been May. Anyway, the nurse called me and was trying to relay what she was going through every day and how it was affecting her. She lived with her family. They had kids. They lived in the Mount Waverley district. She was living separately from the rest of her family. She was wearing full PPE every day, as all of our healthcare workers and ambos and everyone else has been doing. When she got home from her shift it would take her an hour, going through the back door and the laundry, to get out of the scrubs and whatever else—you know, the uniform and the PPE. She would shower. She would do all that, all separately. Her tea would be ready in, again, a separate part of the house. She would eat by herself. She would basically sort of wave at the kids through a window, go to bed, get up in the morning and do it all over again. That was then, and I would imagine that that woman has spent many, many, many days since in similar situations, like others that I have spoken to.

They keep going back. They are exhausted, but they are still going. Because as much as we would wish it to be over, the pandemic is still with us. It is not the same as it was two years ago, thankfully. We have got vaccines. We understand more about the virus. We understand the benefits of masks and air purifiers. Different variants have changed the results, but it is still going, and obviously for anyone who is involved on the patient side of our healthcare system it is a different environment than we would normally be used to.

Surely it is common sense for all of us to understand the pressures on the system that we have—and it is a fantastic healthcare system—the pressures of this virus, of the length of time that we have dealt with it. It is under strain. That is why we have a code brown at the moment. It is all very well to say, ‘Well, where are the 4000 ICU beds?’, and make that argument. That is fine, but you need staff to have them, and you also need to produce the ICU beds when you need them. If there were another 200 ICU beds sitting there empty with staff just waiting at the end of the bed saying, ‘Well, eventually someone’ll need it and will come’, then you would be saying, ‘You’re wasting staff, you’re wasting money’. Pick your argument. The reality is if we needed them, they would be there.

**Mr Battin:** You’ve just gone to a code brown because you needed them.

**Mr FREGON:** No, it is people. It is people.

**Mr Battin** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Gembrook! Through the Chair, please.

**Mr FREGON:** Sorry, Deputy Speaker, through the Chair, yes.

**Mr Battin:** I think you should sit down because you’re embarrassing the Labor Party.

**Mr FREGON:** The member for Gembrook talks about embarrassment—

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Gembrook! Member for Mount Waverley, through the Chair, and I would ask the member for Mount Waverley not to respond to interjections.

**Mr FREGON:** Okay, I will not respond. I will try and use some candour, which brings us back to the bill. A bit of candour today would be a good thing.

These healthcare workers have done amazing work day after day. I have had family members who have been involved in our healthcare system from the other side over the course of the last couple of years, and it is hard when you have got a loved one in hospital. In my case it was my father and my mother could not go. It is hard. Like, that is really tough. But also you have got to understand—surely we understand, most of us—that you cannot just act like it is normal, because it is not.

This bill creates a statutory duty of candour, while we are on the subject, of which an apology will be a mandatory requirement. As other members have said, making an apology may not fix whatever error

has occurred when it does occur, but it will not hurt, especially the people who that error has happened to. Making it mandatory and adopting the duty of candour law and continuing the work of reform that this government has done in this space acknowledges that that apology is important to people.

We have seen apologies from governments over the years, and there have been arguments about public government apologies. Some have said, 'We don't want to apologise because that means we are accepting fault' or guilt or whatever. I think of the apology to the stolen generation in this way: this country struggled with that apology for a very long time in the sense that, 'If we make this apology, the sky will fall down'. Well, Prime Minister Rudd made that apology, and the sky did not fall down. But I would argue that many, many Australians received that apology and that it was a very worthwhile thing to do for our country. Similarly, just this week we have had an apology in Canberra about the treatment of staffers in Canberra, and again the sky has not fallen down.

It is important to acknowledge when mistakes happen because, as other members have said, mistakes do happen. It does not matter if you are dealing with a once-in-a-century pandemic and you have got all of the stresses of everyone shifting into gear and setting up a quarantine system in a weekend or whatever, mistakes will happen. Acknowledge that. When you acknowledge those mistakes and you work on it—and I will quickly go to this before the end—the other side of that is to give the feedback to the patient in question so that not only does the apology happen and we acknowledge the mistake but also we can say, 'This is what we're going to do to try and make sure this doesn't happen to the next person'. And that is a moving feast. That is a continual work. I mean, we are all in here following a long line of people who have been in this room because the job is not done today. We will be back in two weeks, and then there will be others in here and there will be others in here. And this continues because we will never get it perfect, but we continue to turn up and try. And we work at it.

So this bill also establishes the chief quality and safety officer and grants the statutory officer the power to review health service entities, including authorisations to inspect and audit hospitals. The officer will create guidelines for health services that are publicly available—more transparency. These guidelines will cover topics in the public's best interests, such as emerging risks and trends, and outline recommended clinical practice.

This is another good step forward in public health policy and implementation by the Andrews government, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Mr SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (16:41): I rise to speak on the Health Legislation Amendment (Quality and Safety) Bill 2021, and I say that today we actually should not be talking about amendments, but we should be talking about a complete overhaul of the health system. The health system in Victoria is absolutely broken. It is a mess. It is a disgrace. This government has had and this Premier has had 15 years—11 of which he was either the Premier or the health minister—to fix the health system.

We hear from the government that all of the problems that we are currently experiencing are due to COVID, all of the waiting lists, the lack of answering by the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA) of our 000 calls, our ambulance wait times, the elective surgery—80 000 people on the waitlist. It just keeps skyrocketing. It was at 65 000 a year ago. Each day that the government has cancelled elective surgery is another day where we see patient after patient added to that list, and these are real people. These are real stories.

We have heard each day the Minister for Health being asked questions, whether about a young child with a cleft palate who needs an operation desperately—not in six months time but tomorrow—and without that operation will have a lifetime of issues and complications. And what does the health minister say? 'Well, I'm not going to talk specifics, but let me give you some statistics'. Well, that family does not need statistics. That family needs answers. They need our surgeries to have the ability to open.

