

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY, 22 MARCH 2022

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

The Honourable LINDA DESSAU AC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable JAMES ANGUS AO

The ministry

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

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

Speaker

The Hon. JM EDWARDS

Deputy Speaker

Ms N SULEYMAN

Acting Speakers

Mr Blackwood, Mr J Bull, Ms Connolly, Ms Couzens, Ms Crugnale, Mr Edbrooke, Ms Halfpenny, Mr McCurdy, Mr McGuire, Mr Morris, Ms Richards, Mr Richardson, Mr Taylor and Ms Ward

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

The Hon. DM ANDREWS

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

The Hon. JM ALLAN

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 E KEALY

Leader of the House

Ms EA BLANDTHORN

Manager of Opposition Business

Ms LE STALEY

Heads of parliamentary departments

Assembly: Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Ms B Noonan

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

Parliamentary Services: Secretary: Ms T Burrows

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

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

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

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

Legislative Assembly committees

Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee

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

Environment and Planning Standing Committee

Ms Addison, 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 Theophanous 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 Blandthorn, Mr Fregon, Ms McLeish, Ms Settle, Ms Sheed, Ms Staley, Ms Suleyman 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 Symes and Ms Tierney.

Electoral Matters Committee

Assembly: Ms Hall, Dr Read and Mr Rowsell.

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, Mr Fregon, Ms Sandell, Ms Staley and Ms Suleyman.

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

Integrity and Oversight Committee

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

Council: Mr Grimley.

Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee

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

Council: Ms Crozier and Mr Erdogan.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Assembly: Ms Connolly, 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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Tuesday, 22 March 2022

The SPEAKER (Hon. Colin Brooks) took the chair at 12.03 pm and read the prayer.

Announcements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The SPEAKER (12:03): 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.

Members

MEMBER FOR FOREST HILL

The Clerk: I advise that on 17 March 2022 the member for Forest Hill complied with the resolution of the house made on 14 October 2021 and amended on 9 February 2022 relating to COVID-19 vaccination requirements. On 26 October 2021 I had advised the house that the member for Forest Hill had not complied with the resolution and had been suspended. The resolution requires me to report to the house that the member's suspension is lifted.

Bills

TRANSPORT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (PORT REFORMS AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL 2022

Introduction and first reading

Ms HORNE (Williamstown—Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (12:04): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Transport Integration Act 2010, the Port Management Act 1995, the Marine Safety Act 2010, the Rail Management Act 1996, the Tourist and Heritage Railways Act 2010 and to make related amendments to other acts and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) (12:05): Could the minister provide a quick explanation of the bill, please.

Ms HORNE (Williamstown—Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (12:05): Certainly. The bill implements the remaining parts of the government's response to the *Independent Reform of the Victorian Ports System*; embedding the establishment of Ports Victoria in legislation; adapting the charter of Ports Victoria to implement specific recommendations; implementing the review recommendations in relation to local ports, the port development strategies and regulatory arrangements relating to harbourmasters, towage and pilotage; and changing the Port of Hastings Development Authority's name and objectives to reflect its current role and likely future function to the Victorian ports system.

Ms Allan interjected.

Ms HORNE: It is right up your alley. It also makes improvements to transport restructuring, order provisions and other matters in the Transport Integration Act and other minor and technical amendments, including amendments to the Tourist and Heritage Railways Act.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

ROAD SAFETY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022

Introduction and first reading

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (12:06): Just to be clear, this is on behalf of my friend the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Road Safety Act 1986 and the Transport Accident Act 1986 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Ms RYAN (Euroa) (12:06): I request a brief explanation of the bill from the minister.

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (12:06): As I said, I am introducing this on behalf of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I am advised that as the short title indicates it is going to amend the Road Safety Act and the Transport Accident Act to address a couple of key issues around enforcement capabilities, particularly for Victoria Police to have the legislative framework for dealing with the new technology that can now identify particularly misuse of mobile phones and there are also some other opportunities for immediate licence suspension on the basis of serious road offences. I am sure the minister and his office will give the shadow minister a fulsome briefing at the appropriate juncture.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Petitions

Following petition presented to house by Clerk:

KALKALLO AND DONNYBROOK TRAFFIC CONGESTION

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly in the significant road congestion in the Kalkallo/Donnybrook area, including growing difficulty in accessing the Hume Highway.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly provides for roadworks to improve the traffic flow at the Donnybrook Road/Mitchell Street roundabout to alleviate the congestion experienced by residents in Kalkallo and Donnybrook.

By Ms SPENCE (Yuroke) (1315 signatures).

Tabled.

Ordered that petition be considered next day on motion of Ms GREEN (Yan Yean).

Documents

DEPARTMENT OF FAMILIES, FAIRNESS AND HOUSING

Absolutely Everyone: State Disability Plan 2017–2020 Final Report

Mr CARBINES (Ivanhoe—Minister for Child Protection and Family Services, Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers) (12:08): I table, by leave, the *Absolutely Everyone: State Disability Plan 2017–2020 Final Report*.

Committees

ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Whether Victoria Should Participate in a National Electoral Roll Platform

Dr READ (Brunswick) (12:09): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Electoral Matters Committee on the inquiry into whether Victoria should participate in a national electoral roll platform, together with an appendix and transcripts of evidence.

Ordered that report and appendix be published.

SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE

Alert Digest No. 4

Ms THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (12:09): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 4 of 2022, on the following acts and bills:

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Decriminalisation of Possession and Use of Drugs of Dependence) Bill 2022

Gambling and Liquor Legislation Amendment Bill 2022

Human Rights and Housing Legislation Amendment (Ending Homelessness) Bill 2022

Justice Legislation Amendment (Fines Reform and Other Matters) Bill 2022

Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022

Victoria Police Amendment Act 2022

together with appendices.

Ordered to be published.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Gender Responsive Budgeting

Ms BLANDTHORN (Pascoe Vale) (12:10): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee on the inquiry into gender responsive budgeting, together with appendices and transcripts of evidence.

Ordered that report and appendices be published.

Documents

DOCUMENTS

Incorporated list as follows:

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

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978—Order under s 17D granting a lease over Albert Park

Financial Management Act 1994—2021–22 Mid-Year Financial Report incorporating the Quarterly Financial Report No 2 for the period ended 31 December 2021

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984—Notice under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule 7 (*Gazette G10, 10 March 2022*)

Judicial Entitlements Act 2015—Recommendation statement under s 34

Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978—Register of Interests—Returns submitted by members of the Legislative Assembly—Ordinary returns 28 February 2022 (two volumes)—Ordered to be published

Planning and Environment Act 1987—Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

Baw Baw—C142

Boroondara—C374

Colac Otway—C121

Glen Eira—C190

Greater Bendigo—C256

Greater Shepparton—C227

Mitchell—C129

Moorabool—C91

Moreland—C217

Mornington Peninsula—C224

Nillumbik—C126

South Gippsland—C126

Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008—Documents under s 165AQ on the making of pandemic orders implemented on 25 and 27 February 2022

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994—Documents under s 16B in relation to the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*—Ministerial Order No 1360—Amending Ministerial Order No 1038—Mandatory Vaccination and COVID-19 Status Reporting Obligations.

Bills

REGULATORY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2021

Council's amendments

The SPEAKER (12:12): I advise the house that I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2021 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.

ALPINE RESORTS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022

VICTORIA POLICE AMENDMENT BILL 2022

WORKPLACE SAFETY LEGISLATION AND OTHER MATTERS AMENDMENT BILL 2021

Royal assent

The SPEAKER (12:12): I inform the house that the Lieutenant-Governor has given royal assent to the Alpine Resorts Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, the Victoria Police Amendment Bill 2022 and the Workplace Safety Legislation and Other Matters Amendment Bill 2021.

PUFFING BILLY RAILWAY BILL 2022

Appropriation

The SPEAKER (12:12): I have received a message from the Governor recommending an appropriation for the purpose of the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022.

Joint sitting of Parliament

SENATE VACANCY

The SPEAKER (12:13): I advise the house that I have received a letter from the Lieutenant-Governor transmitting a dispatch from the President of the Senate notifying of a vacancy in the representation of the state of Victoria in the Senate of the Commonwealth of Australia following the death of Senator Kimberley Kitching on 10 March 2022.

Committees

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Membership

The SPEAKER (12:13): I advise the house that I have received the resignation of Mr Limbrick from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee effective from yesterday.

Business of the house**STANDING AND SESSIONAL ORDERS**

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) (12:13): I desire to move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow general business, notice of motion 48 relating to the reintroduction of non-government business, to be moved immediately.

Leave refused.

PROGRAM

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (12:13): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5.00 pm on Thursday, 24 March 2022:

Gambling and Liquor Legislation Amendment Bill 2022

Justice Legislation Amendment (Fines Reform and Other Matters) Bill 2022

Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022.

In moving this motion today to the house, I do so with great optimism and positivity because I have been given a bit of a whisper that this might receive some universal support throughout the chamber today. I do not want to get everyone's hopes up too high; there is still the entirety of the government business program debate to be run and I know how much the members for Gippsland South and Sandringham love making their key contributions of the week on this important part of the house's processes and debate. I think we are all still trying to recover from the member for Sandringham's attempt at getting Mr Squiggle into the context of the government business program debate last sitting week.

But in all seriousness, the government has put three bills forward for consideration by the house today. They are all good, important bills that cover critical pieces of policy and reform for members to consider and debate, and the government would like to see them passed without amendments. I would also note, for completeness's sake, as you have just read, there is the bill returning from the Legislative Council, the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2021. It is the government's intent for that matter to be discussed this afternoon, as I appreciate there is quite a bit of interest from members in this house on that matter. I particularly note the independent member for Shepparton is no doubt very keen to make a contribution on that amended bill, given it goes to issues that she raised in this place during the second reading of the bill some weeks ago in the Legislative Assembly.

I just want to finish by making the observation that the opposition have requested that the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022 be taken into consideration-in-detail stage. After some long conversations with the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, discussion about the bill and the content and the request from the opposition that was weighed heavily and considered and discussed with great detail, we are very pleased to be able to confirm to the opposition that that request has been agreed to. The minister for tourism is very pleased to be able to have the opportunity to discuss this bill in greater detail with the Shadow Minister for Tourism during a consideration-in-detail stage. Now, I will have to say to the opposition: it will be later this week; it will be based on when time is available later this week. I understand—

Members interjecting.

Ms ALLAN: You should all know by now never to assume and never to presume. I know that the minister and the shadow minister have had some discussion already about some of the issues that the shadow minister wishes to raise, and I am sure an appropriate amount of time can be made available later in the week for that consideration-in-detail stage to take place and for those matters to be raised and debated during that part of the week. With those words—and from the joyous nature of those opposite—I am going to hope that this government business program gets supported by the house this week.

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (12:17): I can advise that on this occasion we will not be opposing the government business program. We can do that because, as the Leader of the House has indicated, we have requested it, as we quite frequently request consideration in detail on a bill, and this time around the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events—unlike every other minister that this has been put to, who has run scared on this issue—has agreed that he would answer some questions in this place. Clearly every other minister that we have asked this of—and that includes the Minister for Health, the Minister for Agriculture and the Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, who all declined the opportunity—is not across their portfolio in the way the minister for tourism is, prepared to have a go and answer some questions.

This is a serious bill. The Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022 is the result of an inquiry that came out of some very, very serious allegations that ended up with some people going to prison, I believe, and a terrible culture of sexual assault, and it is a final part of some of the recommendations from that inquiry. So it is an important piece of legislation, and we do welcome the opportunity to examine it in more detail. But we cannot get past the fact that we have been asking for consideration in detail, and we are now in the fourth quarter of this term of Parliament and this is the first—and we will wait to see if it is in fact the only bill we get consideration in detail on. We will be asking for it, I would suspect, on other bills at other times—but that is not to take away from our pleasure that the minister for tourism is prepared to come into this place and answer some questions from the Shadow Minister for Tourism on this bill.

I wonder, though, in addition to the minister's availability and acceptance of our request, whether in fact the government has been reading the *Guardian*, because I note that in the *Guardian* this week there has been quite a big piece on the government's poor record on how it runs this house. It mentions the motion that the member for Shepparton attempts to move each sitting week and for which she is denied leave so it cannot even be debated, and it also mentions the consideration-in-detail stage and the fact that we have asked for it repeatedly and never received it this term. So I do wonder whether a bit of sunshine in the way of press mention has in fact prodded the government to give us consideration in detail. I note, though, that it should not take that and it should not take our continual requests—somehow begging for crumbs at the table of consideration in detail. It should be far more a part of this place than it is.

As I noted in my remarks when I spoke to the *Guardian*, senior ministers such as the Treasurer, the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and the Premier are all in this place, and they all should be prepared to answer questions—

Ms Allan: On a point of order, Speaker, a bit of latitude is given, but reading into *Hansard* the article in the *Guardian*—I mean, we can all go and read it for ourselves. I would suggest it is straying far and wide from the government business program. I could also point out to the former Shadow Minister for Transport Infrastructure that not all requests are always made by those opposite for those ministers that she has identified. I would suggest that she come back to debating the government business program, and we can all pop off and read the *Guardian* article at our leisure.

The SPEAKER: Order! I do not uphold the point of order. The member for Ripon is being relevant to the government business program debate.

Ms STALEY: Thank you, Speaker. I could keep reading and in fact will. What I went on to say was:

It's not something that we would do all the time, on each and every bill, but some are incredibly important.

It's an issue that goes to the very heart of democracy.

It is relevant to the government business program because we are exactly debating whether we get to go into consideration in detail, and the government business program is where the guillotine is imposed. So as I say, we will not be opposing the government business program on this occasion.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements**COUNTRY FIRE AUTHORITY ROCHESTER BRIGADE**

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) (12:23): On behalf of the volunteer men and women of the Rochester CFA, I again raise the desperate need they have for a new fire station. The current station is nearing its 60th birthday, and it has only remained operational because the Rochester CFA volunteers have fundraised money to add multiple extensions to accommodate the new generation of larger trucks and associated equipment. It is so small that the trucks actually risk damage as they are manoeuvred in and out of the station. The current station has served the Rochester community well, but it is no longer fit for purpose. For a brigade that turns out as many times each year as the Rochester CFA does, they deserve a new police station.

Captain Luke Warren and his brigade are always willing to do their bit to help keep Rochester and district safe, and it is time the Andrews Labor government did its bit to support the brigade and the community by providing funding for a new fire station in this year's budget. If the Andrews government can fund \$23 billion in cost overruns on its Melbourne major transport infrastructure projects, it should be able to build a new fire station for Rochester. That \$23 billion in cost overruns would build 10 000 new police stations across country Victoria, like in Rochester. It is not too much to ask for Rochester—just one fire station—when the Andrews Labor government can waste \$23 billion on cost overruns on its Melbourne transport infrastructure projects.

BACK TO BACK THEATRE

Mr PEARSON (Essendon—Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services, Minister for Creative Industries) (12:24): I rise to pay tribute and offer warmest congratulations to Geelong's Back to Back Theatre, who this week have achieved an extraordinary pinnacle in international awards as recipient of the 2022 International Ibsen Award. This award is often referred to as the 'Nobel prize of theatre'.

Based in the Geelong CBD, Back to Back Theatre has a core ensemble of five neurodiverse professional actors who collaborate to create and produce their theatre works. The works created by Back to Back artists are groundbreaking and very often provocative and provide the most powerful of social commentary.

Their performance schedule is incredibly busy, with shows all over the world for around six months each year. The International Ibsen Award is given by the Norwegian government and honours creators who gift new dimensions to international drama and theatre. It brings with it a \$300 000 prize, which will no doubt allow Back to Back to create even more stunning works. I am so thrilled to see global recognition for what Victorians have always known: that Geelong's Back to Back Theatre is a creative powerhouse, leading the way in thought-provoking theatre that sees people of all abilities enjoy opportunities in the arts. And that is why the Victorian government is so proud to support them. The Back to Back team will travel to Norway in September to formally accept the award and perform two of their shows before international audiences. They represent the very best of Victoria—creative, brave, inclusive, diverse—and I, along with the members for Geelong and Lara, could not be more proud. Congratulations to Back to Back Theatre.

MOOROOLBARK HEIGHTS RESERVE CLUBROOMS

Mr HODGETT (Croydon) (12:26): Today I rise to raise a few important matters within my electorate. The Mooroolbark Heights Reserve clubrooms were built in 1970 and are host to the Mooroolbark football and cricket clubs and are in desperate need of an upgrade. Women players currently do not have access to change rooms when men are playing, which is shocking, particularly in this day and age. A long overdue upgrade would include a separate change facility for women, which would increase female participation in local sport and provide equal access for all players. Despite being on the council's top 10 priority list, a new pavilion is still five to 10 years away from being completed. There is an urgent need to get these clubrooms prioritised and built. I will continue to work hard and

advocate for funding to deliver the new clubroom facilities for the Mooroolbark Football Club and Mooroolbark Cricket Club.

CROYDON KAREN COMMUNITY

Mr HODGETT: I would also like to make mention, especially during Cultural Diversity Week, of the Karen community that have been a welcome part of the wider Croydon neighbourhood since 2006. Originally two Karen families settled here, and we now have a community of more than 400 families in the Maroondah area. The Karen are a friendly and hardworking community, and they increase the cultural diversity in Croydon.

CRAIG BELLAMY

Mr HODGETT: Lastly, Speaker, on a matter I know you will be very interested in, I would like to extend my congratulations to Craig Bellamy on coaching his 500th game for the Melbourne Storm last week—a remarkable achievement. Craig’s dedication, incredible work ethic and ongoing enthusiasm to listen, improve and develop as a person and a coach have seen him make an enormous contribution to the club, players and the game. Five hundred games as head coach is a magnificent achievement, and I extend my congratulations to Craig and his family.

KYNETON CONTEMPORARY ART TRIENNIAL

Ms THOMAS (Macedon—Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional Development) (12:27): It was great to join Kyneton Contemporary collective for the launch of their second art triennial, *Holding the Circle*, on Saturday morning. What a joy to see our town transformed with installations in surprising places, including the masonic lodge, the scout hall, under the Mollison Street bridge and at the Kyneton hotel. It is incredible to see the hard work that has been put in by the whole crew at Kyneton Contemporary come to fruition. So a big thankyou to Clare Needham, Kent Wilson, Angela Connor, Ross Taylor, Liza Martin, Lee Brennan, Michael Needham, Elizabeth Barnett, Jud Wimbhurst, Lizzie Graham and Carly Wilson for this gift to our town. Continuing through next weekend, there is still plenty of time for visitors to organise a trip to our beautiful town.

BARKLY SQUARE, KYNETON, UPGRADE

Ms THOMAS: In more Kyneton news I was thrilled to announce that this government has committed \$500 000 to fix the chronic drainage issues at Barkly Square, home of the Kyneton Rangers soccer club. Now, this story is well known to many in this house. The Barkly Square upgrade was rated 87 out of 100 by Sport Australia, but it did not make it onto Bridget McKenzie’s colour-coded spreadsheets. The sports rort saw my constituents miss out on the much-needed funding. I am delighted that this government gets on with the job and delivers funding fairly to our sporting groups.

EASTERN FREEWAY

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) (12:29): I have been contacted by residents about the current state of the Eastern Freeway. They have raised concerns about the overgrown vegetation along both the edges and the centre median strip. They are also deeply concerned with the prevalence of graffiti along the freeway corridor, plus the significant amount of rubbish. It is imperative that the government does everything in its power to ensure that this freeway is maintained properly.

SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT

Mr WAKELING: Over recent weeks I have visited many local businesses across Knox. Many businesses face an uncertain future, which has been confirmed in a recent survey that I conducted with local businesses. Many businesses have raised serious concerns about the lack of support they have received from the Andrews government, both during and post COVID. These businesses are gravely concerned with the impact of new taxes and charges that are being imposed on them by this government. Knox businesses need to have hope. They need support. Unlike the current Labor

government, the Liberal Party is committed to working with local businesses to help them to recover and rebuild from the impact of six lockdowns.