We have had so many examples of that, where we have had the private system wanting to open the doors, the elective surgeries, the doctors, the nurses, wanting to help, but they are being turned away. The government has completely turned their back on those willing to help. At a time when you would think the government would actually open their arms and say, 'We will take whatever help we can get', this government has turned its back. They have turned their back on so many, like Richard Bloom. His wife went to school with me. She is also a surgeon. Both Richard and Lisa and many others have made the point that they have their surgeries, they have their staff, they have their team available, but they cannot operate. They cannot work. You have got many of these doctors and nurses sitting at home doing gardening because they cannot actually do surgery.

**Mr Edbrooke** interjected.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** Now, the member for Frankston talks about 'on the bill'. This is about the health situation, the crisis that we face here in this state. That is what this bill is about, and it is disgraceful, the mess that it is in. Look again at our ESTA wait times. I was talking to one of the journalists yesterday, who said to me—

**Mr Wynne** interjected.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** Yes, an ABC journalist yesterday that said to me that she fears actually calling 000 for the sheer matter of somebody being on the other line to take the call. This is an essential service. This is something where you want someone on the other end to actually take that call. You want somebody to be available. Now, this is not a joke. This is quite serious.

**Mr Fowles** interjected.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** And the member for Burwood laughs.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Caulfield, through the Chair.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** Deputy Speaker, the member for Burwood laughs.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I ask the member not to respond to interjections.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** Can I give an example, in my electorate of Caulfield, where somebody had to wait 6 hours for an ambulance—Christina Lackmann died. That is what happened to her. It is not a laughing matter—from this fool. She died. And that is the situation of the health system here in Victoria. It is broken. None of the members in this house on the government side should be laughing right now. They need to take things very seriously. When you have got no confidence that somebody is going to be at the other end to take the call to 000, when you are unsure whether an ambulance is going to turn up and when you are unsure whether you are going to be able to find a bed available to treat you, then we should all be taking things very, very seriously.

I want to put on record the great work that our healthcare workers have been doing in a very stressful situation. They are overworked, they are at their wits' end and they are stressed. I have had so many nurses, doctors and healthcare workers contact me at their absolute wits' end in terms of what they are doing. But let us not forget the government—and the Premier, as health minister for 11 or Premier—have had 11 of 15 years to fix this. This is not a COVID situation, this is a health crisis. This is broken.

**Mr Wynne** interjected.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** The fact of the matter is that we have gone from code reds, Minister for Planning, to code browns. It does not matter what code you want to call it, it is code broken. That is what it is.

**Mr Wynne** interjected.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** The Minister for Planning interjects, but every other state is managing their situation and is able to deal with elective surgeries and what have you. We do not have—



**Mr Wynne:** Is that right?

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** Minister for Planning, how many other code browns are happening around the country at the moment? The state of Victoria is the only place with a code brown. This state is broken. It is the only state in Australia that has a code brown. It is absolutely Victoria that is broken. You only have to ask people that are waiting. We have rolled them out, not for a media stunt but for an answer. That is what these people want and expect—an answer—and the Minister for Health is not giving them one.

**Mr Edbrooke:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, in the time left available to the member I would ask you to bring him back to the bill and the reforms in that bill.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** It has been quite a ranging debate in the last 45 minutes, but I do ask the member for Caulfield to come back to the bill.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** Part of what this bill talks about is the ability to make an apology when a situation in a health system happens to the point where you can apologise to those that have been affected. I very much think that regarding the bill the Premier and this government should be making an apology—firstly, for the 801 lives that were lost only in Victoria, not in any other state. Due to bad decisions made with hotel quarantine 801 people have died. Have those families and loved ones been contacted and received an apology from the Premier and those ministers? Have they? I put that point.

Four thousand ICU beds were promised. Now we are in a code brown and we have been in a code red. The member for Mount Waverley said, ‘If you wanted them, we could get them’. Well, we are in a code brown at the moment—we have had code reds and I do not know how many other codes we are going to have or invent—and the member for Mount Waverley casually says, ‘Well, you know, if we need them, we’ll find them’. What a joke. It is an absolute disgrace, this failed government, on something you would think should be a number one priority.

We have had another talk about how we are in the middle of a pandemic. I 100 per cent accept that, and that is why all of the resources and efforts should have been directed towards them. We have been in a pandemic for two years. This did not happen overnight. For two years we have been in a pandemic. We have had a health system that has failed for a lot longer than that. If you look at even being able to deal with all of our contact tracing and all the rest of it through health, it failed. New South Wales were able to contact, track and trace with no problems at all. It was done. What did Victoria do? Victoria sent departmental officials to New South Wales after they had used fax machines and paper and pen to do their contact tracking. That is what they did, and they still did not get it right. There has been lots of failure with this health system and it needs an overhaul. We should not be having amendments today. We should have a complete rewrite of our health system in this state. Nothing more would do for those people that have lost their lives. Nothing more would do for the 80 000 people that are on a waitlist. Nothing more would do for Christina, who had to wait 6 hours and died waiting for an ambulance, and her family. And that is not all; the list just continues.

Now, this government when we had ambulance issues were very, very keen to roll out the ambulances and all the rest of it and say, ‘What are you going to do in terms of ambulances?’. We saw all of that during the election when we had been there for four years. But do you know what? They have had 15 years—18 actually—and what has happened? Nothing. Their health system has failed. Their health system is a mess. Most importantly, Victorians have been let down. This is dire straits. This is life and death, and the government needs to actually do something. They should stop patting themselves on the back, stop saying how great things are. Things are a mess. They have failed—absolutely failed—and they have let down Victorians. The government have let down Victorians, our health system is an absolute mess and this government should be ashamed of themselves.

**Mr EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (16:51): I really need to get Kevin Sheedy’s number. I really need to have a talk to Sheeds. I need to know what he said because it really has not worked. We heard an amazing soliloquy from those opposite about failure, about giving up. Where would we be if we just

said, 'Let it rip'? We have heard facts—well, so-called facts—from those opposite about apologies to people who have died who have been under federal jurisdiction. It is amazing to me that as we sit here now—and it is so ironic, because we are actually putting a bill through this house to improve health and safety and what is delivered in the health sector to the Victorian community—we have got people who cannot even speak on this bill but who say the system is broken.

From a personal perspective, Deputy Speaker, you and I have both been on a committee together, the Family and Community Development Committee, and we heard those firsthand personal accounts from people—usually a minority I think, but still it matters—that had not had the service that they thought they would get in the health system, in the judicial system, but more so in the Family and Community Development Committee it was those perinatal services. We heard from parents who, and I am sure you did at the time too, were owed an apology and an explanation of what went on, but they were denied that because of the legal issues surrounding it. I have seen it locally with a local government representative that would not speak to the wife of someone who passed away at Frankston motocross track because of the liability they might incur if they spoke to them and the words 'we apologise', 'we are sorry' and some measure of candour, openness, frankness—some honesty—came out.

This bill supports the last tranche of key recommendations from Dr Stephen Duckett in the review of hospital safety and quality assurance in Victoria. The aim of this bill is to establish a chief quality and safety officer; introduce a statutory duty of candour, with no liability attached to that as well; introduce protections for apologies and serious adverse patient safety event reviews; and introduce powers for the Victorian Perioperative Consultative Council. These are all very important powers, and I am sure people on this side of the house who have read the bill would actually agree with them. This is improving our health system.

Now, it has been a wideranging debate, and during this debate I think you would have been a bit troubled at times to hear that there are people who do not believe that COVID is a global issue. There are many other nations and states going through what we are going through. Is it imperfect? Yes, it is imperfect. It is a little bit like any crisis, where there are a lot of new facts being introduced into the crisis and we have to respond to them, and that is what has been happening. To hear members on the other side of the chamber still comparing Victoria to New South Wales when you consider what is happening there at the moment is a little bit off-taste, I would say, but also it is not sticking to the facts.

I want to talk about a very positive incident that I was involved in at San Remo on 1 February this year. There is this great app, the GoodSAM app. Not many people seem to know about it, but many people who do are in the emergency services sector. It is an app, so if you are a former police officer, firefighter or ambo, in your spare time, if there is a code zero call—that is, someone with no pulse and no heartbeat and no breathing—and those services are called, if it is within your area, your app will be activated and you will be told the address and you can go there and help. I had just been for a surf. I was coming back to my son's, across the Phillip Island bridge, and this app went off. I said to my son, 'I'll just press accept'. It turned out that it was a seven-year-old drowning. The family was only two blocks away, and we responded, I guess you could say, and ended up assisting. The child has made a full recovery, I am led to believe, but the pertinent point of this tale is that I reckon I was doing CPR for all of 4 minutes before the first ambulance arrived in San Remo. This ambo—Michael, I think he was—was amazing, just an amazing character and an amazingly skilled operator. What he did would be an education for many people in this house who want to talk all the time about the issues. There will always be issues or always be problems. When someone has a cardiac arrest or someone needs help, it is never something you can plan 100 per cent for. But there are people in this house that would be surprised to hear that this ambulance rocked up in a very, very quick time. On the scene almost at the same time was Victoria Police. The helicopter actually responded and landed close by, and the child, the seven-year-old, was airlifted to the Royal Children's, I think.

It is fine to be sitting here and be critical of these people and be critical of the services they operate in and say, 'It's broken. We can't do anything about it', without anyone saying, 'Yes, this is imperfect. There is a crisis with COVID. It is everywhere. People are trying to deal with this internationally. We

have to adapt and overcome'. And that is what this government has done. Without playing political games, that is what every government in Australia—with the exception of the feds, I think—have done. They have had to adapt and overcome. To some extent, yes, you can say it has been a trial, with something we have not gone through before. But certainly to cherry-pick these cases—these very sad cases at times—and say, 'The system is not operating properly' and that the people in that system are not operating properly and helping our community I find detrimental to the message that should be getting out to the community. There is never anyone that says, 'Oh, wow. That ambulance turned up quicker than I thought it would'—of course not. It is always going to be: 'That ambulance didn't come quick enough', because when you dial 000, when you need something, when you need an operation, you need it now. That is part of us. That is the human condition. That is the ego. But I can say from a personal perspective and as perhaps one of only a few people in here that could say it: my experience on 1 January this year was that the ambulance turned up like that and the police turned up like that. We were working together, and the skills those people displayed were amazing. We should celebrate that.

Yes, we should be very critical and look at where the system is not going right, but to say that it is ruined, it is terrible—well, those things are just too easy to say. Kevin Sheedy is not a bloke to be messed with, I would say, but he did not get into the Liberal caucus the other morning and say, 'You guys are bugged. It's gone. It's a failure. Just clear it out'. You need to work on things, and I am sure he actually said that to you. And that is the same with a lot of the systems. We have to change and adapt to the challenges that are put forward, and it is a government that is fluid and can do that and change opinions and make good leadership decisions, not just try and please people, that does that.

Once again, can I just thank the amazing emergency services and our nurses—everyone in the health sector that has just gone above and beyond during this COVID crisis. It has been long, it has been tough. But every time we hear something hand-picked out, something critical that happened, and we are not celebrating their success, we hear people, like we have heard, saying, 'The system's a failure', when it is just not.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The time set down for consideration of items on the government business program has arrived and I am required to interrupt business.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

*Third reading*

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

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

#### **LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT AMENDMENT (ANIMAL ACTIVISM) BILL 2021**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Ms THOMAS:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

That this bill be now read a second time and a third time.