ELECTIVE SURGERY WAITING LISTS

Mr WAKELING: I have been contacted by many local residents who have raised significant concerns about their inability to access vital treatment in our health system. Victoria's hospital waiting lists have blown out to nearly 100 000 Victorians. These patients do not choose to wait for their treatment. These patients are in excruciating pain and are receiving little support from the government. I will continue to fight for Knox residents to get the hospital treatment they rightly deserve.

SHARE THESE STORIES

Ms ADDISON (Wendouree) (12:30): Congratulations to Headspace Ballarat and Western Victoria Primary Health Network on the launch of *Share these Stories*, an innovative and powerful anthology by authors who have lived experiences of mental health challenges. The stories share personal insights into the strengths, struggles and coping strategies of individuals working towards wellness. In many ways the book is a call-out to other people struggling with their mental health, encouraging people to seek support. The anthology also aims to assist friends, family and carers in responding to someone who might be at risk of suicide. The stories of courage and resilience offer hope to those on a recovery journey.

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System came about because the system was broken. Now as we transform mental health in Victoria over the next 10 years the voices of people with lived experience must inform and shape the way that services and support are delivered. I am so pleased that our government supported this important project and congratulate everyone who has made this happen: Andy Penny and Janelle Johnson from Headspace Ballarat; Sean Duffy, Joanne Gell and Lisa Spurr from Ballarat Community Health; and Rowena Clift and her team from Western Victoria Primary Health Network. Thank you to the inspiring authors who have overcome so much in their own journeys and have shared their stories to give hope to others and to help them with their own journeys. These authors include Bonnie, Brittnie, Caiti, Egan, Emma, Georgia, Harry, Jake, Joshua and many others.

POLWARTH ELECTORATE FUNDING

Mr RIORDAN (Polwarth) (12:32): My statement today involves my community of Polwarth's request to get a fair go in this year's budget from the state government. As we know and as has been variously reported, \$23 billion has been wasted on overblown projects here in Melbourne, and the good people of country Victoria, the people of Polwarth, want to know that this upcoming budget they are going to get a fair crack at the largesse that this government continually wastes in Melbourne.

These are some of the issues that the people of Polwarth are wanting to know. They want to know that the Victorian Blue Ocean Safety Skills Centre at Apollo Bay is going to be funded. That community has worked very hard putting the project together for that. People in Torquay, for example, want to know that their community hub planned down at the footy ground to look after the Lions and the men's shed is going to get a fair share. Colac Area Health is the main health support service, providing a whole range of services, but has an old, out-of-date urgent care centre. It needs a refurb. We have got Barwon Water—all that water, literally thousands of megalitres, going out to sea. That water can be re-used. We need a feasibility study to look at how that water that is currently going out to Port Phillip Bay can be better used across our region. And of course the Birregurra footy club have been waiting a very long time to get the support they need to rebuild a very, very substandard footy clubroom for both men and women to play Aussie rules and netball.

FOOTSCRAY ELECTORATE PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Ms HALL (Footscray) (12:33): In the Andrews Labor government we are passionate about high-quality public education. State schools are great schools, and in Footscray, brick by brick, they are

being transformed and modernised. Last week I visited Footscray North Primary School to join with student leaders to open their incredible new facilities. Footscray North has had a \$16.13 million upgrade that includes new classrooms and library spaces, a Spanish classroom, a competition-grade gym as well as new gardens and playgrounds throughout the school. It was a huge celebration for Footscray North in their 99th year, topped off with a beautiful performance of *Wominjeka* by the students participating in the State Schools Spectacular. To the student leaders who showed me around, thank you. To Kay Willmott and the teachers at Footscray North, thank you for your passion and your commitment to the children of Maidstone and Footscray North.

And just down the road at Footscray Primary School construction has started on their \$20 million upgrade. It was such a joy to join Footscray Primary School and students as we got started on that transformative project. And in a month our littlest learners in Footscray will be attending long day care, kinder and three-year-old kinder funded by the Andrews Labor government in the new Billy Button Early Learning centre in the heart of the \$123 million Footscray learning precinct. This beautiful centre is adjacent to Footscray City Primary School, also about to get a \$13.4 million upgrade.

ELECTIVE SURGERY WAITING LISTS

Mr ANGUS (Forest Hill) (12:35): The recent revelation of the extent of the elective surgery waiting lists being around 100 000 Victorians is clear evidence of the incompetence of the Victorian government. The fact that Victorians find themselves in this terrible position is a direct result of many years of Labor's mismanagement of the health system. Given the current Premier has been either health minister or Premier for all but four of the last 15 years, it is clear to see where the responsibility for this mess lies. Victorians need a clear pathway out of their pain, and the Premier needs to address the root causes of the issues and not just give them lip-service, as he and his ministers regularly do.

With the COVID-19 double-vaccination rate for Victorians 12 years and older being almost 95 per cent, it is now time for the government to remove the vaccination mandates in Victoria. Doing this would allow countless Victorians to return to work. I am still being contacted regularly by constituents who for whatever reason either cannot or will not be vaccinated, telling me they have lost their jobs or are unable to work. Others are contacting me to say they are about to lose their jobs, as despite successfully working from home for almost two years they are now required to return to their office to work. The futility of this requirement is obvious given that we regularly see cases of COVID-19 in fully vaccinated environments, such as the AFL or indeed here at Parliament last sitting week. Given the extremely high vaccination rates, there is no need for this discrimination to continue, and I urge the government to remove this requirement. The crisis surrounding the ambulance service is continuing.

MOUNT WAVERLEY ELECTORATE SCHOOLS

Mr FREGON (Mount Waverley) (12:36): I rise to acknowledge the collective efforts and incredible contribution of our Victorian teachers and how their efforts and passion for education are elevating the students of Mount Waverley district to achieve some really great things. Last week the NAPLAN results were released and I was delighted to see multiple schools from my district recognised amongst the most improved in this state, with Glen Waverley Secondary College achieving the highest ranked non-selective state school in Victoria. A big congratulations to the students, teachers, principals, support staff and families from Essex Heights Primary, Glendal Primary, Mount Waverley Primary and Mount Waverley North Primary School, whose students are leading the way with their NAPLAN results.

In other school news, earlier this month I met with Brentwood Secondary College principal John Ballagh to tour their newly completed \$4.6 million VCE centre, and it is fantastic. The outdated portables and locker area are gone, and the state-of-the-art facility was buzzing with activity. A shout-out also to the hardworking green team and teacher Mr Kalva, who were busy cleaning up their school as part of Clean Up Australia Day.

Finally, I want to recognise the 2021 Glen Waverley Secondary College VCE student Jane Siew, whose artwork titled *Exploring the Night Market* was selected for inclusion in the NGV Top Arts 2022 exhibition. The exhibition runs from 16 March to 24 July at the Ian Potter Centre at NGV Australia in Fed Square. Get along and see it. Do yourself a favour. We have got some amazing talent down in Glen Waverley.

LOWAN ELECTORATE ROADS

Ms KEALY (Lowan) (12:38): I would like to extend an invitation to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and the shadow minister for roads to join me in my electorate of Lowan to personally inspect and experience the dangerous condition of our roads. In this year's budget alone the state Labor government cut the road asset management budget by 25 per cent, and performance measures for road surface quality were also revised down.

Locals are seeing the impact of Labor's complete neglect of our country roads. Jason Bendeich of Hamilton has written to the minister for roads on many occasions to highlight some of the more treacherous roads in our region, including the Hamilton–Penshurst road, particularly around Tarrington, Dunkeld–Cavendish Road and the Glenelg Highway, particularly near Muntham. This section of road near Muntham has recently been fixed. However, it has already fallen apart and there is no accountability when it comes to terrible workmanship on our roads. People are now saying they do not feel safe driving that section of road unless they are in a four-wheel drive. Darren Scott has been a fierce advocate for fixing roads around Rupanyup, and as a CFA volunteer, he has seen firsthand the heartbreaking and tragic outcomes of having unsafe roads. This road needs to be fixed.

The Wimmera Highway has had some roadworks done, which is fabulous, but you come to the end of the section that has been repaired and there are massive undulations and potholes and crumbling edges again. Many locals in the Minyip area have flagged the terrible condition of the Donald–Minyip road, which is now permanently reduced to 80 kilometres per hour. In this budget I ask the government to give country Victoria its fair share to finally fix our country roads and make our roads safe.

CARRUM ELECTORATE STUDENT LEADERS

Ms KILKENNY (Carrum) (12:39): Congratulations to college captains at Patterson River Secondary College for 2022: Ally Barnard, Isabelle Evans, Maddy Wicks and Shekinah Upkett. Congratulations to college captains at Carrum Downs Secondary for 2022: Josh Barlow, Lachlan Earnshaw, Natasha Kaiyum and Joel Rowan. I first met many of these students when they were in grade 5. It has been an absolute privilege to watch them grow these past seven years into mature and responsible young people. I am so proud of them and know they will be encouraging role models and wonderful ambassadors for their schools.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms KILKENNY: Last Friday I held my fourth annual International Women's Day schools forum at Carrum Downs Secondary College. Can I thank each and every school who attended and participated: Carrum Downs Secondary, Patterson River Secondary, Frankston High, Chelsea Primary, Skye Primary, Rowellyn primary, Banyan Fields Primary, St Joachim's primary, Kananook Primary and McClelland secondary. Nearly 300 students from 10 local schools came along to listen to our fabulous guest speaker, Felicity Topp, chief executive of Peninsula Health. We could have listened to Felicity for hours. Her authenticity and candour spoke directly to us all. Not only do we have a completely relatable and genuine person heading up our public health care in my local community, we have an extraordinary group of young people, who through their questions displayed such empathy and understanding well beyond their young years. It was a powerful event that left every single one of us feeling motivated and connected. I want to thank each and every one of them for their contributions and for the fantastic questions they asked on the panel. Well done to all.

HOMELESSNESS

Ms SANDELL (Melbourne) (12:41): Right now in Victoria we are in a housing crisis. Owning your own home is becoming a completely impossible dream for a generation of people my age and younger. People are being forced to rent long term, but then they face rising rents, fewer rights and the prospect of having to move every year, with no ability to put down roots in a community. We also have a huge number of people who are facing homelessness. People are sleeping on our city streets, in their cars and on friends' couches, and we have 100 000 people on the public housing waiting list.

But it actually does not have to be this way. Homelessness is not something that we have to live with. We can actually solve it if we have the political will. Governments have spent too long putting homelessness in the too-hard basket. They have let housing become a commodity and an investment instead of something that is fundamentally a human right. Other countries do not do it this way, so it is not inevitable. Other jurisdictions have virtually eliminated homelessness, have built houses for people who need them and have more than 20 per cent of their housing stock as public housing. Yet Victoria has not had a large-scale build of public housing since the 1960s. That is why the Greens have introduced a bill to Parliament to set a target to end homelessness within the next 10 years and to require the government to come up with a plan to reach this target. It is not a pipe dream. Other states around the world have done it. If we set a target, set our minds to it and develop a plan to make it happen, we can achieve a Victoria without homelessness.

MORDIALLOC ELECTORATE EMERGENCY SERVICES

Mr RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (12:42): It was wonderful to recently join the fantastic volunteers at the Edithvale CFA for their annual fun run—a fantastic community event. More than 511 participants took to the running tracks of the City of Kingston, with the 15-kilometre, 10-kilometre and 5-kilometre runs and a 5-kilometre walk. I will place on record that the federal member for Isaacs, Mark Dreyfus, once again beat me in the 5-kilometre run, because I took to the walk. Just a bit of hamstring tightness kept me on the bench this time. But it is a wonderful event, and I wanted to place on the record my sincere appreciation to Captain Graham Fountain and his incredible team of volunteers. It grows each and every year, and it is an example of the support that our community has for our emergency services.

It is matched by the Andrews Labor government's support for our emergency services, with record investment locally, whether it is the Edithvale CFA station redevelopment, which was a \$3.35 million upgrade; the Mentone Life Saving Club that is coming out of the ground now with a second storey underway at Mentone, which supports the more than 1400 members at that wonderful club; or the Aspendale Life Saving Club, where the slab has been poured, and it is coming out of the ground to support our community into the future; the Edithvale Life Saving Club, which is built and servicing our volunteers, and we have seen a huge upsurge in members; or the Chelsea SES's new building and premises that is underway with the retrofitting of their premises. When it comes to emergency services, our community supports our volunteers, and the Andrews Labor government supports our volunteers too.

EMERGENCY SERVICES TELECOMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY

Mr WELLS (Rowville) (12:44): At last. This statement condemns the Andrews Labor government's appalling neglect of the 000 system and the tragic loss of 12 lives, including four children, who have died waiting for ambulances, since October. It is shameful that anyone in our state should die waiting for an ambulance. No-one should watch a family member, let alone a child, die before help arrives. It is a terrible betrayal of each of these Victorians that Labor had so many warnings and then did so little.

Ambulance dispatch staff also deserve better than Labor's constant excuses. ESTA staff work incredibly hard in demanding jobs at the front line of the health system. The Deputy Premier was warned in 2016 about ESTA's serious staff shortages. While ESTA's 000 calls increased by 15 per

cent in the first year of the pandemic, ESTA's staff numbers went down. ESTA staff are not buying the excuses, saying, 'To blame COVID is disgraceful. Our staffing models are already broken'. Labor did not fix the crisis last April either, when a 32-year-old woman died after waiting more than 6 hours for an ambulance. Labor's latest bandaid solution is far too late, and new call staff will not be on board until mid-2023. With COVID numbers increasing, how can Victorians trust that anyone will pick up the phone when they need an ambulance?

MCMAHONS ROAD–BURWOOD HIGHWAY, FERNTREE GULLY

Mr TAYLOR (Bayswater) (12:45): With hundreds of signatures and counting, my campaign to deliver lights at the intersection of McMahon's Road and Burwood Highway in Ferntree Gully is well underway, and it is clear that locals are over the talkfest and the empty promises. They want action. Now, as a proud member of this government I have been out listening to locals right across the community around their concerns at this intersection, and it is clear they want to see it get done. I am absolutely committed to making sure, with the community's support, with their voice, that we will do exactly that, because others have talked with no action, no change. But as their voice in the state Labor government, together we will get this done. So please make sure to support my campaign and my petition, which will be presented to the minister. The link is in the comments.

BAYSWATER SOUTH PRIMARY SCHOOL

Mr TAYLOR: It was also great to get a quick update on things happening at Bayswater South Primary School—works that are underway there and their priorities into the future. At the moment there is a range of much-needed upgrades occurring across the school grounds as well as some new additions. I want to say a big thanks to the teams, students and school community for your patience while we get this work done. I know there is plenty of work going on, but of course there is always more work to do. I know it is going to be another big year at this great local school.

BAYSWATER ELECTORATE FOOTBALL CLUBS

Mr TAYLOR: Local footy is back. I cannot wait to get around the crews locally, and I tell you what: I am looking forward to getting down to the bear cave at Batterham Reserve for their season opener on Thursday night, 31 March. I have got some exciting news to share—and no, whilst it is not a new pavilion, I reckon they will be up and about. I will be there from 7.00 pm, so I will see you there.

WANTIRNA SOUTH CRICKET CLUB

Mr TAYLOR: Whilst the cricket might be over, it was great to get around to the Wantirna South Cricket Club and meet their president, Sam, and the secretary, Paul, to chat all things cricket. There is a big future ahead for the Devils. I am looking forward to supporting them in any way that I can. Go the Devils.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (12:47): The inner north is filled with talented, hardworking and inspiring women. A few weeks back I had the chance to honour them at an International Women's Day morning tea in the company of the Minister for Women. Our Northcote IWD awards went to three remarkable women this year who were nominated by their friends and colleagues. Jessamy Miller from the 5th Northcote Scouts has been working tirelessly to fundraise and improve the Scout hall and grounds. Laura Thompson is co-founder of Clothing the Gaps and has driven the incredible Free the Flag campaign for the Aboriginal flag—an absolute powerhouse. And Zowie Minchin of Zsa's bistro is president of the Northcote Business Association and has brought together our local traders through the toughest of times, uniting them under the banner of 'Northcote Rise'. Zowie also gave away free meals during the lockdown to out-of-work hospo staff and frontline workers.

These women are part of our inner north family and are each amazing role models for women and girls right across our suburbs. It was an honour to award them with their certificates and their special gifts, courtesy of Gus Berger from the Thornbury Picture House, in the warm surrounds of local venue

Northside Wines owned by Charlotte Sewell and Jacob Davey. I want to thank Minister Williams for her powerful words about our collective work to drive better outcomes for women and girls and thank all the wonderful women from across my community who came and joined in the conversation. Bit by bit, the women of the north are changing the world.

LARA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Mr EREN (Lara) (12:48): One of my favourite things to do as a local MP is to visit my local schools in my electorate. My electorate is full of wonderful local schools, both primary and secondary. I may be a little bit biased, but I think we have some of the best schools in the state. I am also grateful for this opportunity to connect with young minds and hear directly of the things that are important to them.

Recently I was honoured to attend Lara Primary School and speak to grades 5 and 6 about the government and the role of an MP. Here is what two students, Lucy and Tahlia, had to say about the experience:

To Mr John Eren,

We appreciate you coming to see us.

We learnt heaps from your speech.

Some things are:

Health

Education

Lara Small Businesses

Politics

Election and the way things run.

We thank you for coming in and seeing us. It has helped with our Civics and citizenship topic for inquiry.

Thanks again. From Lucy and Tahlia.

I want to thank Lucy and Tahlia for these kind words. I would also like to thank grades 5 and 6 from Lara Primary for being such a well-mannered, interested and involved group of students. They are a wonderful group, and it was my absolute pleasure to speak to them about the role of MPs within our local community. Their questions were very well thought out. They were attentive and fantastic listeners as well. I also respected their confidence and engagement during our discussion. I would also like to thank their teacher Sherridan for organising this visit and her fellow grade 5 and 6 teachers for their assistance on the day. I enjoyed my time visiting this group, and I am glad that I could help them with their civics and citizenship inquiry. It is a wonderful school in my electorate.

SCHOOL DENTAL SERVICES

Ms SULEYMAN (St Albans) (12:50): I rise today to acknowledge the incredible Victorian government program the Smile Squad and the work that it does. The program is being rolled out across my electorate of St Albans. The Smile Squad program provides free dental care to all Victorian public primary and secondary school students. I know that this program is making a real difference for the community in St Albans. Recently they set up this program at St Albans Meadows Primary School. It was an exciting day for the students. I give a special shout-out to the dental nurses, Laura and Grace, and also the dental therapists, Houda and Adriana, who were on site assisting the students.

ST ALBANS ELECTORATE SCHOOLS

Ms SULEYMAN: I am a bit biased of course but all schools in St Albans are fantastic schools, and I congratulate the students for their outstanding efforts in the recent NAPLAN assessments. Many schools across my electorate of St Albans were listed as some of the most improved in the state, and I am very proud and confident that during the last two years—I know it has been a difficult time and challenging time for families and students—with strength and working together, students and the

school community, we saw a great improvement in NAPLAN scores across the electorate of St Albans. I am really proud of the teachers, students, the school councils and the community.

SICK PAY GUARANTEE

Mr HALSE (Ringwood) (12:51): Until last Monday Victorian workers employed casually had two options if they fell sick on a workday: going to work sick or staying at home and not getting paid—quite honestly, two appalling choices. That is not good enough for casualised workers who are some of our state's best and brightest and who have held multiple industries up through the most recent and current pandemic crisis. I myself have worked as a casual in supermarkets, in hospitality, in retail and in aged care. I have organised aged care workers and healthcare workers who have never had a day of sick pay in their lives. I know the panic of waking up sick when it means you have to choose between giving your body the rest it needs or keeping the lights on and paying the bills. This is why I am incredibly proud of our new five days of sick pay policy announced on Labour Day. In a fitting nod to the mighty Victorian trade union movement, we are guaranteeing five days of sick pay each year for casual workers who need it in hospitality, food preparation, cleaning, security, laundries, supermarkets, retail as well as aged and disability care. This is an Australian first. It is welcomed by our unions, and it is incredibly well deserved by so many hundreds of thousands of hardworking Victorians.