**House divided on question:**

*Ayes, 66*

Allan, Ms  
Battin, Mr

Halfpenny, Ms  
Hall, Mr

Richards, Ms  
Riordan, Mr

## BILLS

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Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 10 February 2022

Brayne, Mr  
Britnell, Ms  
Bull, Mr J  
Bull, Mr T  
Carbines, Mr  
Carroll, Mr  
Cheeseman, Mr  
Connolly, Ms  
Crugnale, Ms  
Cupper, Ms  
D'Ambrosio, Ms  
Dimopoulos, Mr  
Donnellan, Mr  
Edbrooke, Mr  
Edwards, Ms  
Eren, Mr  
Foley, Mr  
Fowles, Mr  
Fregon, Mr  
Green, Ms

Halse, Mr  
Hamer, Mr  
Hennessy, Ms  
Hodgett, Mr  
Horne, Ms  
Hutchins, Ms  
Kealy, Ms  
Kennedy, Mr  
Kilkenny, Ms  
Maas, Mr  
McCurdy, Mr  
McGhie, Mr  
McGuire, Mr  
McLeish, Ms  
Morris, Mr  
Newbury, Mr  
Northe, Mr  
Pakula, Mr  
Pallas, Mr  
Pearson, Mr

Rowswell, Mr  
Ryan, Ms  
Scott, Mr  
Settle, Ms  
Sheed, Ms  
Smith, Mr R  
Southwick, Mr  
Spence, Ms  
Staikos, Mr  
Staley, Ms  
Suleyman, Ms  
Tak, Mr  
Taylor, Mr  
Theophanous, Ms  
Thomas, Ms  
Vallence, Ms  
Wakeling, Mr  
Walsh, Mr  
Ward, Ms  
Wynne, Mr

*Noes, 3*

Hibbins, Mr

Read, Dr

Sandell, Ms

**Question agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

*Third reading*

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

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

### REGULATORY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2021

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Mr PEARSON:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**and Ms SHEED's amendment:**

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government conducts further consultation on the impact on regional newspapers of ceasing to publish notices in print newspapers'.

**The SPEAKER:** The question is:

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

Those supporting the reasoned amendment moved by the member for Shepparton should vote no.

**House divided on question:**

*Ayes, 48*

Allan, Ms  
Brayne, Mr  
Bull, Mr J  
Carbines, Mr  
Carroll, Mr  
Cheeseman, Mr  
Connolly, Ms  
Crugnale, Ms

Fregon, Mr  
Green, Ms  
Halfpenny, Ms  
Hall, Ms  
Halse, Mr  
Hamer, Mr  
Hennessy, Ms  
Hibbins, Mr

Pallas, Mr  
Pearson, Mr  
Read, Dr  
Richards, Ms  
Sandell, Ms  
Scott, Mr  
Settle, Ms  
Spence, Ms

## BILLS

Thursday, 10 February 2022

Legislative Assembly

281

D'Ambrosio, Ms  
Dimopoulos, Mr  
Donnellan, Mr  
Edbrooke, Mr  
Edwards, Ms  
Eren, Mr  
Foley, Mr  
Fowles, Mr

Horne, Ms  
Hutchins, Ms  
Kennedy, Mr  
Kilkenny, Ms  
Maas, Mr  
McGhie, Mr  
McGuire, Mr  
Pakula, Mr

Staikos, Mr  
Suleyman, Ms  
Tak, Mr  
Taylor, Mr  
Theophanous, Ms  
Thomas, Ms  
Ward, Ms  
Wynne, Mr

*Noes, 21*

Battin, Mr  
Britnell, Ms  
Bull, Mr T  
Cupper, Ms  
Hodgett, Mr  
Kealy, Ms  
McCurdy, Mr

McLeish, Ms  
Morris, Mr  
Newbury, Mr  
Northe, Mr  
Riordan, Mr  
Rowswell, Mr  
Ryan, Ms

Sheed, Ms  
Smith, Mr R  
Southwick, Mr  
Staley, Ms  
Vallence, Ms  
Wakeling, Mr  
Walsh, Mr

### Question agreed to.

**The SPEAKER:** The question is:

That this bill be now read a second time and a third time.

### House divided on question:

*Ayes, 48*

Allan, Ms  
Brayne, Mr  
Bull, Mr J  
Carbines, Mr  
Carroll, Mr  
Cheeseman, Mr  
Connolly, Ms  
Crugnale, Ms  
D'Ambrosio, Ms  
Dimopoulos, Mr  
Donnellan, Mr  
Edbrooke, Mr  
Edwards, Ms  
Eren, Mr  
Foley, Mr  
Fowles, Mr

Fregon, Mr  
Green, Ms  
Halfpenny, Ms  
Hall, Ms  
Halse, Mr  
Hamer, Mr  
Hennessy, Ms  
Hibbins, Mr  
Horne, Ms  
Hutchins, Ms  
Kennedy, Mr  
Kilkenny, Ms  
Maas, Mr  
McGhie, Mr  
McGuire, Mr  
Pakula, Mr

Pallas, Mr  
Pearson, Mr  
Read, Dr  
Richards, Ms  
Sandell, Ms  
Scott, Mr  
Settle, Ms  
Spence, Ms  
Staikos, Mr  
Suleyman, Ms  
Tak, Mr  
Taylor, Mr  
Theophanous, Ms  
Thomas, Ms  
Ward, Ms  
Wynne, Mr

*Noes, 21*

Battin, Mr  
Britnell, Ms  
Bull, Mr T  
Cupper, Ms  
Hodgett, Mr  
Kealy, Ms  
McCurdy, Mr

McLeish, Ms  
Morris, Mr  
Newbury, Mr  
Northe, Mr  
Riordan, Mr  
Rowswell, Mr  
Ryan, Ms

Sheed, Ms  
Smith, Mr R  
Southwick, Mr  
Staley, Ms  
Vallence, Ms  
Wakeling, Mr  
Walsh, Mr

### Question agreed to.

### Read second time.

*Third reading*

### Motion agreed to.

### Read third time.

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

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.****Adjournment**

**The SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

**NORTH EAST LINK PROGRAM**

**Mr BATTIN** (Gembrook) (17:13): (6206) My adjournment is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I ask is for the minister to come out and meet with Quinn Civil. Quinn Civil is a fully accredited industry leader and well-respected family-owned business of more than 50 years in the Victorian water industry. They have always paid their bills on time. Quinn Civil were contracted to carry out specialised work on the early works package of the North East Link Program, a major infrastructure project. Due to inadequate design by the North East Link Program and CPB Contractors, major design requirements for the authorities were not carried out. QC were then contracted not for design but only for the construction. This poor design led to them suffering massive delays on approvals by authorities and also massive changes that could not have been foreseen by anyone. QC had no ability to talk to the North East Link Program throughout the project to discuss their concerns, as they were always blocked. QC were prevented from consultation with Melbourne Water while maintaining stakeholder approvals was their risk under contract. The North East Link Program and CPB were not willing to fairly discuss various claims and extensions of time that added up to tens of millions of dollars. Instead they were completely ignored or refused.