Business of the house

NOTICES OF MOTION

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (12:53): I advise that the government does not wish to proceed with the notice of motion today and ask that it remain on the notice paper.

Bills

PUFFING BILLY RAILWAY BILL 2022

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Mr PAKULA:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (12:54): I rise to make a contribution to the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022. This is a bill that was brought into the house only 13 days ago, and we made a little bit of a fuss about that at the time. It ended up, with the long weekend, being actually only 12 days, but the minister has now agreed to go into a consideration-in-detail stage for this bill, and I am extremely appreciative of him taking the time to do this, because it is not something that has been happening in the lower house particularly. I want to thank the minister's office for arranging the briefing and being very responsive to my questions. I know some of the questions that I had may have been a little bit challenging, and some of them certainly required a bit of research to come back. So I would particularly like to thank Sarah Wilson for her role there, and thank the staff from the departments who participated in that briefing as well.

I think most people in this house know about Puffing Billy. It is one of Victoria's iconic tourist destinations. Many of us as children would have gone on that trip, with legs dangling over the sides—there was a time when children could do that. And as families many members of this chamber would have also taken their children there, because it is a particularly iconic tourism destination. It winds itself through the Dandenongs, through the ranges, through fern gullies and through beautiful mountain ash, and it is really particularly scenic as it starts at Belgrave and winds itself up through a number of gorgeous little stations and areas: Selby, Clematis, Menzies Creek—which has one of the most quaint old stations that you could see—Emerald, Lakeside, Cockatoo and Gembrook. It is quite the journey and it is quite the day out, and I think everybody who goes there really enjoys it.

We all think of Puffing Billy as being a very fun place, a happy place for families where everybody particularly enjoys themselves, but that is not entirely the case. There have been a number of issues during the journey that have made that a very unhappy place, and at the moment there is a very broken relationship between the key group of volunteers at the Puffing Billy Preservation Society and the Emerald Tourist Railway Board—that is quite broken. What we have here today is the result pretty well of an Ombudsman's report, because, as many organisations that had experienced child sexual offences in the past did, they had been covered up. There were plenty of people in the organisation, whether through the volunteer network or through the paid employees, who knew about the offences that were taking place. The Ombudsman did a report, and that was tabled in 2018. I will go into detail.

One of the things the Ombudsman talked about was improving the governance of the organisation, the Emerald Tourist Railway Board. When they had a good look at it, as I am advised by the department, they reviewed the existing legislation and decided it was pretty well out of date. This was an opportunity to modernise the legislation and make a number of other changes. Some of these changes can be quite controversial, but certainly making sure that the right things are reported to the minister in the right way I think is extremely important.

If we think about the purpose of the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022, it repeals the Emerald Tourist Railway Act 1977 and it establishes the new act. It also provides for the ongoing management and sustainability of Puffing Billy as a significant tourism attraction, and it updates provisions relating to corporate governance practices and the operation of the railway. Many provisions of the bill respond to the findings of the Ombudsman's report, *Investigation into Child Sex Offender Robert Whitehead's Involvement with Puffing Billy and Other Railway Bodies*, which was tabled in June 2018. As I have already said, the Ombudsman recommended a review of the current structure, and following the Ombudsman's report I understand that there was also another report that was commissioned by one of the major consultancy firms, which also led to the development of this bill.

Before I go into the details around the Ombudsman's report and some of the real nitty-gritty of the bill, I just want to give a broad overview of the things that it covers. It repeals the Emerald Tourism Railway Act, which was put in place in 1977, and it changes the name. We currently know it as the Emerald Tourist Railway Board, ETRB, and it is now changing to the Puffing Billy Railway Board. It provides objectives, functions and powers for the board, as you would expect when you are setting up a new or a transitioned board. The board mix is moving to transition to a skills-based board comprising a maximum of 10 members; I think there are a minimum of five. One of the things that has been quite appreciated by a number of people is it enables a new board to enter into contracts and arrangements to the value of \$1 million without ministerial approval. Currently the limit is \$200 000. With the number of rebuilds and big projects that are on the way there will be some of those contracts that are maybe in the \$400 000s. It provides the board with the ability to make those decisions. It also provides for the growth and development of the railway, including the requirements of contemporary business and strategic planning, and I think this is really important as we get into some of the nitty-gritty a little bit later.

Absolutely of great importance is the significance of heritage, and I will talk about this. This railway line has been in existence for a very long time, and it is particularly significant—and I know that there are many other tourism railways in the state that also form part of our significant heritage railways. Absolutely of importance is its recognition of the role of volunteers in the ongoing operation of the railway. Now, this is particularly important, because volunteers have played and should play a very important role going forward.

But I want to have a look first of all at the history of the railway. It has been operating for 121 years—it was built in 1900—and that steam train originally transported passengers, timber, livestock, mail and food. If we take ourselves right back, we can imagine what this historic railway did. The steam railway has transported over 11 million passengers in that time. Now, what happened was: in 1954 there were a number of financial losses, they had a very damaging landslide and it was closed. The Puffing Billy Preservation Society was formed. They saved not only the railway but also Puffing Billy,

because they worked very hard and long to actually get on top of something that they loved and were very passionate about, the steam rail. In 1977 the Emerald Tourist Railway Board was formed pursuant to the Emerald Tourist Railway Act 1977, and that was the means of taking over the infrastructure which had previously been owned by Victorian Railways.

Pre pandemic there were 500 000 visitors annually. As I said, it was an iconic tourist destination and is gaining momentum again now that we have come out of our monumental lockdown. This has been a major contributor to Victoria's visitor economy—60 per cent international markets and 40 per cent domestic, and that is going to be certainly changing. They have Puffing Billy education programs available from early years to year 8 to teach people about the history, about steam trains, about the community and about the design and the technology that has been used, and this is really integral to creating a sustainable future. You can visit the Menzies Creek Museum—and there are lots of things to do in that neck of the woods.

One of the things I want to talk about now is the Ombudsman's report and the seriousness of not just the allegations but the offences that took place there, which resulted in the minister making an apology which was absolutely fully supported by everybody in this chamber. Robert Whitehead committed child sex offences allegedly from 1947 to 1982; that is a very long period of time. The total number of victims is actually unknown, but he was involved with Puffing Billy Railway for decades, beginning in 1961. That was the year after he was released from Pentridge, where he was imprisoned for child sexual offences and child abduction. So he began there after that time.

In 1987 a fellow volunteer at Puffing Billy, Anthony Hutchins, was convicted of 66 child sexual offences. In 2015 Whitehead was convicted of 24 child sexual offences. Both predators were confronted about the accusations in 1985 by the then president, Lon Wymond, and board member John Robinson, Hutchins admitting to his crime, Whitehead not—and Whitehead was then appointed as the archivist at Puffing Billy. Now, he had been involved with and employed by Victorian Railways since 1947. He had been terminated after he was convicted and jailed—a six-month sentence—and then he rejoined Victorian Railways 10 days after leaving jail, as I said. And he was employed until 1988. In 1973 he was forced to resign from the Australian Railway Historical Society, where he had worked from 1960, due to the allegations that had been made about child sexual abuse. He quickly—this is quite shocking—became one of Puffing Billy's most active and valued volunteers during the late 1970s. So somebody with this history, with known allegations, became absolutely valued. I am quoting here from the Ombudsman's report on page 12:

... the investigation found that Whitehead's reputation preceded him and each rail group he joined saw his contributions as a volunteer as being more important than protecting their young members from the risk he posed.

That is shocking—absolutely shocking. The Ombudsman, on page 4, said:

Although Puffing Billy's management denied any knowledge of his past conviction there is ample evidence that rumour abounded.

Victims and their parents had reported abuse to management, who never forwarded those complaints to police. In 1976–79 Puffing Billy vice-president Philip A'Vard warned his son to stay away from Whitehead. This all formed part of the Ombudsman's investigation. On page 4 she also said:

When Whitehead resigned in 1985—not coincidentally when he was the subject of a police investigation into child sexual abuse—Puffing Billy's Board expressed its effusive thanks. Months after his resignation, he returned to Puffing Billy as its archivist—with unencumbered access to its records, including any records of complaints, even drafting a policy that complaints were not to be stored in the archives.

This is absolutely manipulative and shocking from a truly dreadful person. During his time at Puffing Billy Whitehead supervised overnight working parties, had leases on railway property where some of his offending occurred and in the 1980s he was with others responsible for the lax volunteering screening procedures. He ended the volunteering officially in 1991 with his legacy praised. Again from the Ombudsman, page 4:

Whitehead was a life-long offender whose abuse was facilitated by the wilful blindness, indifference or ineptitude of a succession of organisations.

It is particularly sad, reading through the Ombudsman's report and understanding how the safety of our children was put down the ladder in terms of this man's work, being very involved in a number of different areas there.

The nature of the victims' complaints to ministers and government agencies led the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources—DEDJTR—at the time to refer the matter to the Ombudsman in 2017. There had been the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and an in-depth investigation for that had ranged for more than five years. There were thousands of records and extensive historical documentation received from the 2014 Victoria Police criminal investigation into Whitehead, the Office of Public Prosecutions Victoria, the County Court, the Public Record Office Victoria, Puffing Billy's offices at Belgrave, its Emerald archives and members of the public, and there were 18 people who provided information and 16 interviews with witnesses. Scrutiny over the structure of the board from 1977 to 2002 occurred. All three levels of Puffing Billy management were controlled by the executive of the society and the board responsible for overseeing the accusations. We had the report tabled, and in November 2019, on the back of work that was done by the former minister, the member for Lara, the current Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events tabled an apology in this place.

There were victims that I will just mention briefly. Victim Wayne Clarke had contacted many people through this. He met Mr Whitehead in 1975, and in 1976 he began being groomed at a historical rail event. He wrote to the Ombudsman:

I also find it incomprehensible that Mr Whitehead, a dangerous sex offender, was given two leases on railway stations ...

He wanted that investigated. Justin Drew was 12 years old when he was abused. In an article in the *Age* around the apology he said:

It's been very hard ... They had a responsibility to keep an eye on what the Emerald Tourist Railway Board was doing. They didn't do that.

It means they're accepting liability, which they didn't years ago ...

He wanted that sorted out. Those that were involved in the board at the time and also with the society have all since resigned but have left a trail of destruction. On the back of that there are changes in the governance here.

In looking at this for my contribution, other than the Ombudsman's report, I spoke with tourism bodies locally in the Yarra Ranges in my area, and extensive submissions were received from the volunteers and former volunteers and members of the Puffing Billy Preservation Society. I was overwhelmed with the responses, the input, that I received from those people. They range from several paragraphs to pages and pages. They were not proforma. We know that in this place when people are really pushing their cause they will get many people to send proformas. I did not get one proforma. I got very detailed information about the role of the volunteers going forward under this bill. It is very clear that there are so many volunteers out there who have a love and a passion for the train, the railway, its history and its future, and they certainly want to have continued involvement. But as I have said, there has been a very fractured relationship with the current board, and that board will be transitioned to the Puffing Billy Railway Board. There will not be any changes, as I have been advised. The relationship between the society and the board is fractured, it is toxic, it is broken, and I am not sure that this bill will fix that because there remain a lot of questions unanswered. Having said that, we will not be opposing it in this place because I think we do need to update the governance arrangements so that the appropriate reporting requirements are in place, because that is indeed important.

I will turn now to a couple of changes. What is outlined up-front in the purposes clause at 1(f) is:

to recognise the importance of volunteers to the operation of the Puffing Billy Railway ...

and this is particularly important. There is no pathway forward, as I can understand yet, of how to engage the volunteers constructively and how to provide them a positive pathway forward and a line of sight to what their future with the railway looks like. That is mentioned, and I am pleased to see that the role of the volunteers is mentioned in the bill because I think that is particularly important.

I am just going to touch on a little bit about the Puffing Billy Preservation Society, which I will call 'the society', because they have a very long and proud association with the railway. It was established in 1955, and the initial role was to provide a financial guarantee against the loss to the Victorian Railways at the time, who operated the train. Now, they have made enormous contributions. They have fundraised, they have bought land, they have taken on donations of steam trains and they have worked tirelessly in the museums.

In 2017 they had, I believe, 900 volunteers, and they have got 300 now. The Puffing Billy master plan from 2017 estimated the volunteer base would increase from 900 to 1100. Now, it was due to the COVID lockdowns that they were unable to operate. They were not able to do so for 21 weeks last year, and in fact for 35 weeks they were not able to operate, from the commencement of the March COVID lockdowns. With that, they saw a loss, but the tabling of the Ombudsman's report and the investigations also saw a loss of volunteers. According to the recent annual report, the value of the volunteers has fallen from \$6.5 million in 2019 to \$1.3 million. If we look at that \$6.5 million volunteer contribution, that is so significant. You can see how invested people are from their spending so much time.

The society holds many freeholds—they made purchases from private vendors between 1964 and 1980—and they lay claim to a lot of rolling stock. Volunteers are no longer involved in jobs with any planning or decision-making functions. Previously every department had a volunteer member as part of the team. They were once heavily relied on in the retail settings and in some clerical roles, and these are all paid positions. The organisation has moved from being totally volunteer based to having some paid members; in 2021, 54 full-time and 33 part-time—87 employees—but in the previous two years it was 103 employees. Making that transition is extremely difficult because at the same time you need to understand and value the work that the volunteers have done. At the moment they work as firemen, drivers, guards, stationmasters and conductors, writing rosters and booking officers, doing some gardening and some engine cleaning. They feel very much undervalued because some of the roles that they have been undertaking require years of training—the stationmasters, guards, firemen and drivers—but they are given jobs that require them to turn up, do the job and just go home. They do not have a say anymore. They used to have a couple of positions on the board, and now those positions are not on the board they are wondering how their voice is going to be heard. They are really quite dismayed and would like to see this delayed to allow for greater consultation.

With regard to the animosity that is there at the moment, I am just going to quote from some of the people that have contacted me. There are concerns about a:

... group of people making decisions, without the intimate knowledge held by those who do the day to day tasks of running the railway.

Some think it is 'unfair' because:

The writers of the legislation have conveniently forgotten that it was ...

the society

who saved the railway, and helped rebuild it (for free) to what it is today.

Somebody else:

The railway I think is only running because of the volunteers efforts the last 70 or so years ... and ... the board ... only wants the best for the Railway ...

and members really now do not get a say. Somebody else:

The love of the train is foremost in their minds.

Somebody said to me:

As the railway grew ... it became ... a commercial operation, paid staff were employed. I spent a day a week in the workshop in 2001 where ... skilled Fitters and Machinists were paid \$38,000 . A Marketing Manager was reputed to have been paid \$80,000 plus had a car provided ...

They actually wondered then where the value was: was the value in running the railway or was the value in bringing people there? Now, you need to have both; they are important roles, but they felt then that volunteers were certainly undervalued.

Moving to a skills-based board I think is absolutely important, and I would like to think that the boards in these last few years have been moving that way rather than being stacked at times with people that have political motivations. One of the functions of the board is operating, managing and maintaining the infrastructure and the assets, and this is where one of the huge disputes lies. The legislation does not forge a path forward here, and I cannot see how this is easily resolved because on the rail corridor, which extends—we are looking, say, from Belgrave to Gembrook—a considerable 40-odd kilometres there are some 67 different parcels of land. That is quite extraordinary. There are multiple ones around each station. Not only are they multiple but they all have different owners. You can have a look. I have been provided with information about the property status and the current use. The railway board have freehold title to some rail infrastructure. There are government roads on Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning land. The railway preservation society have freehold land. There is reserved and unreserved Crown land. There is such a mix of ownership within that. The volunteers are very concerned that after the work that they have done in purchasing it, the ownership of the land is now just going to be stripped from them.

I was interested to find that there is a particular steam engine housed at Menzies Creek under the ownership of the society, a Shay engine number 14. It was designed by Ephraim Shay, and it is the only such engine outside of Taiwan. Taiwan is watching very closely what happens here, because they look at these Shay engines as national treasures. They donated one; the only one outside of Taiwan is sitting in a museum. Volunteers say to me that the Taiwanese government donated it to the society and they are unsure where that asset is going to end up—what is going to become of that. These are the intricacies and the complexities that sit below the surface.

With the skills-based board that we have, there is a strong need for conflict resolution. Having worked in the area of conciliation and mediation, I understand that a small issue if not addressed can become a bigger issue. And if that is not addressed either and becomes scratchy, you can end up with this gaping chasm, and that is what we have at the moment—a toxic environment, a toxic relationship there. We should not have to have volunteers going to court to resolve this and spending millions of dollars. That should not have to happen. I fear that that may be what is going to happen through this. With that conflict resolution, the board needs to actually include people, whether they co-opt them onto the board or they bring them onto the board for a proper board term, to deal with some of these issues. We cannot have volunteers treated like that. We cannot have these disputes going on and on. The volunteers feel like they are being shafted and being forced out of the railway.

We have the legislation now that acknowledges the volunteers, but it is about how that happens. We need people on the board that are skilled in change management and bringing people along and setting a pathway forward about how this can happen. Whilst there are a lot of things in this legislation that I am fine with, and I am fine with its purposes, we do not know how it is going to be implemented. This is where all the questions arise. How are they going to resolve some of those disputes and have a culture that is positive, that is welcoming and warm? When the public go there and enjoy their experience at the railway line, they think what a positive place this is, how fantastic this place is, but behind the scenes there are a lot of issues.

I implore the minister and I implore the government to have a look at what the pathway forward is to resolve this. We cannot have one of our most iconic, prized and highly visited destinations falling apart behind the scenes. The volunteers rebuilt this railway from scratch. They got it running. At that time, in the 1950s, the government was not interested. Once it became a success—it was paying its way—it did very well. At the minute we are being told that the railway board is debt free, but I have had a

look at some information that we gained through freedom of information, and they have had enormous government handouts—some for projects but some to just keep them afloat. They need to be self-sustaining, and I think that should happen.

Mr EREN (Lara) (13:24): I will have been in this place for 20 years at the end of this year and have been fortunate enough to be in government for most of those years that I have been a member of Parliament. We have seen some wonderful bits of legislation come through this house. I am very proud of every single one that we have implemented as a government. But there comes certain legislation before this house that has a profound impact on people's lives, and this is one of them. Of course the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022 is one that will have a profound impact on those people that have been offended against by certain individuals that were involved with this organisation. I want to thank the minister for finally having closure on the recommendations that were made by the Ombudsman back in 2018. This is, I suppose, the final chapter in terms of that whole saga that inflicted so much pain on children that loved railways, that loved Puffing Billy. Puffing Billy is iconic, with 500 000 people attending—those from around the nation but also international visitors. It is 121 years old and in the Dandenong Ranges. It belongs to the seat of Monbulk, which is fantastic, and the Minister for Education is very proud of that iconic attraction.

I was the Minister for Tourism and Major Events and Minister for Sport in the last government—people called it the 'Minister for Fun', which was mostly true, but it was a heavy responsibility. Sport is worth about \$7 billion to our economy, and the tourism sector is worth about \$300 billion, with about 320 000 jobs associated with it, so it is very important work.

But I came to earth with a thud when some of the revelations of what occurred came to my desk. I want to particularly thank Wayne Clarke, who brought to our attention some of the atrocities that occurred on that iconic attraction. Still to this day, having spoken to every single one of those surviving victims through that saga, through my time as the minister, I still get goosebumps about how it had a profound impact on their lives and continues to do so. Obviously on 27 November 2019, when we invited most of those victims to this Parliament—some of them could not come because of anxiety, and I feel for them—they attended and heard the public apology that was made to all of those victims, and it was gratifying to all of those people that were offended against by particularly one person, Robert Whitehead.

At the time, I remember in the media conference that I did break down a bit because of some of the evidence that I read and the conversations that I had with victims, which were traumatic to say the least. There is nothing more abhorrent than child sexual abuse and for that to happen under any government's watch, where obviously there is a duty of care. If you do not have certain protocols in place, some of these things do happen. It is important to acknowledge them and apologise accordingly, and that is exactly what we did. When Wayne Clarke brought this to our attention I had intensive meetings with the department, and then we thought that we needed an investigative body that could thoroughly investigate everything about these allegations. Then the department referred this off to the Ombudsman, and I thank the Ombudsman for her work in that very important investigation that she did. I remember at the media conference that again I was anxious. Finally, there was some closure in terms of the investigation. We promised as a government that we would implement all of the recommendations by the Ombudsman over time. We have, and this is probably the final chapter.

I did say through that media conference that there were a couple of perpetrators that were known—Anthony Hutchins and Robert Whitehead obviously. Robert Whitehead had passed away, died. I said that I hoped he was burning in hell. I am not necessarily a religious person, but you would hope that death is not the end and that they do suffer after death. You wish that they are suffering in some way, shape or form after death, forever and ever, burning in hell. I think that resonated with victims to a certain extent, because they wanted some justice even after death. That is why I made those comments, and I hope he is still burning in hell and will be burning in hell forever and ever.

When it came to vulnerable children who love the railways, these people, these predators, were out to maximise their deviancy in terms of how they could prey on vulnerable children because of their love of railways. This is something that is atrocious, obviously. When you think about those victims—and some of them did not survive it; some of them committed suicide and some of them died of other causes—certainly for those survivors we had to do what we could as a government. And that is indeed what we did; we supported them all the way. From some of the conversations I had with some of the victims—Bill Elms and others—they were very appreciative that they finally had closure.

I understand the opposition has spoken to the volunteers, and I spoke to the 300 or so volunteers, who were very distressed at the time when these revelations occurred. Of course Puffing Billy could not operate without the volunteers, and I think it was very important that we listened carefully, as we did back then, to how we could structure Puffing Billy—and about the love that we have for Puffing Billy—so that these sorts of incidents will not ever occur again and no child will ever have to go through what those children in previous years went through.

Once I implemented the interim board—and I thank all of those; I will not go through all of the names on the interim board at that time when we implemented the interim board—they worked very closely with the volunteers, because they were ashamed to be part of an organisation that in some way, shape or form had stuck its head in the sand and pretended things were rosy when they were not and where these perpetrators had got away with what they had done to children. It was very much about making sure that we do not lose the volunteers, because they are a critical part of the operations of Puffing Billy. They were very appreciative of the instant action that the government had taken in relation to these allegations, and that gave them a bit of a sense of pride in what they were doing as volunteers.

Now COVID has chucked a big spanner in the works in terms of Puffing Billy, and I hope that going forward Puffing Billy will regain that confidence, will regain that reputation and will regain its status as the wonderful attraction that it is to worldwide audiences right across the globe so that they will come to our wonderful state to expend their money through the tourism opportunities—500 000 people is a lot of people to visit that region.

I know that other members will cover some of the changes. I just wanted to put on the record some of the historical facts of what happened leading up to this day, but I am sure that other members speaking after me will put on the record some of the changes that are occurring through this bill. I want to reiterate that this is a bill which has a profound impact on all of those people that have been victims, the survivors of those awful acts that occurred over many decades, and we want to ensure that this never happens to any child ever again through this organisation. That is why there are checks and balances that we have incorporated into this bill to ensure that children are as safe as possible when it comes to their health and wellbeing. I mean, there is nothing more important for us as parliamentarians than to protect children, the most vulnerable in our society, and regardless of the colour of their politics it is incumbent upon governments to ensure that they have mechanisms in place to prevent this sort of psychological and physical trauma that lives with people for the rest of their lives. Again, I was pleased to have been involved with this bill coming to this place, and I wish it a speedy passage.

Mr McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (13:34): I am delighted to rise and make a contribution on the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022. As we have heard, it establishes the Puffing Billy Railway Act 2022, and it will repeal the Emerald Tourist Railway Act 1977. Primarily the bill provides for its ongoing management and sustainability as a significant tourist attraction, and the bill has certainly come about, as we have heard from the member for Lara, most of whose contribution was talking about it, as a result of that Ombudsman's report in 2018 and that investigation that subsequently followed. It is fair to say that many of the provisions within this bill have come about as a response to the Ombudsman's findings.

First of all, within the bill it recognises the heritage significance of the railway and the importance of volunteers, and I am pleased to see that this government is making a good footnote on volunteers. We certainly hope it does not end up down the path of the CFA—these volunteers have been walked over

by the government for Melbourne. But in this legislation it supports volunteers apparently, so let us hope that that is a step forward by this government.

The bill changes the name of the Emerald Tourist Railway Board to the Puffing Billy Railway Board. It also transitions the board to a government-stacked board that will hold the balance of power, and that is the way they roll. Now, this board will be able to enter into contracts up to \$1 million—they can currently enter into contracts worth up to \$200 000. So the bill is doing all the things it should be doing in a regional rail perspective.

When we look at regional rail in north-east Victoria, unlike Puffing Billy, we are in a disastrous state. I mean, the federal government has spent a lot of money on our rail lines, and we just still continue to wait for rolling stock from this government. Certainly when we talk about Puffing Billy in north-east Victoria, many people see that as the VLocity for us, because it is faster and more reliable than the current trains that we have. I know that from genuine experience. It happened yesterday again: I was at Shepparton trying to catch a train that would get into Melbourne at 12.21 pm, which turned into a bus that got in an hour and a quarter later—and this is not a one-off event, this happens quite regularly. So in terms of reliability, I can certainly say that Puffing Billy is far more reliable than the north-east trains.

Ms Green: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, it is quite clear that this is not a bill about public transport. It is about Puffing Billy and a set of very serious issues, and I think the member for Ovens Valley is making a meal out of it and actually demeaning those serious issues.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order, on relevance, yes, I did see the connection briefly, but I do ask the member to come back to the bill.

Mr McCURDY: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. The bill also outlines how the assets will be maintained and how the assets will remain in safe working order. Puffing Billy has been operating since 1962, as we have heard from others, and attracts over 500 000 tourists per year, and that is significant. Over the years Puffing Billy has seen its fair share of financial and operational issues—and again, that is not dissimilar to the north-east corridor, but we will not go into that.

Certainly Puffing Billy has gone from being predominantly a volunteer organisation to having nearly 70 employees. We know the tension that does exist between the board and the volunteers, and that is a concern. As I say, just like the CFA and FRV, we want to make sure that this board functions properly and it is not just a takeover and an opportunity to roll over a perfectly good volunteer organisation.

Ms Green: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance again, this bill before the house is incredibly serious. It has nothing whatsoever to do with fire services.

Mr McCURDY: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member for Lara spoke about the Ombudsman's report rather than what the bill is covering. I am trying to cover off on the bill—

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Mr McCURDY: I am trying to cover off on what the bill actually talks about, not just one section of the bill.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I would ask members to be mindful of what is in the bill and to speak to the bill.

Mr McCURDY: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. Now, the Ombudsman's report was as a result of sexual offences against children which needed to be addressed within the Emerald Tourist Railway Board, and consequently the report recommended the review. But as always, the review became, again, the government for Melbourne's excuse to move on the volunteers and put in place Labor, like-minded supporters, and that happens in every bill that we see that comes through this place.

Ms Green: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, seriously, on relevance, is the member for Ovens Valley able to address any of this bill?

Ms Staley interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will rule on the point of order, member for Ripon. This is a point of debate, it is not a point of order.

Mr McCURDY: Thank you, Deputy Speaker, and I hope the member for Yan Yean gets her opportunity to speak on the bill somewhere down the track.

The concerns that I have around this bill are about the ongoing role of volunteers, and it is unclear how their service will be recognised—or their significance as volunteers—both historically and into the future. Currently there is no pathway for the resolution of their significant issues, which have been raised. Further to those volunteer concerns, I have received correspondence from volunteers, and they attest to the fact of the way the government for Melbourne has undermined their volunteer base—so they have genuine concerns about that. As the member for Eildon said, if not for the volunteers that saved the railways in the 1950s and 60s, there simply would be no Puffing Billy. And the way this government has treated volunteers has caused many to leave and to cease community involvement.

Now, I can see genuine problems within the old legislation and the Emerald Tourist Railway Board, and changes are generally required. Misconduct was highlighted in the Ombudsman's report, and certainly general management and asset management are concerns. But again we have got to make sure that we do not just turn this into another Labor model like we have seen in various other boards that have been formed. We have seen that through the alpine resorts, water boards and many others as we have gone through this term of Parliament. Victoria should be concerned about the way some of these boards have been set up, and that is what I am trying to put to the house today. If you remove the entire board, as is happening in this example, then all of a sudden the Labor government continues and puts in their new model, and then it goes forward from there.

The bill will be going into consideration in detail later in the week, which I am pleased to see. Time will tell if that is genuine or just a token gesture, but I certainly hope it is genuine and we get considerable time for that consideration in detail. But Puffing Billy has always been seen as a happy place, as the member for Eildon said, a fun place. But the Ombudsman's report suggests that is not necessarily the case, and I think if you listen to the volunteers, they will also agree with that. With that, I commend the bill to the house.

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (13:42): I have great pleasure in joining the debate on the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022. As a number of other members have said, this has been an iconic tourism activity and business for decades in Victoria. I recall as a little child being taken many times from my home in regional Victoria to visit the beautiful Dandenong Ranges and to take a ride on the train. My family were kooky railway nuts, gunzels, and I have many of my local community volunteers who are gunzels themselves, particularly the Campbell family, who until recently lived in Hurstbridge. Dad David and sons Lachlan and Blair have volunteered for years and years and years, and they are a really pivotal part of the operation of the Puffing Billy Railway. But as the member for Lara outlined, there are extremely good reasons why this bill is before the house—extremely serious reasons.

We need to commend the work of the volunteers over the years and recognise the economic benefit that Puffing Billy has brought to the Dandenong Ranges, but we cannot gloss over the appalling events that have happened within this primarily volunteer organisation. There are many memories that I will take with me from my almost 20 years in Parliament, having come in at the same time as the member for Lara—we will be departing, walking out the door, as mates, just as we walked in—but I will never forget his emotion when he and the department publicly referred this iconic organisation to the Ombudsman. I will never forget when the Ombudsman's report was completed and we had the apology before this house. I see the member for Croydon at the table, and I know that he and others

on both sides of the house—the Premier, the then opposition leader and a number of members from the outer east—all spoke on this.

I say this as a longstanding member of a volunteer organisation: we as a government have an obligation and responsibility to ensure that there is good governance in those organisations. We can put volunteers up on a pedestal, but there were some terrible things that occurred around the poor culture that was there from staff and volunteers. We need to protect volunteers into the future, and that is the absolute intention of this bill.

I must say, given the unanimity that we saw following the horrific findings in the Ombudsman’s report and the inexcusable nature of how a convicted paedophile and murderer could have been recruited and kept on the books, it is just unfathomable. We have had many, many reports before this Parliament, including *Betrayal of Trust*. I grew up in the Catholic Church, and I draw no comfort from the fact that the Catholic Church was not the only organisation that had a poor culture, a culture of cover-up and a culture of harm to children. And the fact that it happened in this organisation that has always been there for children I found even more horrific. I commend my dear friend the member for Lara, who has again doubled down on saying that he hopes that those perpetrators do burn in hell, and there is really nothing more that can be said about that time. That is why the new Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events has said root and branch we need to have a new structure, a skills-based board.

I must say, I neighbour the member for Eildon, and she is a good person. We serve on a parliamentary committee together. But really, as the opposition’s lead speaker, she made some mention of political appointments to the board and things like that. I think that is really beneath her, and that the opposition should be supporting this bill. They should not just be saying ‘We’re not opposing it’; they should be supporting it. There is some political pointscoreing that is being done by the opposition’s lead speaker and certainly the member for Ovens Valley. If we have learned anything with all these reports over the years, *Betrayal of Trust* and others, it is that all these matters should be above politics. They should absolutely be above politics, and I hope that further speakers from the opposition will keep this in mind.

I pay tribute to those who, like Wayne Clarke, were just relentless in saying that these perpetrators needed to be held to account and that the damage that they had done needed to be redressed. It is not easy to speak up about those matters, and I am sure that that has taken a huge toll on his and his family’s lives, but we are eternally grateful for that.

The new governance structure repeals the ETR act, the Emerald Tourist Railway Act 1977, and establishes a new Puffing Billy Railway Act 2022 as the new principal act. It introduces a framework to provide for the ongoing management and sustainability of the iconic railway, and that sustainability is predicated on volunteers—and I decry comments by those in the opposition saying that we as a government do not recognise that; nothing could be further from the truth. It changes the name of the Emerald Tourist Railway Board, the ETRB, to the Puffing Billy Railway Board, PBRB. It introduces modern corporate governance reporting mechanisms. It updates the functions of the PBRB and outlines clear objectives relevant to the operation of the railway as a state significant tourism attraction. It changes the titles of the persons appointed to the PBRB to ‘directors’ rather than ‘members’ to remove any ambiguity with members of the Puffing Billy Preservation Society.

It transitions the PBRB to a skills-based directorship, conferring the power to appoint directors to the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the minister. It permits the making of regulations to support the day-to-day operation and management of the railway. The bill supports the growth and sustainability of the PBRB while also recognising the heritage significance of the railway, the significance of its volunteers and its importance to local communities. The bill adopts a framework that aligns with modern standards and addresses findings from reviews of the ETR act and the governance structure at the ETRB.

I want to commend those that have worked so hard for this change, whether it is the current minister; the previous minister, my good friend the member for Lara; or the new CEO, Steve O’Brien. I know

Steve O'Brien well; he used to work for the City of Whittlesea. He is a good egg, he is a good human being, and he understands the importance of good governance and of working with staff and volunteers. I really wish the Puffing Billy society and all its volunteers well and hope that they continue their great work, and also the staff that work at this fantastic tourism asset. It has been so disappointing with that beautiful brand and all the thousands and millions of hours of enjoyment that the railway has given people from all over the world, from local areas and from regional Victoria and interstate. I as a child and my children have had the benefit of that, and I hope one day I will have grandchildren—I have not got them yet; they had better hurry up, those two boys of mine—and ride that train again and sit on the sill and hang my legs over the side with my grandchildren. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr HODGETT (Croydon) (13:52): It is a pleasure to rise and make a contribution on the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022. As previous speakers have already outlined, we all know Puffing Billy, a great iconic asset in the Dandenong Ranges. Puffing Billy has operated as a heritage tourist railway since 1962, and it is a major Victorian tourism attraction. It sees around 500 000 visitors each year. I have spent some time on the Yarra Ranges council as a councillor and mayor, along with other members of the Parliament here, and been a resident in the Yarra Ranges. We all know Puffing Billy well and the important part it plays in its position in tourism in the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges.

To the purposes of this bill, as have been outlined: the bill establishes the Puffing Billy Railway Act 2022 and repeals the Emerald Tourist Railway Act 1977, it provides for the ongoing management and sustainability of Puffing Billy as a significant Victorian tourist attraction and it updates provisions relating to corporate governance, practices and the operation of the railway to align with modern standards. From listening to the lead speaker and speakers on both sides of the house, I think we are all in agreement about the need for the corporate governance practices and operation of the railway to align with modern standards.

This bill is the result of the Victorian Ombudsman's 2018 report *Investigation into Child Sex Offender Robert Whitehead's Involvement with Puffing Billy and Other Railway Bodies* and a subsequent consultant's report. Many of the provisions of the bill respond to the findings of the Ombudsman. I spoke on the apology for child sex abuse linked to Puffing Billy in this house on 27 November 2019, and as the member for Yan Yean in her contribution said, I do well remember the member for Lara's very moving contribution. The member had a great deal to do with it at the time, and I respected and remember well his contribution on that very serious, sensitive and important issue. In reviewing the existing legislation it was determined that the act contained too many outdated provisions and sections and a new act was required. You will get no argument from us on this side of the house; we concur with the need for that. We are in agreement with that, so there is no argument with that part of the bill.

In summary, and as the member for Eildon outlined in her contribution, the bill changes the name of the Emerald Tourist Railway Board to the Puffing Billy Railway Board; it provides for the objectives, functions and powers of the new board; it transitions to a skills-based board with a minimum of five and maximum of 10 members; it enables the new board to enter into contracts and arrangements to the value of \$1 million without ministerial approval, where the current limit is \$200 000 in the current act; and it provides for the growth and development of the railway, including requirements for contemporary business and strategic planning. Anyone who has had anything to do with tourism or Puffing Billy out there knows the importance for the board members and the society or people involved with Puffing Billy to have that provision for growth and development of the railway included in the requirements for contemporary business and strategic planning. I think that was identified as a shortfall, and that is a great need that the bill addresses. The bill also recognises the heritage significance of the railway and the importance of volunteers to the ongoing operation of the railway, and there have been a few people that have mentioned volunteers. I will come back and make a few comments on that, time permitting. It will manage and maintain the infrastructure and assets of the railway—and I will come back to focus on that—and a rail corridor plan outlining how assets are to be maintained must be prepared and approved.

Before my current shadow portfolio of education I did wear the tourism, major events and sport shadow portfolio hat for a couple of years in this term, so I am acutely aware of some of the issues around Puffing Billy and the Emerald Tourist Railway Board and what was required. As I said, I had spoken on that apology for child sex abuse linked to Puffing Billy, so I am aware of the issues and I am aware of how the bill has arrived at the house today.

I did want to focus a major part of my contribution on the asset ownership. It is best described as an ugly dispute about the asset ownership. I do want to focus there. I have had some dealings with the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events on that specific issue and I had some productive meetings, I might add, with the minister when I was wearing that shadow tourism hat. But they are still in some ways unresolved. Therefore I note from the earlier discussion on the government business program that this bill will be going into consideration in detail. I am sure our lead speaker will seek to explore some of those issues with the minister for tourism to try and get answers around the asset ownership. I might come back to that after I speak a bit more about the background of the bill.

Puffing Billy, as I said, has operated as a heritage tourist railway since 1962 and is now a major Victorian tourist attraction, seeing around 500 000 visitors each year—pre COVID of course, and we look forward to those numbers getting back to the pre-COVID case and growing. Over the years the railway has had its fair share of financial and operational issues. It was closed in 1954 and was reopened in 1955 by Victorian Railways with the help and support of the Puffing Billy Preservation Society, also established in 1955. In 1977 the Victorian government established the Emerald Tourist Railway Board as a statutory authority under the Emerald Tourist Railway Act 1977. Under this act, until July 2018 the Puffing Billy Preservation Society occupied four seats on the board.

Puffing Billy has moved from being a volunteer-dominated organisation to now having some 70 employees. For a number of years there has been considerable tension between the board and volunteers, and maybe I will come back and speak a little bit about that in terms of the asset ownership. But with the culture being described as toxic, ownership of assets in dispute and the Puffing Billy Preservation Society claiming to own several parcels of land and rolling stock at considerable value, members of the Puffing Billy Preservation Society are aggrieved that they have gone from being a large and dedicated volunteer resource—

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Members

MINISTER FOR HEALTH

MINISTER FOR ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

MINISTER FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Absence

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:01): I rise to inform the house that today I will answer questions for the portfolios of health and ambulance services and the Minister for Water will answer questions for the portfolios of solar homes and energy, environment and climate change. Further to this, for all of this week the Minister for Transport Infrastructure will answer questions for the portfolios of public transport and roads and road safety.

The SPEAKER: Before beginning I would like to welcome to the chamber His Excellency Mr Wolfgang Lukas Strohmayer, the Ambassador of Austria; Ms Eva Hussain, Honorary Consul General of Austria in Victoria; and the Honourable Heidi Victoria, Honorary Vice-Consul for Austria in Victoria and former member for Bayswater.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

ELECTIVE SURGERY

Ms KEALY (Lowan) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. In December the government was asked when elective surgery would resume following lockdown 6 so that Melissa Proven, a patient suffering a spinal burst fracture, could receive her pain-relieving surgery. It is now 15 months since her injury, yet she was very recently notified that there is still no scheduled date to perform this vital surgery. What is the government's plan to cut elective surgery waitlists? What is the government's plan to give Melissa hope and get her the surgery she so vitally and desperately still needs 15 months on?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:02): I thank the member for Lowan for her question. Obviously this global pandemic has cancelled a lot of surgery and deferred a lot of care in every part of our health system, both public and private, and in every part of our nation. Indeed I am sure there have been issues of deferred care, delays and the unavoidable cancellation of various procedures and services, particularly from the point of view of safety in comparable countries right across the whole world. What I could say to the member for Lowan is I will make sure that the Minister for Health upon his return is informed of the constituent—the individual that the member for Lowan refers to. If I need any further information from her, I will be sure to have my office contact hers.