On any other job QC would have been paid for their extra scope of work, and variations in this have totalled between 30 and 50 per cent of the total package. They did not recognise the huge financial strain on QC. They have offloaded all financial risk onto the subcontractor even though the issues arose due to their poor design. The treatment of QC, an industry leader, on a major state-run infrastructure job is both unconscionable and unethical. Due to financial strain QC were forced to stop work and try to negotiate a way forward last October. This finally brought the state government's North East Link Program to the table. During a four-week period QC's engineers worked tirelessly to bring issues they were facing to the North East Link Program's attention. This led to the approval of approximately \$11 million to be paid to QC's creditors. However, this money was never paid to QC. Instead it is thought to have gone to CPB, who have not passed it on to the rightful creditors. The creditors are now owed \$17.5 million, and they want to know where the \$11 million that was approved has gone. That money includes funds for COVID-related costs that were incurred during construction lockdowns and many other reasonable variation costs.

The creditors, on the other hand, are small businesses that are suffering significantly due to the state government's negligence in addressing this matter. The state government is refusing to pay for the work that has been carried out, and the hardworking people, including those who have delivered essential services, have been broken. They have lost their business and assets and are now at risk of losing their house. They want to meet with the minister. They have written on multiple occasions, and they cannot get through the door to meet with the minister to have a discussion, to negotiate and to work out a fair outcome that is of benefit to them, their creditors and all of those that are contracted to them. It is the right thing to do, and I ask the minister to meet with them.

**BUNINYONG ELECTORATE COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

**Ms SETTLE** (Buninyong) (17:16): (6207) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Regional Development. This adjournment matter relates to a proposed project to establish a new multipurpose community building at the heart of the Navigators community in my electorate. This project involves the demolition of the existing tennis clubroom and the attached very dated toilet block to construct a new multipurpose community space. The new facility would include a community space, a viewing area, a kitchen, two storage rooms and toilets, and this would be of huge benefit for the local tennis

club and everyone in Navigators and the surrounding communities. The action I seek from the minister is to provide me with an update on when the Regional Infrastructure Fund grants will be announced.

### ELECTRIC VEHICLES

**Mr McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (17:17): (6208) My adjournment matter is for the Treasurer, and the action that I seek is that the Victorian government immediately remove the road tax for driving electric vehicles in Victoria. Victoria appears to be the only jurisdiction in the world to tax electric vehicles, and the government for Melbourne prattles on about renewable energy and encouraging Victorians to produce and use renewable energy all the while actively discouraging the use and purchase of electric vehicles. I recently met with a Wangaratta couple who purchased a Tesla, and they are extremely happy with that purchase. They are proud that they are doing their bit within the clean and environmentally friendly world. They normally, where possible, charge their electric vehicle from solar, and therefore there is very little non-renewable power needed. Only occasionally do they need to top up with grid power. The Victorian government has introduced a tax that is a deterrent for those considering an electric vehicle, and on top of that there is the road user tax.

The Wangaratta people in question are heading to South Australia, and for their entire trip they will be paying the per-kilometre tax back to the Victorian government even though they are using the South Australia roads for most of the trip. It is extremely unfair and goes against all the market signals to encourage renewable energy. The tax should be removed immediately to encourage greater uptake in this industry. Another greedy tax by this government is beyond belief.

### ENERGY POLICY

**Mr HALSE** (Ringwood) (17:18): (6209) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update to our Ringwood community regarding the actions the Andrews Labor government is taking to ease household spending pressure, to strengthen protections for energy customers and to hold big energy companies accountable in 2022. Members of my electorate were delighted by the news that as of 1 January 2022 unsolicited door-to-door sales and cold calling by energy retailers is now banned. Retailers seeking to save or win back customers attempting to switch providers are also prohibited from doing so. We want energy retailers to provide fair offers to customers up-front so they do not have to change providers.

I was also delighted to share the news with my community that the Victorian default offer for electricity has been cut by 5 per cent from 1 January. As members of the government know and will be familiar with, the Victorian default offer provides a simple to understand, reliable energy offer that consumers can trust. It is estimated that this 5 per cent cut means that the average household on the VDO will save \$70 a year, and for small business customers it is \$336. I look forward to the minister's update.

### WOOLSTHORPE-HEYWOOD ROAD

**Ms BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (17:19): (6210) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to meet with residents and travel along Woolsthorpe-Heywood Road to see for himself the atrocious state of this important truck route. Woolsthorpe-Heywood Road is a 50-kilometre, B-double-gazetted major arterial truck route, which is a vital link to the port of Portland as well as being utilised regularly by grain trucks and daily by milk tankers as well school buses and local traffic. In fact if you google 'Melbourne to Portland', the route takes you along the Woolsthorpe-Heywood Road rather than the Princes Highway. Yet despite calls from upset residents in the Broadwater and Bessiebelle areas over many, many years for upgrades, long stretches remain single lane and are riddled with potholes and poor surfaces, and the shoulders are just amazing in how hard they drop off.

There have been numerous serious accidents along this dangerous and dilapidated road. Despite this, there are no major upgrades to make the entire road a double lane. Over the past seven years I have

written to the various road ministers advocating for the government to take proper action on the Woolsthorpe-Heywood Road. The answer I have received every time is the same: the road will be monitored and the upgrades considered in future funding rounds, blah, blah. Residents get the same answer when they raise the issue with Regional Roads Victoria: that the road is constantly monitored and inspected. It is mind-numbing. But to force B-double trucks that meet on that road to pass on potholed and dangerous shoulders is unacceptable—let alone how the bus driver feels when they are passing the school bus.

Instead of proper investment, the answer has been as predictable as it is insipid. The speed limit was reduced to 60 kilometres an hour in 2018, while ‘Rough edges’ signs have been placed on sections of the road for much, much longer. Reducing speeds on our rural and regional roads rather than investing in proper upgrades and maintenance is a hallmark of this government, but it is not and never will be the solution. It should not take fatal accidents for this government to take action. How many accidents are needed? How many fatalities are needed on this Woolsthorpe-Heywood Road to have a dual carriageway? Years of constant lobbying from angry and fearful residents should not repeatedly fall on deaf ears.