In broader terms, obviously we need to return to 100 per cent of normal activity, and we are well and truly on the way to that. Then there will need to be additional capacity, additional work, to not only deal with those patients who would ordinarily come onto the list each day, each week and each month in a non-COVID year but to deal with those for whom the pandemic has meant their care has been postponed. Clinical guidance, clinical expertise, will guide any prioritisation within that framework. We are well engaged with the private sector, and not just here in Victoria. We will have more to say in due course about how we go beyond our normal 100 per cent activity so that we can make sure everybody for whom there has been disruption and delay because of this pandemic get the care they need as quickly as possible.

I will take this opportunity—the question provides me with an opportunity—to again thank all of our staff, who are doing an amazing job under extraordinary conditions. I thank each and every Victorian for the part they have played in getting vaccinated and in keeping us safe. To those who have had disruption to their care, I thank them for understanding that these are not ordinary circumstances. They are very, very challenging circumstances, and I can assure them our staff are doing everything they possibly can to get everyone who needs care the care that they need as fast as possible.

Ms KEALY (Lowan) (14:05): Premier, what is the latest advice you have received as to how many Victorians remain on the elective surgery waitlist?

The SPEAKER: I just remind members to direct questions through the Chair.

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:05): Again, I thank the member for Lowan for her question. I can only direct her to those most recent reports. I should also point out that the amount of data and the frequency with which it is released to the public is at levels unthinkable under others—and certainly never, ever delivered. So there is more transparency, more data, more accountability than there has ever been, and that is a wholly good thing. I do not have a confirmed update to provide to the member. I can only point her, direct her, to the most recent data that was released. The quarter is coming to a close, so there will be another quarterly report at the end of this quarter, and I am sure the minister upon his return will be only too happy to answer any and all questions about that report.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: TAFE FUNDING

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:06): I was very pleased last Sunday to be at Kangan TAFE with my honourable friend the Assistant Treasurer as well as the Minister for Training and Skills from the other place to make a very significant announcement in vocational education and training—so jobs, but also a very important announcement for health and mental health—

10 000 additional TAFE places, many of which will be free because the enrolments will be off the free TAFE course list, together with substantial changes to the way people can access subsidised and indeed free skills. Previously we would take account of a person's qualifications before they were seeking to enrol. Under these new places, the courses you have done in the past—your qualifications before this most recent interaction with TAFE—will not be relevant, and that is a reflection of the fact that circumstances have changed. The pandemic means that many people want to reskill, need to reskill—10 000 additional places.

So TAFE on its knees, TAFE gone, TAFE almost dead and buried: we have repaired the damage, and now we are making TAFE better and stronger than it has ever been because we need to provide people with alternative pathways but we also need to recruit in health and mental health, particularly mental health, thousands of additional staff. That was one of the recommendations of the royal commission, all of which have been supported by our government from day one. There has been no Damascus-like conversion required on this side of the house because what we know is that if you cut health funding you hurt patients. There can be no reform unless there is substantial funding. Victorians know who cut hospital funding, and it is no-one on this side of our chamber.

AMBULANCE SERVICES

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (14:08): I have a question for the Premier. John lives in Yea. Last week his wife displayed symptoms of a heart attack. He said, 'I dialled 000 and it took ages to get on—ages, really ages'. Worse still, when he eventually got through he was then told there were no ambulances to dispatch. John was panicked, and he had no option but to drive his wife to hospital himself. How is it fair that when someone is suffering from a suspected heart attack the only option in Victoria today is to be driven by a family member to the nearest hospital?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:09): I thank the honourable member for her question, and whilst I will take this opportunity to express my deepest concerns and to acknowledge the distress that would have been caused to this particular individual and his wife and family, I am sure, I do not think it is accurate in any way, and the data certainly demonstrates this—

A member interjected.

Mr ANDREWS: Well, the sheer number of people who have been transported by ambulance because of cardiac arrest under lights and sirens, code 1—yesterday, the day before, last week, last month—indicates that the way you have just described the ambulance system is wrong. It is wrong, and it is a very poor reflection on your understanding of how the system works and it is equally a very poor reflection on the men and women of Ambulance Victoria.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Just before calling the member, I ask members not to shout. Question time started in a good manner and has become too shouty.

Ms McLeish: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is now debating the matter, and he is suggesting that perhaps what was said is not quite accurate. I spoke to John personally, and he was panicked and he praised the staff at the hospital.

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

Mr ANDREWS: For the purposes of clarity, I was not for a moment calling into question John's version of events, rather the creative and inaccurate way in which the honourable member described ambulance services and by definition ambulance paramedics in our state. In any event, I will just remind the honourable member that prior to a one-in-100-year global pandemic—not by accident but because of a work value case, additional recruitment of ambulance paramedics, the additional construction of ambulance stations, the additional purchase of ambulance equipment and indeed massive funding boosts to the emergency department part of our hospital system—we did not report

improved ambulance response times, we did not report ‘okay’ or ‘getting better’ or ‘moderately successful’, we reported in this state the best ambulance response times since records were kept. We know some are very upset about that. They are the facts of these matters, and it is a credit to every ambo, every nurse, every staff member in our hospitals and in our ambulance service. It is an absolute credit to them.

The challenge now as we normalise COVID, as we push beyond this with one of the most highly vaccinated communities in the world, is for all of us to work together, not to play politics but to get back to that level of best ever performance. In fact if we can do even better again, then that is what will drive us, because that is what has always driven us. We have never been at war with our ambos. We have never been content to see response times at any level. We have always worked to do more and do better, and prior to this one-in-100-year global pandemic event—which apparently is the fault of the government, it would seem from those opposite—we had the best ever response times. We are determined to get back to that because that is how you change lives and save lives. I will give you one piece of advice: politics will not get you there, only hard work and the commitment of our dedicated team, who have our complete support.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! This is the point in question time in which I warn members that they will be removed from the chamber if they shout across the chamber, without further warning.

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (14:12): Many Victorians are being forced to drive themselves, be driven by a loved one or call a taxi to get them into hospital in an emergency. With people dying waiting for an ambulance, when will the Premier finally fix the 000 crisis?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:13): The original question went to a very specific example, and I have made it clear we do not want to see anybody having to go through the distress that John and his family would have gone through. The supplementary is much broader and is making assertions and claims that there are no numbers, there is no data, to support that. But in any event, even if the very critical view that the honourable member has of our ambulance paramedics and the work they do were true, even if that were accurate, let me just say this: our ambulance service has come under extraordinary pressure, and when you have unprecedented demand and a goodly number of your workforce—a quarter, a half on some days—at home sick with COVID, you will finish up with impacts on services. We regret that. I point you to what occurred prior to the pandemic, the best ever performance, and I remind the honourable member and all honourable members we are determined to get back to that level of performance and even exceed it.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: MENTAL HEALTH FUNDING

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (14:14): This government’s landmark Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System estimated that the economic cost of poor mental health to Victoria is around \$14.2 billion a year. That includes a cost of \$1.9 billion a year to employers, mostly of course through a loss of productivity but also through, sadly, workplace injuries. The commission’s findings identified that properly investing in our state’s mental health will boost economic growth but it will also provide a dedicated revenue stream to support mental health into the future. Impacting only about 5 per cent of the largest employers in our state, our mental health levy is already paying dividends, with \$3.8 billion having been invested in our last budget to rebuild the mental health system.

Unless of course those opposite’s positions have changed since 6 o’clock last night, I think the Leader of the Opposition has now offered his belated support—but only because they cannot repeal the legislation they voted against. On this side of the chamber we are steadfast in our commitment to rebuilding our mental health system. Some in this debate are conscripts of political convenience, not volunteers to good policy. Their record is voting against secure mental health funding. They are promising to repeal this funding mechanism, so no matter what they say today, they will cut mental

health funding, be assured of that, because their values speak louder than the words that they utter on a point of convenience. It is vitally important that we provide the certainty of investment and the security of the knowledge that this government will continue to invest in mental health to ensure the wellbeing of all Victorians.

ALBURY WODONGA HEALTH

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) (14:16): My question is to the Premier. Last week Albury Wodonga Health was forced to declare a code yellow, an internal emergency declaration, because patients were left waiting in ambulances for treatment. Thirty million dollars has been provided by the New South Wales government to build a new emergency department for the border region. Why has the Andrews government steadfastly refused to build this needed facility?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:17): I do thank the member for Benambra, and it is a very good question. I would have to take issue with the way he has described our government's effort. This is the problem. I can well remember when I was privileged and honoured to play a different role in a different government, having conversations with the New South Wales government. I said, 'We need to do better for border communities. Instead of having a Wodonga hospital and an Albury hospital, why don't we merge the two together?'. You have no idea the resistance that came my way. For some reason that southern part of New South Wales is not part of New South Wales. They were very resistant to this. So you know what I did—I said, 'Well, okay, fine. Let's move them, and Victoria will run it, even though it's in New South Wales'. So I am terribly sorry, but if the member for Benambra expects me to sit here and be lectured about the fact that we have not looked after border communities and we have not looked after the formation of the only health service where one state manages assets—

Ms Staley: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question rather than answering it, and I would ask you to bring him back to answering it.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier does have 1 minute and 46 left for his answer, and I am sure he is coming to answering the question.

Mr ANDREWS: Albury Wodonga Health is unique, and I can say this not just as a former health minister and as the leader of our government but because members of my own family have received care, particularly regional cancer services, out of Albury Wodonga. And I will not be lectured by the member for Ripon about these matters. They are far too serious for the nonsense commentary we get from the member for Ripon. The point I was making—and I am sure the member for Benambra appreciates this even if his colleague does not: the nurses, the doctors, the team at Albury Wodonga Health do an outstanding job. The only argument we have is when the member for Benambra tries to assert that our government has not supported that health service. We in fact created that health service, and we will support that health service and its staff and the patients who turn to it every day we have the honour and privilege of governing this state, not just because it is in the community where I grew up—although that is not unimportant to me—but because every patient deserves the care that is most important to them as fast as possible and as close to home as possible.

I well remember the member for Ripon running up the street when we made an announcement at Maryborough hospital. I remember matching it, and it will be a Labor government that delivers it. That is the fact of the matter. It is not who runs up the street making promises, it is who gets the job done. Whether it is in Albury-Wodonga or Maryborough or anywhere in between, this government will continue to invest in health outcomes, not play health politics.

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) (14:20): On a supplementary question, the state government refuses to provide the board of Albury Wodonga Health and the border communities with the master plan for the new health facility, including a new emergency department that is so desperately needed. Why is the plan not being released by the Victorian government in the interests of community transparency?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:20): I tell you what, if New South Wales funded it there is a first time for everything, because at the end of the day the New South Wales government were happy to actually give us the Albury hospital—‘You look after it. You run it as part of Victoria’s health system’. Again, that is not a version of events, that is the fact. That is the history. I will tell you what I will do, though. I do not necessarily know that the way the honourable member has described events is accurate. I am not casting aspersions; I do not know. I will need to speak to the Minister for Health about that. If the member for Benambra wants to have a cup of tea with me to talk about the hospital, I am more than happy to make time—or something stronger, depending—and we will see what we can do. It will be your shout, though. We will see what we can do. I know and understand this community. It is a proud community. The fact that you are a long way from Melbourne does not mean you should have to settle for anything other than excellence. It has always been my view and it has always been what we have striven for, and we will do the same here at Albury Wodonga Health.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Ms SPENCE (Yuroke—Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Youth) (14:22): I rise to update the house on the important issue of youth mental health. To fix a broken system, we launched the royal commission into mental health before the pandemic, but since then we have seen unprecedented pressure on the mental health of young Victorians. Unprecedented times call for unprecedented measures, and not only has this Labor government committed to implementing every one of the recommendations of the royal commission but last year alone it invested more than \$842 million in youth mental health, including new pop-up and mobile services so young people can access care closer to home; expanded specialist organisations that work with young people, including eating disorder services; new and upgraded mental health residential facilities; and, a year ahead of schedule, every government secondary and specialist school now has a dedicated mental health practitioner as well as our \$200 million School Mental Health Fund kicking off in regional Victoria.

Last year’s budget committed a record \$3.8 billion to reconstruct the mental health system from the ground up. It will have dedicated care streams for young people to put those with lived experience at the helm of leading programs and services. This is a huge job and one that this government is committed to. Our government has been consistent in our commitment to fixing our mental health system with long-term investments through the mental health levy. Unlike others, we will not be changing our position from one day to the next. The opposition might not know what their position on the mental health levy is or was, but Victorians know what their record is on health care. Our record is one of commitment and investment, while those opposite simply have a record of cuts. If given the chance, we would see those opposite undo all the hard work that our government, together with Victorians, has done, and this we know will mean cuts to youth mental health.

ENERGY POLICY

Ms SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:24): My question is for the Minister for Planning. As the minister would know, burning gas is a major cause of the climate crisis. It is also getting very expensive, and recent research shows just how bad it is for our respiratory health to burn gas in our homes as well. The government has a program to help low-income households replace old, dangerous gas heaters, which is very welcome, but at the same time our state’s planning laws still actually require that all new homes are hooked up to gas. New housing developments that could be all electric, all renewable, are being forced to install gas even if they do not want to. Will the minister change Victoria’s planning rules to stop new homes being forced to connect to gas?

Mr WYNNE (Richmond—Minister for Planning, Minister for Housing) (14:25): I thank the member for Melbourne for her question. There would be many parts of Victoria where there is no—

A member interjected.

Mr WYNNE: The member for Malvern advises me there is no reticulated gas in his part of the world. I think there is—

Mr Andrews: The question's just not right.

Mr WYNNE: Well, clearly. My colleague the member for Gippsland East advises me that there is no reticulated gas in his part of the world—

Members interjecting.

Mr WYNNE: What do you do with this, Michael? I do not know. I mean, it is an extraordinary question to ask, but I guess the answer—

Mr Riordan: It's a very Melbourne question.

Mr WYNNE: Yes, it is a very inner-city question actually, but that is fine. I am very happy to represent the inner city, as I do—

Mr Andrews: And she asked you the inner-city question—who would've thought?

Mr WYNNE: Who would have thought, indeed. Can I say to the member for Melbourne, as she would know, we are building close to 15 000 units of public and social housing, and in that context we are ensuring that in all of those new builds we are in fact not using gas. We are not using gas in those buildings where in fact reticulated gas is available. Indeed in terms of heating and cooling, we are using the recycling air conditioners, which of course are much more efficient because of the burden that is placed upon low-income earners. We have to ensure that we maintain the option for poorer people to have their utility bills paid in a less burdensome way by ensuring that we have got heating and cooling through the air-conditioning system. But more generally, it is important that the government does show leadership in this space, and in fact we are through the massive Big Housing Build. We will continue to show that level of leadership—

Mr Andrews interjected.

Mr WYNNE: and indeed as the Premier has indicated, through diversification and the magnificent announcement that the Premier made with the minister for the environment about offshore wind, which is going to be an absolutely magnificent addition to the targets that we are seeking in terms of our renewable energy.

Ms SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:27): I am not sure if the minister needs reminding, but it is clause 25.09-2 in Victoria's planning rules that says that new housing developments, where reticulated gas is available, must be connected to gas. Gas is mandated in these homes. In fact it is not the inner city that this is affecting; it is actually the urban fringe where a lot of housing development is happening, where it is affecting people's cost of living and health the most. Right now while we wait for the gas substitution plan, all of these new homes that are being built are being forced to connect to gas, but with the stroke of a pen the minister could stop this right now. It could happen overnight, and then we could prevent the problem of having to then transition these homes away from gas in the future. Minister, why not just do this tomorrow?

Mr WYNNE (Richmond—Minister for Planning, Minister for Housing) (14:28): Can I thank the member for Melbourne for her policy analysis on planning 101. Can I just say to the member for Melbourne: it is very pleasing to see that you have got out to the urban fringe—

Mr Andrews: I don't know about that.

Mr WYNNE: Well, possibly. I mean, generally speaking I do not think you cross more than a river for most of your time up there on a Kensington hill looking down on the rest of us. But the reality of this is that where there is reticulated gas, it is a matter for those people who are developing on the urban fringe, and many developers of course have taken up the option not to include gas—

Mr Andrews interjected.

Mr WYNNE: Yes, free PT was probably a better one. But it is an option for developers— (*Time expired*)

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: RURAL AND REGIONAL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms THOMAS (Macedon—Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional Development) (14:30): I rise to outline how the Andrews Labor government's once-in-a-generation reform of the mental health system will give rural and regional Victorians the care they need. In 2018 I was privileged to be at the Kyneton Men's Shed when the Premier announced that our government would hold the nation's first royal commission into mental health. I am proud that our government is supporting and implementing every one of the royal commission's recommendations. By rebuilding our mental health system we are transforming the way support is offered in regional Victoria, with more care in regional communities, more early intervention and more focus on wellbeing and prevention.

Last year's budget committed \$141 million to upgrade youth prevention and recovery care facilities, including sites in Geelong, Shepparton, Ballarat, Traralgon and Bendigo. We are delivering funding for local services for those needing care, providing early intervention support without needing a referral from a GP and without the pressure of a clinical hospital emergency department. This includes 14 new local services in regional Vic. We also know that our farmers have faced many challenges over the years, so we are supporting them to focus on their mental health with \$2.9 million for local programs tailored to local needs in communities from Bass Coast to the Wimmera.

The Andrews Labor government is firm on our commitment to mental health. Victorians know that they can trust us and our word. Unlike those opposite we will not dither, backflip or waver on funding for these important reforms because reforming and investing in the mental health system is part of our values. It is what Labor governments do, and Victorians know that only Labor governments can be trusted to deliver these reforms.

EMERGENCY SERVICES TELECOMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY

Mr SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:32): My question is to the Premier. On 6 January this year, Suzie's 12-year-old daughter suffered a severe seizure while at home in Tambo Upper. Suzie's calls to 000 never made it through to ESTA and she was left speaking with a Telstra operator who was attempting to patch her call through while in crisis, before finally scooping her daughter up after a 15-minute waiting time and driving her to a hospital herself. Suzie's daughter made it and she was okay, but this was a terrifying experience for her family, who had no idea the 000 system was so severely broken. Premier, what do you say to Suzie to explain the totally unacceptable delay given your government knew about the broken ESTA system back in 2016?

The SPEAKER: Earlier in question time I warned members about directing questions through the Chair. So the next time this happens, the question will get knocked out of order.

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:33): I thank the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party for his question. I say to Suzie and her daughter—to their entire family—that I am very sorry that when they needed the system, the system was not there to provide them with the support that they needed. I am not questioning any of the version of events as put forward by the questioner, but I am not sure whether this might be a Telstra issue or a 000 ESTA issue. I think it would be appropriate to go and double-check that, and I will commit to the deputy leader to do that. Beyond that I would just say in more general terms—

A member interjected.

Mr ANDREWS: No, not a cup of tea. It is a serious question that has been asked, and I am providing you with a serious commitment to follow it up. If that is what you want me to do, I will do it. I apologise for letting interjections get the better of me. It is a serious matter, and we will look at it seriously—of

course we will. I will just say in more general terms when you have got 4000 calls coming in a day, when you have unprecedented demand—and when I say ‘unprecedented’, I am talking about more calls than at any time ever, that are by and large attributable to a 1-in-100-year global pandemic—then any system will struggle. That is not an excuse, but it is an explanation.

Mr Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, I ask you to bring the Premier back to answering the question. This was not relevant to the pandemic in that specific time limit but about a broken ESTA system back in 2016. This system has been broken since 2016, and the government have not fixed it.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister for Industry Support and Recovery! The question at the end of his question was a broad one, and the Premier was being relevant to it.

Mr ANDREWS: Indeed, Speaker. If I might, the question related to an incident on 6 January. Not 6 January 2016, I do not think; it was 6 January—

Ms Allan: This year.

Mr ANDREWS: And, look, my profound apology to the deputy leader if I am confused, but I thought he was talking about an incident, a very serious incident, where I have already said I regret and I apologise for any distress that family has felt as a result of the system not meeting their legitimate expectations. I have committed to following that up. Was that a Telstra telecommunications issue? Was it an ESTA capacity issue? Was it a dispatch issue in relation to the availability of an Ambulance Victoria asset to provide them with the care that they needed? I am glad things finished okay, but I again say how deeply sorry we are if the service did not meet their legitimate expectations.

I do not accept the characterisation of our ambulance service as offered by the deputy leader. What I will say is that at times of unprecedented demand it is not about making excuses, it is about understanding the challenge you face. It is about explaining the challenge you face and then doing something about it. In most recent times, and indeed over a lengthy period of time, this government has invested and reinvested and invested again in ambulances, in ESTA, in police, in fire—in all of our emergency services—and indeed all parts of our health system. We will continue to do that as we come out of this pandemic, knowing that the pandemic has done a lot of damage. The pandemic has seen a lot of things disrupted, a lot of things overloaded, a lot of things—systems and processes—put into very challenging circumstances. This family is not only in our thoughts, but they motivate us to make sure we do even better on the other side of this global event.

Mr SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:36): This is a direct quote from Suzie:

Every single day there is an alarming story, and we should not be accepting it. And now I have been a direct recipient of this crisis. We are a fit and healthy family but always want to know that, if required, the health system and services are available to us at an acceptable standard.

Premier, why has the government failed to provide a 000 system to an adequate standard?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:37): Well, I would direct the honourable member’s attention to a very simple fact. The advice I have is that ESTA met every one of its monthly benchmarks between 2016 and just before the pandemic. Indeed through large parts of the pandemic it was able to deliver against its well-understood metrics. Ambulance response times were the best that they had ever been. At a point, though, the workload becomes so overwhelming that any system will struggle. On the exact issue that the questioner has put to me: he is wrong, because between 2016 and right through much of the pandemic every benchmark was met every month. Now, that does not mean that we do not have to repair the damage the pandemic has done. It does not mean that we do not all have to strive to get back to that best-ever performance. The real point about it is who do you trust to do that: people who cut health funding or people who invest—people who cut health funding and cannot even admit it, or people who invest? We are going to get this done— *(Time expired)*

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: MENTAL HEALTH FUNDING

Mr MERLINO (Monbulk—Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health) (14:38): I rise to update the house about how the Andrews government is getting on with delivering on all of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. The Andrews government has made significant inroads into the reform of our state's mental health and wellbeing services, with work underway on more than 85 per cent of the 74 recommendations. This is the first year of a 10-year reform, a complete rebuild. This work has already delivered over 1000 extra jobs in the mental health workforce, backed by the Labor government's, as the Treasurer said, record \$3.8 billion investment—the largest single mental health investment in Australia's history.

But there is a range of views on mental health funding. There are those in our community who have always opposed sustainably funding mental health as recommended by the royal commission—opposed when the interim report was released in 2019, opposed when we introduced legislation, opposed after this royal commission recommendation was legislated—but now desperately deny it, saying that this was all 'before it became law' and, 'We've been quite clear we'll retain it'. Even though well after it became law, in fact eight months later, when asked, 'Can you categorically say the mental health levy will be gone if you're elected?' the response was, 'Yes'. The Shadow Minister for Mental Health was standing right next door. The same people who for more than two years opposed sustainably funding mental health now say they will not repeal the legislation 'even though we'd like to'. The Leader of the Opposition is damned by his own words—'even though we'd like to'. Only the Andrews Labor government can be trusted to deliver a sustainably funded mental health system. Those opposite would cut it mercilessly.

Ms Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, again—this is the seventh time I have raised this point of order, seven times—constituency question 5994, asked 194 days ago, to the Minister for Health. I have raised this point of order seven times. Obviously the Andrews Labor government and the Minister for Health clearly do not care about the community in the Yarra Ranges. If you could, please ask him to follow up and provide a response for my constituents to question 5994.

Constituency questions

SANDRINGHAM ELECTORATE

Mr ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:41): (6266) My constituency question is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and I ask: when will the Andrews Labor government commit to better protecting the Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary? The Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary is one of Victoria's greatest environmental and ecological assets. Crystal clear shallow water, sandstone reefs, sea caves and rock pools make Ricketts Point one of the most distinguished and treasured places in all of Port Phillip Bay. However, this government continues to disappoint members of my community by not taking the necessary actions to better protect our marine sanctuary. Some—not all, but some—fishers, jet ski riders and boaters who unlawfully fish, travel between or anchor within the sanctuary are making a mess of the sanctuary. My community is looking to this government for leadership on this matter. It is, after all, our collective responsibility to better protect and preserve our environment for this generation and the next.

NORTHCOTE ELECTORATE

Ms THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (14:42): (6267) My question is to the Minister for Housing. There are currently two Homes Victoria projects underway in my electorate of Northcote, delivering more and improved social housing in Northcote and Preston. I ask: what are the next steps that my community can expect in the delivery of these two critical projects? As the inner north grows I have been pushing to embed equity, amenity and environmental sustainability into every initiative that we pursue. Of central importance is the delivery of modern housing to give more people the safety and security they need. There are many ways that people can find themselves without safe housing: family violence, mental health issues, job loss, disadvantage. We have a fundamental responsibility to each

and every person needing a home, and that is why we are investing over \$5.3 billion to build thousands of them. The two projects in my electorate are delivering critical homes, but more than that, they are building communities. I would welcome an update on the new housing, amenities, open spaces, environmental standards, opportunities for first home buyers, local job creation and construction time lines as we get underway with building a brighter future for more local residents.

GIPPSLAND SOUTH ELECTORATE

Mr D O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:43): (6268) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I ask: when will the government deliver improvements to local roads in South Gippsland, specifically the Meeniyah-Promontory Road, the Leongatha bypass, stage 2, and the Coal Creek bends at Korumburra? More than 500 people and counting have signed a petition calling for 'kamikaze corner' in Leongatha to be fixed. It can be largely accommodated by funding for the design and then implementation of stage 2 of the heavy vehicle bypass. Planning has been funded for the dangerous Coal Creek bends, but no capital funding has been committed—several years later. There have been several fatalities at this spot in recent years. I travelled the Meeniyah-Promontory Road last week, and while there has been some patching the road is still in poor condition and is too narrow, with no overtaking lanes. As the gateway to our magnificent Prom, it is an embarrassment. I ask the minister to allocate the necessary funds in the coming budget to address these and other road issues throughout the electorate of Gippsland South.

MORDIALLOC ELECTORATE

Mr RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (14:44): (6269) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education. When is the current redevelopment and upgrade of Parkdale Secondary College expected to be completed? This is a wonderful investment for our local community, the stage 3 works in Parkdale Secondary College's wonderful journey: \$9.6 million was committed by the Andrews Labor government to deliver 18 new classrooms and learning spaces that will meet the growing demands and aspirations of this incredible community. Under the leadership of David Russell and past principals Debby Chaves and Greg McMahon, this school has gone from strength to strength. I had the opportunity to visit the school and meet with student leaders recently and get a tour of the school once again, and to see its transformation and growth as it comes back in 2022 was really exciting. To see the second level of the redevelopment taking shape was a real honour. I want to pay tribute to this wonderful community for all that they have done over the past few years. I am really keen to get an update on when those important construction works are expected to be completed and supporting our community.

POLWARTH ELECTORATE

Mr RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:45): (6270) My question this afternoon is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Like the member for Gippsland South, I would like an update or some answers on when some key roads in my electorate will be seen to for the long-suffering residents of the Polwarth electorate. The roads specifically are the Princes Highway west of Colac, which seems to be endlessly recoated with asphalt and failing, particularly the stretch at Weerite. The Gerangamete-Colac-Forrest road is a major tourism conduit that basically has no shoulders, overhanging trees and very little clearance for the major amount of traffic that it carries. The Hendy Main Road, west of the township of Torquay, is a frustration to all, and the only impact it sees from Regional Roads Victoria is to lower the speed limit to 80 kilometres an hour. There is the Coragulac-Beeac Road, and of course the dangerous and very busy stretch of the Ballarat road between Cressy and Rokewood. Minister, these are important roads, and they need urgent attention.

BROADMEADOWS ELECTORATE

Mr McGUIRE (Broadmeadows) (14:46): (6271) My question is to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. How will the electorate of Broadmeadows benefit from the rollout of another tranche of the \$40 million Aboriginal Workforce Fund? This fund will deliver training opportunities for local young people to build the workforce pipeline. It will also support efforts to sustain Indigenous organisations through building specialist capabilities and strengthening leadership, governance and workforce planning. This initiative adds value and opportunities throughout vulnerable communities. The Andrews government is already ensuring women and families across Melbourne's north can access coordinated family violence and child and family wellbeing services in one place with the recent opening of the Orange Door network for Hume and Moreland in the global learning centre in Broadmeadows. The Orange Door network is a strong partnership. We also have the Indigenous education centre at the Kangan Institute as part of this network of opportunity being delivered. This is the way to give people a better chance in life.

SHEPPARTON ELECTORATE

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) (14:47): (6272) My question is for the Minister for Health. I am advised that a constituent recently contacted Goulburn Valley Health to ascertain the status of a waitlist in relation to her child who is awaiting a child developmental and behavioural assessment. The child had been on the waiting list for 12 months, and she said that she was told that there were over 400 children on the waiting list. Minister, could you advise what the current waiting time is for a child to obtain a developmental and behavioural assessment at Goulburn Valley Health, how many children are on the waiting list and what the government is doing to address the long waiting time?

YAN YEAN ELECTORATE

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (14:48): (6273) My constituency question is to the Minister for Suburban Development in the other place, and I ask: when will the new pavilion for the Greensborough Hockey Club be officially opened? The Greensborough Hockey Club is a fantastic community club that delivers fabulous sporting experiences for women, men, boys and girls, from little ones to masters. I have been proud to sponsor the Burra for almost 20 years. Prior to the last federal election Nillumbik Shire Council submitted an application to Sport Australia's community sport infrastructure fund. Despite receiving a merit score of 89/100, placing it in the top priority list, funding for the hockey club under the sports rorts scandal was denied. Disappointingly the then Liberal-led council said very little about this, but I congratulate hockey club president Greg Purser on speaking his truth to the Senate inquiry into this shameful episode. Fortunately the state government rose to the challenge and funded \$2 million for a new pavilion through our Growing Suburbs Fund, and I look forward to being part of the official opening.

FERNTREE GULLY ELECTORATE

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) (14:49): (6274) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Knox families have continued to raise their concerns around the safety of the intersection of McMahons Road, the Burwood Highway and Clyde Street in Ferntree Gully. With a history of traffic accidents and near misses, protective measures are crucial to ensure that Ferntree Gully locals can safely use this intersection. For years I have called for traffic lights to be installed at this site, but I am continually dismayed by the Andrews Labor government. Hundreds of residents have signed my petition calling for traffic lights, and I have raised this issue in Parliament on 21 separate occasions. I was very pleased to join the Leader of the Liberal Party to announce that a future Liberal government will install these much-needed traffic lights. This announcement has been strongly received by Ferntree Gully locals. On behalf of my constituents, my residents have asked if the Andrews government will follow the lead of the Liberal Party by finally listening to the needs of Ferntree Gully residents and committing funding in this year's state budget for this urgently needed project.

NEPEAN ELECTORATE

Mr BRAYNE (Nepean) (14:50): (6275) My constituency question is for the Minister for Fishing and Boating. Heritage Victoria recently recommended to the Heritage Council of Victoria that the Flinders Pier be included in the Victorian Heritage Register. The Flinders Pier is so important to the Mornington Peninsula community, and many locals have been campaigning to save the pier from being removed. I would like to acknowledge the work of the Save Flinders Pier campaign and the Flinders Community Association. Both of these groups have been working hard to build public support for the pier's restoration while raising awareness of the pier's historical significance. Community consultation is now open for locals to tell the heritage council why the Flinders Pier is so important and for the community to relay historical stories and information that relate to the pier. So my question to the minister is: how will this feedback help inform the council's decision on whether to include the pier in the Victorian Heritage Register?

Bills

PUFFING BILLY RAILWAY BILL 2022

*Second reading***Debate resumed.**

Mr HODGETT (Croydon) (14:51): Before question time I was making a contribution to the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022, and I was speaking about the infrastructure and assets of the railway and what had been described as being an ugly dispute over that asset ownership. I did think this was a very important matter that needed to be sorted out that the bill did not attempt to achieve, and I thought that maybe the minister in consideration in detail might have the opportunity to clarify the action that might be taken here.

I know that the land tenure arrangements throughout the corridor are a complex mix of Emerald Railway Tourist Board freehold and Puffing Billy Preservation Society freehold, leases, licences and Crown land. The department is currently reviewing all land tenure agreements across the rail corridor, so that might give us some direction or some answers about where that might head. The powers given to the board in section 27(1)(a) are very broad. It enables the new board to grant 'a lease, licence or easement over any land vested in or owned, leased or managed by' the new board. I understand some society members are very concerned that the arrangements may allow acquisition by stealth of assets owned by the Puffing Billy Preservation Society or others.

As I said, it is an important matter. I understand that at the briefing some of these questions remained unanswered and some further information may have been going to be supplied to the member for Eildon, our shadow spokesperson for tourism. The questions primarily relate to that definition of the extent of the rail corridor, including details of what is freehold, leased, licensed and/or Crown land. The bill does not deal with it. Should it? I do not know. It is certainly an outstanding issue. It certainly needs these questions to be discussed or answered so that some peace of mind might be given to some people who have concerns about that. We all want Puffing Billy to grow and prosper, and we recognise the important role it plays in tourism in the Dandenong Ranges and the Yarra Valley. But that is an important area that we would like to be addressed, and if we move into a consideration-in-detail stage and have adequate time, the minister may be able to shed some light there to give some people some confidence, certainty and reassurance in that area.

Mr CARBINES (Ivanhoe—Minister for Child Protection and Family Services, Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers) (14:53): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

REGULATORY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2021*Council's amendments***Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:**

1. Clause 38, lines 17 to 19, omit “, whether circulating generally in Victoria or in a particular locality,” and insert “circulating generally in Victoria”.
2. Clause 38, line 22, before “approved” insert “an”.
3. Clause 38, page 25, after line 2 insert—

“(2A) For the avoidance of doubt, subsections (1) and (2) do not apply to any requirement under an Act, a statutory rule or any other subordinate instrument to provide for the publication of a notice published in a print newspaper in a particular locality.”.

Mr PEARSON (Essendon—Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:54): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

The bill before us today reflects the amendments that were made in the other place that guarantee that public notices will still be printed in regional papers. But let us quickly recap what the change is that this bill is trying to achieve: the bill will modernise public notice requirements, bringing the practice into the 21st century.

Any public notice that currently needs to be printed in print newspapers will have its publishing requirements satisfied by being published online on a designated website. This change will significantly reduce costs and administrative burdens associated with print newspaper publications while also consolidating the information and increasing transparency for the Victorian public. There are over 400 requirements across Victorian acts and regulations for public notices to be published. It is estimated that this change will save Victorian businesses and citizens up to \$1700 in print advertising costs per notice. These measures will particularly help new businesses that need to issue public notices before trading as well as businesses pivoting their operations during emergencies and at other times.

Having said that, the government understands how important public notices in local newspapers can be for some more diverse and vulnerable members of our community and understands regional communities' concerns. In particular can I thank all my regional colleagues who have spoken to me about their communities' concerns. I want to in particular acknowledge the contribution the independent member for Shepparton has made and the regional members in the other place for their tireless work in advocating for their communities. That is why the Premier gave assurances to this place that the government would amend the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2021, and the amendment we are debating today fulfils that commitment.

The government's proposed house amendment clarifies that regional and local newspapers will be left no worse off by the government's changes to regional public notices. The amendment will mean that any notices required by law to be published in a print newspaper circulating ‘in a particular locality’ will remain unchanged after the bill has passed. In practice that means all types of public notices that are currently required to be published in a regional or local print newspaper will continue to be required to be published in those papers, and this in effect guarantees the current status quo for regional papers. This is in stark contrast to the embarrassing, deficient amendment that Mr Davis attempted to pass in the other place. I was not in the chamber for that debate, but it is my understanding that that amendment was a carbon copy of ours in all but one aspect: his amendment did not mention local papers. Of course that begs the question: if Mr Davis knew that his amendment was deficient, why didn't he retract it? He would have been faced with the peculiar circumstance of having two basically identical amendments coming back to the Assembly for consideration. I am pleased to say, though, that that did not occur and that the government's house amendment was supported by the other place. Our amendment will ensure that not only will the *Bendigo Advertiser* or the *Ballarat Courier* continue to see the status quo remain but so will papers like the *Frankston Times* and the *Mornington News*.

We also know that print newspapers may be the most accessible medium for some groups, and that is why these changes will also be accompanied by an enforceable guideline that makes sure public notices are published in a medium that is most equitable for its target audience. We will also be undertaking lengthy consultation with the industry before these changes begin.

This change builds on the historic level of support the Andrews Labor government has extended to regional newspapers over the last few years, because we recognise the important role these papers play in informing their local communities. Many regional newspapers were struggling due to the combined impacts of COVID-19, bushfires and the drought, so in April 2020 the Premier announced a new regional press initiative, committing the government to booking print advertising and digital advertising with regional news publishers. Since that time the government has invested \$17.5 million in regional press advertising as part of this initiative, saving many newspapers from going broke. Indeed the Victorian Country Press Association, the peak body representing Victorian regional newspapers, wrote to the government earlier this month expressing how grateful they were for the government's support throughout the course of this pandemic. They said:

This commitment, we believe, is an Australian government first which has sustained our industry during one of the most challenging times for Victorian regional communities in history.

This is on top of the communications budget that the government operates to communicate to regional Victorians. In the 2020–21 financial year alone the Victorian government's total spend on regional and local newspapers was \$9.8 million. So this amendment bill puts beyond any doubt the government's commitment to regional and local newspapers. It guarantees the status quo regarding public notices and builds on our commitment to regional and local newspapers. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (15:00): I was not sure what I was just listening to then. I rise to make a contribution about the amendments that the government has put forward that have come back from the other place, but listening to the Minister for Regulatory Reform at the table, who sadly is just leaving, he has only just understood the importance of regional media. He did not understand that a couple of weeks ago when we were in this house debating this bill or when he introduced it and gave his second-reading speech. He has only just understood it because, he says, his regional MPs lobbied him. I find that staggering, and I think it is again an example of a city-centric government where ministers do not get out of the city limits, the tram tracks.

We had the independent member for Shepparton, last time in this place when these changes were before us, when the original bill was here, move a reasoned amendment. We supported that reasoned amendment. It did not get up. Lo and behold, a lot of noise happens in the upper house, a lot of people lobby the minister and, 'Oh, yes. I am aware that this is important. I am aware of the value of regional newspapers'. I was not sure what I was just listening to then when he started talking about that.

He quoted also the Victorian Country Press Association. They might be pleased with the level of funding that has been given since COVID, when Victoria and Melbourne were having the longest lockdown in the world, but on 9 February 2022 they were not so happy with this bill, and they provided us with a letter saying that regional news providers across Victoria had deep concerns about the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2021. Now, I want to read a couple of sentences out of that because these reforms, if they were passed the way originally intended—the minister's original intent, when he did not understand the importance of regional, before he was enlightened—would:

... take away the government legislated mandate for local councils to place their public notice and community information classifieds in ... newspapers, taking away yet another revenue source and effectively negating even more council connection with their local communities.