Minister, I urge you to be the one with the fortitude to fix this problem and fix it properly, unlike the many ministers before you who have stood up and taken no action. The Woolsthorpe-Heywood Road users should not have to play Russian roulette with their livelihoods and their lives. To hear the minister in question time deliver a ministerial statement bragging about how much work they have done on the roads was the reason I stood up, called him out and got kicked out. But it was absolutely impossible for me to sit there and listen to that bragging. I ask the minister: come with me, jump in my car and I will take you on this road. You will not believe your eyes.

#### MENTAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS PROGRAM

**Ms SULEYMAN** (St Albans) (17:22): (6211) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide me with an update on the progress of the mental health practitioners in secondary schools initiative. I am proud to be part of a government that has transformed the education system in this state, and in particular in my electorate of St Albans, delivering record-breaking levels of funding, building new schools, upgrading old ones and importantly supporting our staff and students throughout their learning journey.

We know that when students are well supported in their learning environments they can not only succeed but also build strong foundations for their future. I would like to see every student have those tools to thrive in secondary studies as well. The mental health practitioners initiative does just that, giving all students in government secondary schools access to counselling and early intervention, in particular providing those services and coordinating support with community health services. This has meant that for those students that need some sort of support there are mental health professionals ready to assist them whenever issues arise or whenever they require those particular services. This \$51.2 million program builds on other critical work to boost support for every Victorian student, like the Victorian anti-bullying and mental health initiative and the schoolwide positive behaviour support program.

It has been great to see a smooth transition for local students going back to school. I have had the opportunity to speak to schools in my electorate, and despite the challenging circumstances they have done a terrific job in making sure that there is support for parents and families. In particular I do want to say thank you to parents and families for getting kids vaccinated, including at local school pop-ups in my community, which have been received positively. It is fantastic to see so many kids and families getting vaccinated.

I also want to thank the teachers, parents and school staff. They have done an incredible job during the pandemic and continue to support and nurture students in my electorate. I also want to thank the Minister for Education for all of his efforts in keeping our schools, staff and students safe by providing air purifiers for classrooms, RATs and sensible COVID-safe measures to protect local schools in my electorate and, most importantly, to make sure that schools remain open during this term. Hopefully



we will see a fantastic year where schools are back on track providing those activities—sports, camps, excursions and so on.

### CAULFIELD ELECTORATE LEVEL CROSSING REMOVALS

**Mr SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (17:25): (6212) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, who is at the table today. The action I seek is for the minister to immediately halt the Level Crossing Removal Project's (LXRP) planned destruction of trees as part of the Neerim Road and Glen Huntly Road projects and return to consultation with residents of the City of Glen Eira. As you know, in this chamber I have been a very strong advocate for the removal of these two level crossings. It is pleasing to see these finally going, but it is also important that we get proper consultation when it comes to removing some key trees as part of the overall land management plan in the area.

As it stands, both level crossing removals, on Neerim Road and Glen Huntly Road, will result in substantial, character-destroying vegetation loss in Caulfield East and Glen Huntly. As many as 600 trees will be uprooted on Derby Crescent, Station Place and Dorothy Avenue and at station car parks as well as major losses on Queens Avenue. On Queens Avenue alone plans for a shared-use bike path will require the destruction of over 200 trees, and instead of adequately replacing this canopy the LXRP would only commit to planting small shrubbery in its place. This will irreparably damage the quality of vegetation on the street as a result. The City of Glen Eira has clearly articulated its preference for a design that will preserve as much of the Queens Avenue canopy as possible, and we are asking for the LXRP to return to consultations to work towards a better plan instead of forcing that bike path, resulting in the removal of many of those trees. We should be able to do both.

I have seen the damage caused to Edward Street in Cheltenham, which once had a very lush, green streetscape and was left simply with exposed concrete, metal fences and tokenistic shrubbery. Particularly I take note of Dorothy Avenue, which has got a number of trees to protect itself from the trains. I would hate to see that ending up in the same situation as in Cheltenham. We cannot make that mistake. So I ask for further consultation, proper consultation, with many of the communities that live in those streets to ensure that we protect the valuable open space and also many of those trees. We saw the destruction of a number of trees at the Caulfield Racecourse when an order was signed off by the Minister for Planning on Christmas Eve. A number of trees, including an Aleppo pine tree, were destroyed as a result of that. We cannot make that mistake again, so I ask the minister and urge her to ensure that we get that consultation which is needed—that we absolutely remove these level crossings but we do it right and we do it with the proper consultation to protect the heritage and the tree value in the area.

### HUME-MORELAND ORANGE DOOR NETWORK

**Mr McGUIRE** (Broadmeadows) (17:28): (6213) My request is to the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence. The action I seek is for the minister to open the Hume-Moreland Orange Door network in Broadmeadows. The minister has announced that the Orange Door network will be coming to the Hume-Moreland region, with a lease signed for a site in Broadmeadows, locking in statewide coverage. Launching the important Orange Door network provides a world-first opportunity to improve the lives of women, and it is being established in Broadmeadows. The strategy combines a network of support for the security of families, linking five local service partners—Berry Street, Uniting, DPV Health, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association—with internationally proven innovation to help unemployed women start their own businesses and create jobs.

The microfinance program that won Muhammad Yunus a Nobel Peace Prize will be established for the first time in Australia, starting in Broadmeadows this year. The plan is to expand nationwide, creating 6000 jobs for women in the next two years. For decades I have pursued ways to address the compounding complexity of place-based disadvantage, and I met the Nobel laureate in Melbourne in 2018 to pursue this initiative. The new program will combine small loans, peer support and mentoring to help women establish their own businesses. It focuses on older women, those with disabilities and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The Broadmeadows comeback

strategy links this internationally successful microfinance initiative the Australian government is backing to the Victorian government's \$448 million response to the first Royal Commission into Family Violence, that landmark commitment delivered by the Andrews Labor government.