And that is the nub of it: council connection with their local communities. A lot of people still read those newspapers, their local papers. I know in my area I have quite a number. The newspapers were extremely concerned about this because people do read them. If you have got tenders that are up and changes that are being made, that is where people see them. They are not going to look for them on an online platform. You have to be alerted to know they are there. When it is in front of you in the paper

you turn the page and you see it. People are not typically sitting at home browsing the web looking for things that are going on that might impact them. Some people might be sitting there browsing the web, but a lot of people in my electorate still rely heavily on local newspapers, and this is a great connection. They go on to say this could:

... potentially lead to all local government classified advertising migrating to a purpose-built government web platform.

We know how well the government does IT. You do not have to look very far. Look at the failed Myki and the ultranet. It goes on for years, failed IT systems, and this I am sure would be another one.

But now we have seen that we have had some backflips. Perhaps those backflips have not gone far enough, so I propose further amendments. I ask that my amendments be circulated.

Opposition amendments circulated by Ms McLEISH under standing orders.

Ms McLEISH: On the motion that Council amendment 3 be agreed to I move:

That all the words after 'be' be omitted and replaced with the words 'disagreed with but the following amendments be made in the Bill:

1. Clause 38, page 25, line 2, after "subsection (1)" insert "or, if subsection (2A) applies, by complying with the requirements set out in subsection (2A)".
2. Clause 38, page 25, after line 2 insert—

“(2A) Despite subsection (1), if a requirement in an Act, a statutory rule or any other subordinate instrument for notice (however described) to be published in a print newspaper applies in respect of any locality or part of Victoria which is regional or suburban Victoria, publication—

- (a) must be in published in a print newspaper circulating in that part of regional or suburban Victoria; and
- (b) in addition, may otherwise be published in a manner specified in subsection (1)(a) to (c).”.

The reason for our amendments to the amendment that has come back is that we want it to be absolutely crystal clear that it is not just in our regional print media but also the suburban print media. The minister went on actually to talk about newspapers in Frankston and Mornington, but some of the outer suburbs are still lucky: the Berwick-Pakenham area, outer suburban; Healesville, mountain views; and Upper Yarra. They are suburban outskirts, they are not regional, so it is important that they too continue to be supported in this way.

One of the other things that you look at when you pull more and more revenue away from regional newspapers is their demise. We have seen already in country areas not just the loss of newspapers or some twice-weeklies or dailies moving to less frequent publication but also where the TV and radio are operating from and how they are doing it, with the lack of cameramen and the lack of journalists in some areas. Journalists may go on holiday from country TV, and they are not replaced. They do things out of Melbourne. People in the city hate it when the news on mainstream TV comes out of Sydney, and that is pretty well how people in the country feel when everything comes out of Melbourne. So it is so important that all of our media across the state are supported.

One of the other reasons that it is important—not just because of the community connectedness of locals looking up and understanding what is going on or supporting the media who provide so much information on local accidents, sporting clubs and what volunteer organisations have been achieving—is it is often a pathway for cadet journalists, for those who first dip their toe in the water of journalism. They will often start at a country newspaper. They will often start on country radio or TV, and they will get their experience, they will work there for a couple of years and then they will move on. I can tell you every single one of them will remember where they started and how they started and its importance. In some situations people will come back at a higher level. They might come back to a different media platform. This is so absolutely important—not just to support the regions, but this supports the journalists and that sector of journalism. It is really important that they understand and are supported for the longer term. If everyone just starts to just have to compete with the big print in

Melbourne or with the online media based out of Melbourne or the TV, there are going to be less opportunities for experience for these people. I think that would be a shame, because you get a lot of young journalists who cut their teeth in country Victoria, where we have that journalist pipeline, whether it be through print media, radio or TV.

The amendments that I have put forward clarify this even further. These notices must be published in a print newspaper circulating in those parts of regional or suburban Victoria—must be published—not just published in the *Herald Sun*, where somebody may or may not read them, or in the *Age*, where most people probably do not read them but a few will, but in the local media. That way, even if somebody picks it up and puts it online, you will still get a second wave through that. Somebody will see that and go, ‘Gee, I hadn’t noticed it online’, and they may put it on Facebook locally or on Instagram, and it might get a different segment looking at it then. But in the early stages this must absolutely be printed in those local newspapers in regional Victoria or suburban Victoria.

I will acknowledge the difficulties during COVID. There was such limited coverage, and advertising did help. There were not many local events going on, so the newspapers really struggled for content and relied heavily on government advertising at the time. I know that they did. But when we look, still going forward, we have tenders, job advertisements, planning matters, and people need to know this. The communities need to know. My local newspapers—the *Mansfield Courier*, the *Yea Chronicle*, the *Alexandra Standard*, the *Local Paper*, which covers quite a number of areas, the *Mountain Views Mail* in Healesville and the *Upper Yarra Mail*—have contacted me. They had not been made aware of these changes, which could have put them out of business, a while ago, but certainly they have now. As I mentioned earlier, the Victorian Country Press Association were horrified and saw this as another nail in the coffin of regional newspapers. We need to support regional media, and this is one way that it can be done.

Ms COUZENS (Geelong) (15:10): I am pleased to rise to contribute to the debate around the regional public notices amendment. As the member for Geelong, I am really proud of the various small regional newspapers that I have in my community. They play a really important role. The role they play in our community is to provide information to my constituents about what is happening in their community, what they need to know. As I said, they play a really important role in local news, and that is essential for many communities. A lot of people do not watch the evening news anymore or do not really follow the news on Facebook or social media of any description, and they love to get their regional newspaper whether it is every couple of days or once a week. They rely heavily on that to get the content about what is happening in their local community. So I am pleased that the government understands and recognises the importance of government public notices, for example, and that that will remain unchanged.

What we have seen in local media is a real struggle during the COVID period. We were able to invest \$17.5 million in regional newspapers, in advertising. That really helped those newspapers. We also contributed to—and I am sure many members in this place did this—different articles and columns. I contributed to one, for example, that the Times News Group, which gets spread right across the region, did—a ‘Women in business’ feature. It was a great way to spread the news about women in business and the challenges they have but also some of the amazing things that they are doing in the community. The Times News Group had an overwhelming response, with record numbers of women’s businesses wanting to be represented in that feature. These are really important regional community assets that we have and that we as a government want to support.

With the bill before us today, these amendments made by the upper house will guarantee that public notices will still be printed in regional newspapers. The bill will modernise public notice requirements, bringing the practice into the 21st century. Any public notice that currently needs to be printed in print newspapers will have its publishing requirement satisfied by publishing it online on a designated website. This change will significantly reduce costs and administrative burdens associated with print newspaper publication while also consolidating information and increasing transparency for the Victorian public. With over 400 requirements across Victorian acts and regulations for public notices

to be published, it is estimated that this change will save Victorian businesses and citizens up to \$1700 in print advertising costs per notice. These measures will particularly help new businesses that need to issue public notices before trading as well as businesses pivoting their operations during emergencies and other times of change. However, the government understands how important print notices in a local newspaper can be for some more diverse and vulnerable members of our community, and we understand the regional communities' concerns that have been raised.

The government's amendments clarify that regional and local newspapers will be left no worse off by the changes to regional public notices. They mean that the requirement for a notice to be published in a print newspaper circulating in a particular locality will remain unchanged after the bill is passed. In practice that means all types of public notices that are currently required to be published in a regional or local print newspaper will continue to be required to be published in those papers. This in effect guarantees the status quo for regional newspapers which are just so important for regions like mine. This is in stark contrast to the embarrassingly deficient amendment that Mr Davis put to the other place. My understanding is that that amendment was a carbon copy of ours in all but one key aspect: it did not mention local papers. Of course that begs the question: if Mr Davis knew his amendment was deficient, why didn't he retract it? Maybe Mr Davis thinks the local papers are beneath him and his party, but our government thinks they are so important to local communities across Victoria.

Our amendment, on the other hand, will make sure that not only the *Bendigo Advertiser* or the *Geelong Advertiser* will continue to see the status quo remain but so will the *Frankston Times* and the *Mornington News*. We also know that print newspapers may be the most accessible medium for some groups. As I said, for my community, particularly for older members of the community, the regional local papers are their only source of information, and they rely heavily on them. They want to know what is going on in their community, what is happening at the local school, what is happening with the various community organisations around Geelong. That is how they get their information. I do a column in Times News Group on a regular basis, and I talk about some of the changes that we have made as a government—great changes that I want my community to know about. Many of us in this place use our regional media very strongly to get messages out across the community. That is why the changes will also be accompanied by an enforceable guideline that makes sure public notices are published in a medium which is more equitable for its target audience. We will also be undertaking lengthy consultation with the industry before these changes begin.

This change builds on the historic levels of support the Andrews Labor government has extended to regional newspapers over the last two years. As I pointed out, \$17.5 million has gone into regional advertising to support those regional newspapers and ensure that they survive through the pandemic. Many regional newspapers were struggling due to the combined impacts of COVID, bushfire and drought, depending on the local community, so in April 2020 the Premier announced a new regional press initiative committing the government to book print advertising and digital advertising with regional news publishers. Since that time the government has invested \$17.5 million, as I said, in regional press advertising as part of this initiative, saving many newspapers from going bust. Indeed the Victorian Country Press Association, the peak body representing Victorian regional newspapers, wrote to the government earlier this month expressing how grateful they were for the government's support throughout the COVID period. Again, in my electorate of Geelong and across the Geelong region I had many of those community newspapers contacting me saying how grateful they were to the government for providing that funding for them because it was so important to their survival. This is all on top of the communications budget that the government operates to communicate to regional Victorians. In the 2020–21 financial year alone, the Victorian government's total spend on regional and local newspapers was \$9.8 million.

This amended bill puts beyond doubt the government's commitment to regional and local newspapers, guarantees the status quo regarding public notices and builds on our commitment to regional and local newspapers, so this is so important. I know there is lots of scoffing on the other side, but I think the issue at the end of the day is that these regional newspapers are being supported by the government.

They have been supported by the government particularly over the last two years going through COVID. Nothing much has changed, and we will continue to support those regional newspapers, continue to ensure that they are able to provide the best possible information to our communities to get messages out there for everyone to understand what it is we do as a government, what is going on in the community and different events that are going on. All this is really important to regional Victoria. We need to ensure that those opportunities, that information, are available to people on an ongoing basis, and therefore I commend the bill to the house.

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) (15:19): I must admit I am intrigued, maybe perplexed, as I sit here and listen to the government members talk about these amendments. Where were they in the Labor Party caucus meetings when this legislation went through? Where was the Minister for Regulatory Reform, who introduced the bill and comes to the table now? He will not admit he got it wrong. He will not admit he was excluding proper scrutiny of government with the original legislation. Members opposite must have been asleep in caucus when this went through, because they are now passionately saying what we have got now is the right bill.

Members interjecting.

Mr WALSH: It is always unruly to pick up interjections, but they were probably too scared to speak up in caucus because they would have been put in the freezer if they had actually spoken up in caucus against this legislation at that time. But I am glad they have finally found a voice on behalf of country and regional newspapers.

The issue I want to start off with is that, yes, this is about advertising in country newspapers, but what this legislation is really about is accountability and transparency when a government or a local government actually makes a change to a regulation or rule. What happens is that if you are going to make changes, local government and certain government departments have to do an advertisement that they are going to make a change to those regulations in a paper that is circulating in that area so people actually know from a public notice in the newspapers that there is a proposed change and they can become informed. What this legislation, I think, was going to mean was that a lot of people would no longer be informed when there were going to be changes to regulations and to rules.

The amendments that were put in the upper house, and the amendments that the member for Eildon has moved clarify it even more, reinstate transparency and good governance in this state. The Andrews government actually wanted to change it; the original legislation was to have everything on some website somewhere that people had to go and find and look up. One of the things I find interesting is that people tell you, 'There is information on a website; just go and find it'. I do not know about you, but a lot of websites have a huge amount of information on them and it is very often quite hard to track through the links to actually find that particular legislation. So just saying 'Well, this is all going to be on a website for people to find' is not necessarily good government and good transparency around how you make regulatory reform and changes to rules, by-laws and the things that would have been covered by this particular thing.

The minister in introducing the amendments from the upper house said there are over 400 requirements for public notices to be done around changes. That says that there are 400 pieces of legislation that include that rule that means people are informed. There was a real risk that the original bill from the government would have meant that people were not informed into the future. I know a lot of people may not read the local paper, but they certainly read the public notices, because that is an important part of communicating what is going on.

A member interjected.

Mr WALSH: It is about the country papers, but it is more about good government and good governance and keeping people informed of changes into the future. It is good that there has been a change.

When I was listening to the minister as he introduced these amendments to our house, the thought that came to my mind was the road to Damascus: where someone is in a situation where they experience a sudden and complete change in their opinions and beliefs. It happened to Saul when he became Saint Paul, when God spoke to him on the road to Damascus. I am not sure necessarily that God spoke to the minister and had him have his road to Damascus moment, but having listened to the minister as he introduced these amendments, I would suggest that with the change of numbers in the upper house it may be the road to Damascus for not only this minister but some other ministers on legislation into the future, because they seem to experience a sudden and complete change in their opinions and beliefs if the upper house numbers do not actually fall with them. It was good to hear the minister have his road to Damascus moment and change his opinions and beliefs around this particular piece of legislation, because it is important—it is absolutely critical—that there is a process where people will be informed if there are going to be changes to regulations into the future.

The issue that everyone else is raising, which is also very, very important, is that this provides significant revenue to our country and our regional and suburban newspapers, which is why there is the amendment that the member for Eildon has moved. Those journals actually play an important part in keeping a community informed and in recording the history of a community. As I have said at other times, if you want to find the history of a community, you go and look at the back copies of the local newspaper, because they are the journal that records the history of that community. The other place to go is the cemetery to look at the records of families that are buried in that community. I must admit, I think it is probably a more pleasant experience looking at the back journals of the newspapers, but both those two do certainly record the history of our communities in this state here. To think that the government was trying to take revenue away from our newspapers effectively under the guise that this was somehow going to make it simpler and going to make it more administratively easy—my time in here says that when the Andrews Labor government say to us, ‘We’re going to make it administratively easy’, it is about secrecy, the community not being informed and how they can slip things through without people being aware of the changes. They now say the government understands the community concerns.

Congratulations to the Victorian Country Press Association. Congratulations to all those community groups and people who lobbied members of the upper house, who lobbied members of the government and who lobbied members of the Labor caucus, who obviously were asleep when it went through the first time. Congratulations to all those that got involved and made sure this change happened.

Can I just finish off by urging those people who are now taking a great interest in this piece of legislation on the other side of the chamber to seriously consider supporting the member for Eildon’s amendments, because I think they actually make the proposed amendments even better than what the government has and make it very, very clear that there have to be advertisements in papers that are circulating in those particular communities. Not everyone buys the *Herald Sun*, not everyone buys the *Age*, but most people buy the local paper and will be better informed if the amendments are supported and it is actually circulated in the local community. I would urge those on the other side: you have come a long way on your road to Damascus. Just take another couple of steps and support the member for Eildon’s amendments, and then we will finally fix up what was very poor legislation in the first place.

Ms SETTLE (Buninyong) (15:27): I am pleased to stand to speak on this amendment to the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2021. I wonder if I could just make a few comments about the debate so far. I am slightly taken aback that the Leader of The Nationals has chosen today to use the expression ‘the road to Damascus’, which the Premier himself just used in question time all of an hour ago. Of course he was talking about several billion dollars worth of backflips. I am pretty gobsmacked that so far I have listened to the member for Eildon talk about backflips and the Leader of The Nationals talk about the road to Damascus when those on the other side are facing the biggest backflip that any of us have seen—billions and billions of dollars.

Ms Staley: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, this is a narrow debate that goes to the amendments before the house. She has already strayed. Could you please bring the member for Buninyong back to speaking on the amendments or sit her down if she has nothing to say on them.

Mr Hamer: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Buninyong is directly responding to points that were made previously.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Taylor): There is no point of order.

Ms SETTLE: Thank you. I was happy to respond to those comments about backflips in a week in which big backflips have happened, but I do want to move on. I do want to talk about our wonderful, wonderful regional media. One of the things I would really like to raise is the fact that the member for Eildon has brought forward an amendment, and do you know what that amendment is? That amendment is about suburban newspapers. I thought we were all standing here talking about the really important role that regional media plays in our lives. Can I just give you an example. The wonderful member for Yan Yean is in the chamber with me. The member for Yan Yean and I spent an extraordinary day together in Maryborough just last week, and we were delighted—

Mr D O'Brien: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on the question of relevance, the member might like to re-read the amendment moved by the member for Eildon because—

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Taylor): What is your point of order?

Mr D O'Brien: It specifically says 'regional or suburban Victoria'. The point of order was on relevance, Acting Speaker.

Ms SETTLE: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the amendment is to 'regional or suburban' and the addition is the 'suburban'. But I am quite happy to continue.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Taylor): I do not uphold the point of order at this time.

Ms SETTLE: Let us have a little chat about regional media. Regional media is an extraordinarily important part of my life and my electorate and very much so part of this side of government. I was just mentioning having a wonderful day in Maryborough with the member for Yan Yean, but in fact I was in the company of eight regional members of this government. We were really happy to be there to see some of the wonderful work that this government has done in Maryborough. But of course eight of us for that day was a lot less than the full 18 regional members of government that we have. What that means is that we really have a grasp on what is happening in our electorates. We do not live in Melbourne; we live in our electorates.

The member for Eildon said that they relied heavily on government advertising. I was really pleased just this morning to read two of the wonderful local papers that I have, which are the *Moorabool News* and the *Golden Plains Times*. Both of these editions carry two half pages. One of the half pages is from VicRoads and is about keeping our roads clear and safe. There is also a half page on Jobs Victoria. The reason I bring this up is that this government knows how important regional stories are, and it knows that because of the 18 regional members. So we have made sure that we have supported regional media all the way through. As the minister said earlier, there has been \$17 million put through there. But the real test I think is the response that we have had from those media outlets throughout this. I have had many conversations with regional media about the support that we showed them throughout this pandemic. Certainly the editor of the *Moorabool News* was delighted that the government made such commitments to support regional media throughout the pandemic, and we have done that again and again. I know that in my office we made sure that we preferenced those papers. I am delighted that Bendigo and Geelong will be protected also.

But the important part of this amendment is around being in a particular locality. That means a lot to me and my electorate because, as much as I love dearly the Ballarat *Courier*, it is papers like the *Moorabool News* that directly work with their localities, and it is incredibly important that we continue

to support them. The whole thing about this amendment is to make it crystal clear. The commitment in the bill has always been to support regional media. I remember talking to the minister's office when this was all going through, and the discussions were about how much this government has invested in regional media and also how this bill will continue to protect them. For example, 90 per cent of the Victorian government's spending on regional papers comes from the government communications budget, which is what I was just explaining—the two half pages that appear this week in the *Moorabool News* and the *Golden Plains Times* and very probably in the *Maryborough District Advertiser* as well. That has always continued; it was established long before this amendment. We are just making it transparent to everybody that it is in a particular locality the addition that this amendment makes.

Regional media for me tells our stories. It tells the stories of the regions, and what stories we have had to tell in recent years. It is interesting because of the difference in reporting, say, in the *Ballarat Courier*. In years gone by under the previous government there was not a lot to report because there was not a lot going on in regional Victoria. So one of the things I find extraordinary is regional papers now—I mean, goodness, I am in the paper weekly, absolutely weekly, because of the extraordinary things that this government continues to do in our regions. So, for example, when the member for Yan Yean and I were in Maryborough, we were there to celebrate the 20th anniversary of a school that the Labor government built. We went there to see some really extraordinary stuff that this government has funded in that electorate.

I know in my own electorate I look around me and the difference is extraordinary. But of course the one that I have talked about many times and is incredibly close to my heart is as an Ararat girl watching that town blossom once this government, once a Labor government, brought back the rail. That made a huge difference. I know I have talked about it a lot, but it was one of those moments that was so good to see reported in the regional media. Regional media, to this government, we know how important it is because it is a conduit, it is a way to talk to people and really for people in our constituencies and other constituencies to see all that this government does and delivers, and it has been an enormous amount in regional Victoria. I have still got the *Ararat Advertiser* photo from the day that my then two-year-old son rode the train back into Ararat.