This Australian-first combination is fundamental for better opportunities in life for adults, children and young people experiencing or using family violence and families in need of extra support for the welfare and development of their children. The Victorian government is ensuring families can access such coordinated services, which is vital, and by bringing in the microfinance model by Muhammad Yunus and combining those opportunities the aim is to deliver better initiatives and greater opportunities for some of the most vulnerable women and families.

### QUEEN ELIZABETH II PLATINUM JUBILEE

**Mr ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (17:31): (6214) My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and the action that I seek is for the Premier to provide me with a program of Victorian government events marking the occasion of Queen Elizabeth's platinum jubilee. On 6 February this year, just a few short days ago, Her Majesty the Queen became the first British monarch to celebrate a platinum jubilee, marking 70 years of service to the people of Australia and to the commonwealth. And 6 February 1952 of course was a day of great sorrow for Her Majesty, as the event that led to her ascension was the death of her father, George VI. Years before that day, on her 21st birthday in a broadcast from South Africa, Her Majesty stated:

I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service ...

More than seven decades on we can say that Her Majesty has in every way been faithful to that vow. Her Majesty is an example of public service simply unrivalled by others. Throughout her years of service she has put others before self whilst conscientiously and joyfully carrying out her duties. She has also been a steadfast, unifying and stable presence in the life of our world and the life of our nation as Queen of Australia. I fondly remember her October 2011 royal tour, which included a visit to our federal Parliament. On the day before her arrival I placed an order with a Kingston florist for a bouquet of native flowers. After a reception in the Great Hall, I waited for Her Majesty to return to her waiting car and presented her with this bouquet. She remarked that the flowers were beautiful. The bouquet, however, was wrapped in netting, which got caught in Her Majesty's lace shawl. As she was untangling the bouquet's netting from her lace she quipped, 'But a little sticky', to which I replied, 'You're welcome, Your Majesty'. I was not sure what else to say. To borrow a line from Thomas Ford's poem *There Is a Lady Sweet and Kind*, famously referenced by Sir Robert Menzies, 'I did but see her passing by'.

In March 2000 Her Majesty paid her 13th visit to Australia following the 1999 referendum, where a majority of Australians voted to retain Her Majesty as our head of state. In the first speech of that tour she said:

... since I first stepped ashore here in Sydney in February 1954 I have felt part of this rugged, honest, creative land. I have shared in the joys and the sorrows, the challenges and the changes that have shaped this country's history over these past fifty years.

It is my sincere wish that Her Majesty and her successors will continue to play an ongoing, meaningful and vibrant role in the life of our nation for many decades to come and that those of us in this place who put service ahead of self take example and courage from Her Majesty as we strive to serve our own communities. Long may she reign. God save the Queen.

### LGBTIQ+ EQUALITY

**Mr FOWLES** (Burwood) (17:34): (6215) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Equality, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide additional support to LGBTIQ+ youth as the government implements our recently released LGBTIQ+ strategy. Since the creation of the equality portfolio in 2015 the Andrews Labor government has made incredible strides towards equality for LGBTIQ+ communities, because these communities are our family, our friends, our workmates and

our neighbours. Our 10-year strategy outlines our plans to continue changing laws and policies and continue strengthening state-based services to drive meaningful change for LGBTIQ+ Victorians.

It is the next phase in our commitment to make Victoria more inclusive. We have made an immediate investment of \$6.5 million in support for those Victorians. That is \$2 million to deliver statewide inclusive training resources to improve LGBTIQ+ inclusion in universal services; \$1.3 million to support initiatives to improve the health and wellbeing of people with an intersex variation; \$2 million to continue health and wellbeing supports for trans and gender-diverse Victorians; and \$1.2 million to fund a statewide awareness campaign to celebrate and increase awareness of LGBTIQ+ experiences.

The Andrews government has fought hard to remove discriminatory provisions from the statute book, but it has been hard to endure the debate that has occurred as we have progressed with those positive reforms. For young LGBTIQ+ Victorians it is not just a debate, it is their lives. That is why it is so disappointing that the Victorian Liberals have continued to oppose us at every step of the way. In 2015 they voted against same-sex adoption. In 2016 they voted against birth certificate reform. In 2018 they promised to scrap the Safe Schools program. In 2021 in this chamber they did not even bother to turn up to vote on the ban on conversion therapy, and then some of their number voted against it in the other place.

I am also angry about the harmful debate we endured this week, kicked off by the Morrison government, and it has been to no avail anyway as the bill has now been shelved. No-one should have the right to sack a person just for being gay, trans, a divorcee or a single parent, and our laws here in Victoria ensure that that cannot happen. Any attempt to undermine the progress that the Andrews government has made in protecting Victorians from discrimination should be called out, and that is exactly what the Morrison government tried on this week. The appalling debate on this failed piece of legislation has only served to make the lives of trans kids harder. Their lives are hard enough. The Morrison government needs to wake up to the fact that these artificial culture wars have real victims and the depth and breadth of the damage they are causing goes well beyond the walls of the commonwealth Parliament. For all of our kids, it is time to kick this mob out.

## RESPONSES

**Ms ALLAN** (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (17:37): I will start with the matter raised with me by the member for Gembrook regarding Quinn Civil, which is a contractor contracted by CPB, which is delivering the early works package on the North East Link Program, remembering this is a very big and important project not just for the north-eastern suburbs of Melbourne but indeed for the whole city and state because of what it means in terms of completing the missing link, that really important part of our road network that has been a line on the Melway map for many a decade. It has taken the Andrews Labor government to get on and get into delivering this really important project. That is why we are seeing right now that the early works that started last year are well and truly underway, and we are employing many, many people who will have a number of years of work on this project. The issues of Quinn Civil: I do want to emphasise this is a dispute between Quinn Civil and CPB, which it is contracted to, not to the state government—or not to the North East Link Program authority.

I also want to be clear that I will be very careful in my comments about this matter in this place because this is the subject of a legal dispute and there are processes around that legal dispute that I will not stray into in this chamber in response to the member for Gembrook. Now, that might be disappointing for the member for Gembrook, but I am just not going to unsettle a legal matter that is underway.

I have been very well briefed on a number of occasions about this matter, and I have received requests for meetings from both Quinn Civil and other contractors which have been subject to the issues since Quinn Civil went into liquidation on 23 November last year. I am not able to take up the opportunity at this stage to meet with Quinn Civil or those contractors because, as I said, there are legal matters underway, and matters of liquidation and the quite legal process that follows from how you settle these disputes between the liquidator and the creditors are governed by the commonwealth Corporations

Act 2001. With the liquidation process that is underway, I am advised that there will be a meeting between the liquidator and the creditors. A meeting has been scheduled and, as I said, it is appropriate that I remain well briefed, as I am regularly by the North East Link Program authority, on the progress of those discussions.

It is disappointing to see any company going into liquidation in these circumstances. It has been a focus from the authority, and I think it is important to emphasise that the role of the authority is not as a direct contractor. The relationship is not with the North East Link Program, it is with CPB. The North East Link Program is working closely with CPB to look at what actions can be taken to mitigate the impact on downstream contractors and suppliers of Quinn Civil whilst at the same time also ensuring those early works that are underway are delivered in a timely way so we can progress to the major works construction over the course of this year.

The member for Caulfield has continued what has become over the past seven years a long-held tradition of the Liberal Party in this place: to oppose each and every one of our level crossing removals by cloaking it behind a veneer of a level of concern of one type or another. Let us be clear: the member for Caulfield has asked for me tonight to delay the removal of the dangerous and deadly level crossing in his area. That is what would be the consequence of what the member for Caulfield has asked for tonight. He has asked for this project to be delayed. That frankly is just not acceptable. It is not acceptable to me or the government, because we remove level crossings. We do not delay the removal of level crossings that we have committed to. This is particularly important for the Neerim Road and Glen Huntly Road level crossings. I should also add that we are also building a brand new train station at Glen Huntly as well as part of our \$4 billion of investment in removing level crossings and building new stations on the Frankston line.

The Glen Huntly level crossing area is a particularly dangerous one. Since 2016 there have been 12 near misses, and 10 of those have involved pedestrians. This is a complex intersection with level crossings. It is one of the few tram squares in Melbourne, which does make it a very, very dangerous and difficult intersection. Also add to that the narrowness of the rail corridor. Yes, it has resulted in the need to remove some vegetation in and around our level crossings to ensure that we can deliver on the commitment to remove the level crossings, make this a safer and less congested area, build a new train station and improve services. Frankly I reject resoundingly the member for Caulfield's call to delay those works any longer, because they are much-needed works.

I would also like to point out to the member for Caulfield that there is the removal of some vegetation, as I have said, in the corridor, but around 70 per cent of the existing trees in the area will be retained. As part of the project, up to 23 large Canary Island date palms along Royal Avenue will be removed very carefully. They will be looked after very well, and they will be replanted once the major works are complete. This is something we have already successfully done in other parts along the Frankston line. I have already mentioned the narrowness of the rail corridor, which means digging a trench and removing the level crossing in this way has resulted in this removal of vegetation. I would also like to remind the member for Caulfield that there will be two trees planted for every one tree that is removed, ultimately increasing the overall tree canopy and biodiversity of the local area.

Look, we are working very closely with the local community to remove—

**Mr Southwick** interjected.

**Ms ALLAN:** I will just repeat, because I appreciate the member for Caulfield enjoys the sound of his own voice. But I want to make sure that my presentation is—

**Ms Britnell** interjected.

**Ms ALLAN:** Ultimately, increasing the overall tree canopy and biodiversity of the area—

**Mr Southwick:** On a point of order, Speaker, it is a requirement for the response to be factual. The minister is verballing me in terms of delaying a level crossing removal. I have been on the record

advocating for a quick removal. The government has delayed this level crossing removal, and now the minister is saying they are planting trees—

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

**Ms ALLAN:** I will repeat for the third time, because I appreciate the member for Caulfield does not have very good listening ears this evening.

**Ms Britnell** interjected.

**Ms ALLAN:** Perhaps, Speaker, with your assistance I could repeat for the third time and make sure it is well and truly picked up by Hansard, who are doing their very best to record these proceedings: ultimately we will be replacing two trees for every one that is being removed, remembering that 70 per cent—

*Members interjecting.*

**Ms ALLAN:** Oh, for goodness sake. I am going to have a fourth crack at this, and I am very happy to stand here for the next 21 minutes and 52 seconds to make sure that this is accurately placed on the record. For the fourth time: 70 per cent of the existing vegetation will remain. For every tree that is removed there will be two trees planted, increasing the overall tree canopy and biodiversity—

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of the House has the call.

**Ms ALLAN:** Seventy per cent of the existing vegetation will remain. We will be replacing two trees for every one tree that is removed, ultimately increasing the overall tree canopy and biodiversity of the local area.

**Mr Southwick:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister keeps repeating her comments, but the question was: are these trees going to be replanted in Glen Eira?

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Caulfield is raising a fraudulent point of order. It is not an appropriate way to make a point of order.

**Ms ALLAN:** I will have a fifth crack at this. Seventy per cent of the local vegetation will remain. We will be replanting two trees for every one tree that is removed, ultimately increasing the overall tree canopy and biodiversity of the local area. I will repeat that last bit again: increasing the overall tree canopy and biodiversity of the local area.

Now, the Level Crossing Removal Project has been working very closely with the local community, which is why I also reject the member for Caulfield's request that we halt and delay this project and go back and undertake further discussion on this particular issue, because there has already been extensive consultation with the local community on this issue, as indeed there will continue to be, as we do on each and every one of our level crossing removal projects right across the state. I really thank the local community for the way they have really engaged with our team on this project. This is a much-needed level crossing removal that only the Andrews Labor government is delivering for the Glen Huntly community, and I trust the member for Caulfield will accurately represent this response back to the local community.

The remaining eight members raised matters for various ministers, and they will be referred to them for their action and response.

**The SPEAKER:** Thank you, members. The house is now adjourned.

**House adjourned 5.47 pm until Tuesday, 22 February.**