I am delighted to support this amendment. I am delighted to just have that clarity absolutely there in the amendment for a particular locality, because for me in my electorate there are many important communities. They are separate communities and they have their own bugles, if you like, and it is important that we protect those regional newspapers. There are the ones I have talked about, like the *Moorabool News* and the *Golden Plains Times*, but there are even the smaller ones. The *Woody Yaloak Herald* has been a wonderful supporter and has certainly published many of the great things we have done in places like Haddon. For example, I was delighted that we did the floor in Haddon, and that was reported on, and of course who can forget the \$9 million that is going to the Woody Yaloak Primary School. I do thank the *Woody Yaloak Herald* for reporting on those amazing things. So, as ever, as part of a really strong regional Labor government, I am very pleased to support this amendment.

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (15:37): I am delighted to follow the member for Buninyong in that contribution. I have not had such a good laugh in some time. The member for Buninyong has suddenly got up and found a voice, but she did not speak on this legislation when it came through the Parliament, and in fact no Labor country member spoke on this legislation in the lower house. I wonder why. When you look at the list of those who spoke, there was not one regional or country member who spoke on this from the Labor side, and clearly none of them have any voice within this government. Now, when the Council was going to roll their legislation they had to put an amendment through which fixes something that should never have been a problem in the first place. They should never, ever, have sought to take away advertising in local papers, in country papers, of the government's ads and also their notices. These are relied upon by country people, and the government should never have moved to do that, and they belatedly saw the error of their ways, their mistake, in the Council.

But I return to what happened in the Assembly. In the Assembly, as I said, not one single country Labor member got up and spoke on this legislation. It is also absolutely clear that not one of the 18—

as the member for Buninyong likes to boast about—members of the country Labor caucus has any voice in this government, not one. So I want to talk simply about those who are in my part of the world, and I am going to start in fact with the members for Bellarine and Macedon, Ms Pulford in the other place and Ms Tierney in the other place. What do they all have in common? What they have in common is that they are ministers, and yet they have no ability, no sway in any way, to get this right. They sat in cabinet. Cabinet put it through. They agreed to it. Either they did not notice that they were doing over their local country newspapers, in which case they are incompetent, or they did notice but they got rolled by their metropolitan colleagues in the Labor ministry. They are the only two options that are possible. So they clearly did not have any say.

Then we come to the other members who are in the western region with me, and that would include the member for Geelong, who has got up and spoken on these amendments. She had nothing to say when the bill was before us. She voted for it, though. She thought it was perfect then—obviously not so perfect. Then we move to the member for Buninyong. She had nothing to say the last time around either, but she voted for it. She voted to harm her local newspapers—harm them by removing a revenue stream that they need. Now she gets up and pretends to suggest that she in some way supports those local newspapers. Of course she does not. She was given every opportunity to stand up for her local newspapers, but she did not. She did not in this place. In fact she voted to harm them, as did the member for Melton. He got up, he voted. He did not say anything—silent. He had nothing to say. The member for Wendouree also was not there to support her local newspapers and nor was the member for Lara. He did not speak on this bill when it came through.

Mr Eren interjected.

Ms STALEY: The member for Lara interjects to tell me that he will speak on the amendments. I am so pleased that the member for Lara has woken up and is intending to now tell us how much he cares about his local newspapers, when he was absolutely prepared to vote to harm them, and did vote to harm them, and was silent at the last go. I am sure we will allow him if he wants to leak from the Labor caucus and tell us how he really did fight the fight in the Labor caucus but got rolled, and therefore we had this terrible legislation that came through. I am looking forward to hearing what the member for Lara has to say.

I also want to make mention of the amendments being proposed by the shadow minister, the member for Eildon. In the amendments that have come back to us from the Council they only use the phrase ‘a print newspaper in a particular locality’. The argument that the government and Labor Party members want to make is that the ‘particular locality’ is enough protection for rural and regional newspapers. However, we believe that we need to absolutely protect those rural and regional newspapers, and so we have moved a further amendment to make it clear that we are talking about those rural and regional newspapers or suburban newspapers. We want to make it very clear that these advertisements that are the lifeblood of a lot of these newspapers—the revenue streams—should continue, and we are not confident that the amendments put through the Council to this bill are clear enough.

Now, we are supporting those amendments. They clearly attempt to fix a massive deficiency that was pointed out in debate in this place. It is not as if the government can say that they were not put on notice in this place. Many of us got up and talked about the correspondence that we had had from our newspapers. I personally read into *Hansard*, so I will not do it again, correspondence that I had received from the *Ararat Advocate*, the *North Central News*, the *Buloke Times* and the *Maryborough Advertiser*. These are several of the many newspapers across Ripon. They had contacted me, and they knew what a huge risk to their revenue this government’s bill was.

We now have amendments seeking to reverse that, and now we suddenly have country member after country member from the Labor Party side getting up and telling us how much they care about their local newspapers. They have found their voice. Well, this is a group of people that proved a few weeks ago that they have no voice. They do not care about their country newspapers, because they voted for this bill in this place. So every time we have a Labor Party member from a country electorate get up

and tell us that there are so many of them and they have got this great voice and they are doing this, we can remind them, when it came to something as important as news in our local communities, they were not here. They were not here. With that I commend the amendments by the member for Eildon to the house.

Mr EREN (Lara) (15:45): I am delighted to be speaking on this particular topic today, the government's house amendments to the regional public notices. I think the member for Ripon thinks that it is a gotcha moment where the government has made a mistake and it is coming back here—you know what? We are very well known as a government for listening and acting. I do not think there is a perfect government anywhere. You certainly were not perfect—far from it—when you were in government. But can we just say from our side of the house, when we see something that is obviously a concern to those people that have been affected by certain changes in this place, we listen and we act. That is why it is back here. That is why we are in government.

Can I just do a bit of a shout-out to our wonderful editors in Geelong, Elise Potter from the *Geelong Advertiser*, Tony Galpin from the *Geelong Independent*, and of course Warick Brown from the *Geelong Times*. You know, I am regularly in contact with these people—regularly. We give them lots of front pages, some very good front pages. I have had a few good front pages—I have had a couple of bad ones, I have got to say, but that is the rough and tumble of democracy—and the dissemination of news is very important to regional Victorians. The dissemination of news is very important to those communities out there who depend very much on the news of the day, the current affairs.

Like I said, when I was a minister and even as a local member there were lots of good news stories: when we refurbished Kardinia Park and it was on the front page; when Atlético Madrid came to Geelong, one of the international European teams, for the first time; when we had Sri Lanka playing at Kardinia Park; when there was the Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race—these were all great front pages. There were a couple of bad front pages. I was on the front pages when I had my cardiac arrest, so I have actually survived it—that was in the *Herald Sun*. But the thing is it is very important whether it is good news or bad news.

There is a saying—I think it is an old adage—‘Don’t pick a fight with somebody that buys ink by the 44-gallon drum’. And of course when you consider that the news media, the print media particularly, is critical to us as a government, whether you are in opposition or government it is important that you get your messages out and in an orderly fashion. That is exactly what these news outlets do in regional Victoria, and I am proud to say that we have done a lot. We have done a lot for the media outlets in regional Victoria, and we will continue to do the best that we can to help them to survive.

It is challenging. It is challenging on a number of different fronts—obviously COVID, though COVID presented a lot of news of the day throughout COVID. There were a lot of people that wanted information relating to COVID, so they were constantly reading their newspapers, constantly listening to news and making sure that they were on top of what was going on with COVID, and we as a government continually advertised some of the changes that were occurring through that COVID period. But also the challenge that I know confronts any news media outlet is the online presence, and as we transition, a lot of young people now I suppose are probably reading more newspapers because they are actually online. To a certain extent environmentally sometimes the print media does have challenges in relation to the consumer demand, if I could call it that. And I think there is that transition between hard copy and then the digital copy that news media outlets are now very much dependent upon.

From our perspective we have listened and are acting on some of those concerns. A road to Damascus was mentioned before. I do not want to go to the previous speaker in terms of some of the backflips that have occurred with the opposition in terms of some of their policies, but this is not a backflip. This is an issue that was brought to us with some concerns. As a good government, as good governments do, we listen to those concerns and we act on those concerns, and of course that is exactly why we are here today. You can see this as a gotcha moment, that is fine, but at the end of the day I know in the conversations that I have had with the relevant people in my area about the fact that we are making

these changes that they are happy about it. They are happy about the fact that we are changing the circumstances of some of the changes that we made initially. It is coming back. So they are happy with the government's approach to this.

I have got 4 minutes—okay. I just wanted to make mention of some of the issues relating to, as I have mentioned, COVID, but also predominantly we do spend a fair bit of money as MPs advertising in print and in digital media. When you consider how important that is for us, again, regardless of what political party you belong to, it is about getting your information out there about your ideas and your policies and your government's direction. That is why we do spend a fair bit of money on media, whether it is radio or print or cinema or whatever. I think the period of COVID presented a number of different challenges. I am aware that the Victorian Country Press Association, the peak body representing Victorian regional newspapers, wrote to the government earlier this month expressing how grateful they were for the government's support through the COVID period. Of course we have tried to do as much as we can not only for the broader community, the business community, but also in terms of the media, because we understand the importance of particularly regional media outlets. Since that time the government has invested \$17.5 million in regional press advertising as part of this initiative, saving many newspapers from going bust. We know how important the media outlets are, and that is why we made those strategic investments into making sure that they could survive that very stressful period through COVID. In the 2020–21 financial year alone the Victorian government's total spend on regional and local newspapers was \$9.8 million.

Again I want to stress that this amended bill puts beyond doubt the government's commitment to regional and local papers, guarantees the status quo regarding public notices and builds on our commitment to regional and local newspapers. That is why we are here today. That is why the regional members, all 18 of us, loud and proud, are very much paying attention to regional Victoria and making sure that the regional news outlets do survive going forward. I commend the minister responsible for actually listening and acting on some of those concerns. That is what good governments do. I do not think there is any government that is perfect. We try our best to get the best legislation through this house. On occasions we do have to refer back to it to refine it, to make it even better, and that is exactly what we are doing as a government today. We will continue to do that. I think those regional news outlets know that this government does care for them, that this government has invested within them and that this government did protect them through COVID by the strategic investments that we made. We will continue to do that. I wish this a speedy passage through this place.

Ms KEALY (Lowan) (15:54): There is a saying which is hacked from Marcus Aurelius, which is, 'Words are opinion, not fact. Action is the only truth'. I have been sitting back today and listening to all these regional Labor MPs saying how they always stand up for regional Victoria and they have always stood up for regional Victorian newspapers, and yet they did not vote to support regional Victorian newspapers a few weeks ago. In fact they were silent; they were absolutely silent.

We have not heard at all from any member of the Labor government saying, 'You know what? I took this to the party room. I took it to caucus and said, "This isn't good enough. These changes that you're putting forward in legislation will take a significant amount of revenue out of our regional newspapers. For some it will put them out of business. For some people, they will not be able to access public notices that would otherwise be their only mechanism to see what their local council is doing, and they will be forced now to have to go to an internet portal and actually take affirmative action to go and access this information rather than see it in their regular regional newspapers"'. I do not understand why no Labor MPs stood up for regional newspapers at the time that they could have made a real difference.

I do not know whether they took action once the regional newspaper editors got on the phone and said, 'Hey, this is going to do an enormous amount of damage to our papers. You know it's an election year, guys. Maybe you should rethink it'. Even when that action happened, when we saw the country media group come out with a considered and targeted campaign to point out the damage that this legislation by the government would do to regional newspapers—even then—they did not speak up. And no wonder, if it was because this bill was brought forward before Labor preselections were

finalised. We all know there are consequences if you dare to speak up against the government's position, if you dare to speak up against the Premier: you do not get endorsed for preselection.

So I look around at these regional MPs. They say there are 18 of them, but I do not see any of them in my area ever—I live a long way from Melbourne. We do not see them; we just do not see them. So why on earth are we hearing all these country Labor MPs saying they are doing everything for regional Victoria? They are only actually doing something when they are forced to, when there is an amendment made in the upper house and it comes back to this chamber and they are forced to make that change. They do not naturally stand up for regional Victoria; they have to be forced and pushed to the line to do it. The only groups that do that are the National Party and the Liberal Party, and we have done it successfully again today.

I do support the amendments that have been put forward by the member for Eildon, which will further cement the mandatory requirement that they must advertise in regional newspapers. That is so very, very important. Our regional newspapers are the lifeblood of our communities. They do an enormous amount of work, particularly the newspapers that are run by just one person—and there are a lot of them. They are making the effort to communicate what is happening in their local area with the rest of the people that are there, and that makes such a difference. It is not just about the public notices. Some of that is government notices, but a lot of that is about the hatches, matches and dispatches, as we refer to them, to see what people are doing. And can I say, it is particularly for elderly people in the community to keep engaged with the kids and grandkids of people that they know. It is also for people who move away from the area—they want to keep in touch with their friends and family who live in country areas still. But it is also about that local info. I know as a kid how excited I would be if I got a photo of myself in the paper because I was playing netball, and it is the same thing today. Kids love to see themselves in the paper. Golfers love to see themselves in the paper, and the footballers, the hockey players, schools—when people get an award, when they get an achievement recognised. They might get a citizenship award when they are doing great things in the community, when they are making a difference.

This is a way that we celebrate our communities, and that is what helps to build community pride. These regional newspapers are really at the heart of how our local smallest regional communities, our rural communities, are maintaining their community pride in how they feel about growing up and living in a small community. What we do as MPs is we stand up for all our communities, whether we live in the city or the country. But for me, I stand up for dozens and dozens of individual communities who all do things their own way and who all are proud of their communities because they are strong, they are a great place to live, work and do business but most of all they look after one another—and they do that by always supporting their local paper.

We saw over the COVID pandemic that regional newspapers were so often cut off from information distributed from the government. We saw that a lot of that information was being pushed through the internet, pushed online, rather than being advertising through the papers. Now, this hit the papers hard, but it hit our communities even harder. So this is not necessarily just about a funding and a revenue line for our papers, it is actually about a really important conduit between getting information from the government out from our big offices in Melbourne and getting it into people's homes so they know what the rules are, they know what the risk is, they know where they can get vaccinated, they know how to look after one another and if they did get coronavirus, they would know what to do in those instances—how to get their groceries, their medication, the help that they might need. I do not think this government did enough to communicate with people who did not have access to online resources over the past 2½ years.

I would like to do a quick shout-out to all of the papers that are in my electorate. Lowan is the biggest electorate in the state and we probably have the most newspapers as well, I believe. We have got 19 regional newspapers in my electorate, and I would like to commend them for their amazing work to support their local communities. It is hard work. There is a workforce shortage at the moment across all industries, but particularly in journalism. If there is anyone out there who wants to train up as a

journalist, there are many, many cadetships available in my electorate of Lowan. Not only do you get to live in a great place, but you get some of the best training you could ever possibly get to start your career in journalism.

I would like to just give a shout-out to Dean Lawson and the team at the *Weekly Advertiser*, Ben Fraser and the team at the *Wimmera Mail-Times*, *Stawell Times-News* and *Ararat Advertiser*, Campbell Kirwan and the team at the *Hamilton Spectator*, and Dave Ward and the team at the *Horsham Times*, *Dimboola Banner*, Jeparit, Rainbow and Yaapeet *Argus*, and the *Warracknabeal Herald*. Dave is doing a fantastic job. He is just putting in a new printing press—the first new printing press in Victoria for decades, I believe. Good work, Dave. Craig Wilson at the *Ararat Advocate* has done a great job establishing a new paper in the past few years. Kristy McDonald at *Casterton News*—she does a great job as basically a one-woman show in Casterton. Em Gladdis at *Nhill Free Press* and *Kaniva Times* and her team. Toni Domaschensz at the *West Wimmera Advocate* has done a fabulous job over the pandemic, particularly with the border closures and the difficulty in getting clarified information out to the community. Angela Barelli at the *Murtoa & District Advertiser*. Stewart Esh at the *Mortlake Dispatch* and *Terang Express*. Simon King at the *Dimboola Courier* and Robin Letts at the *Buloke Times*. You all do an absolutely fabulous job in your coverage of your local communities and of building community pride. So many of you contacted me with concerns about the original legislation that Labor put together. I am very proud today to see that there will be amendments made to make sure that the government will continue to require advertising in our regional newspapers, and I trust that will make sure that all of our regional newspapers will continue strongly to build our community pride, to share our local messages and to provide that essential communication about what is happening in the community for many, many generations to come. I commend the amendments by the member for Eildon to the house.

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (16:03): I am delighted to be able to rise on the amendments to this bill, because I did not actually get to speak on it last time. I was on the list, but the list got cut off, so I am really happy to be speaking about these amendments. Gee, you have got to hand it to the member for Lowan speaking on regional newspapers. Whoops—Hamilton *Spectator* anyone? Misuse of the comms budget anyone? She also actually said that government members do not set foot in the Lowan electorate. I think I have been there five times this year. I was actually there last week, and I have been there about 25 times in seven years.

Then we had the member for Ripon. I am not surprised the member for Ripon in referring to you, Deputy Speaker, overlooked the fact that you actually did speak in this debate when the bill was before the house, and plenty of the member for Ripon's constituents know full well who the member for Bendigo West is. Unlike the member for Ripon, you, Deputy Speaker, have not had to create a regional persona. You were proudly born, bred and educated in Maryborough, and the constituents of Ripon know it. They know who stands up for them and certainly in Maryborough.

I want to give a shout-out to the community newspapers serving the Yan Yean electorate: the *Whittlesea Town Crier*, the *Mountain Monthly*, the *Hurstbridge Roundabout*, the *Whittlesea Review*, the *North Central Review*, the *Community Kalori*. These are just some of the community publications serving my electorate. And like in most non-sitting weeks, last week I was in regional Victoria. As the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Victoria, that is my job, and I stick to it outside these sitting weeks. I think I personally got to put my hands on the following papers and read them—not online, I actually read the papers: the *Buloke Times*, the *Wimmera Mail-Times*, the *Pyrenees Advocate*, the *Ararat Advocate*, the *Skipton Community News* and the *North Central News*. Not only did I get to read them, I was in quite a few of them. Certainly my colleagues and I gave them some more copy while we were all there.

It is not surprising that the opposition have tried to say this is a gotcha moment and a backflip. I mean, anything to distract from their big backflip, their massive backflip, on mental health. They have elevated this to some horrible situation. Just to clarify, around 90 per cent of government communications spending goes on advertising; only 10 per cent is on public notices—10 per cent.

That 10 per cent, yes, it is very important, and that is why I support the minister moving to agree to these amendments. No grandstanding by the opposition saying, ‘What about our amendments?’. We can read too. The amendment moved by Mr Davis in the upper house was completely deficient, and the proposal to put opposition amendments here is just grandstanding and trying to draw attention from the big, big backflip that you have made—that they have made. I apologise, Deputy Speaker, for reflecting on the Chair.

I want to thank another editor of a local community newspaper, Kathy Sproules. I had not stopped in Skipton for a while; I go through it frequently. She is the editor of the *Skipton Community News*. That is a fabulous publication. I particularly enjoyed reading the double-page spread which talked about the visit by Labor’s candidate for Ripon, Martha Haylett, to Skipton last week. It is a really good read. I urge people to have a read of it.

This is someone that I know you know well, Deputy Speaker, and that is the legendary Ella Ebery. There was no editor in regional press in this country, in this state, like Ella Ebery. I know that you and I were both mentored by a former member for Bendigo West, Bob Cameron, and he always told me about how formidable and amazing Ella Ebery was, as did the former Premier, John Brumby. I want to quote from what John Button wrote in the *Age* after Ella’s death. Ella died at 103 in 2019. She:

... was a shearer’s wife and cook who realised late in life—too late, she always said—that she could be more than a wife and a cook. She was 58 when she got her first paid job, as a welfare worker. At 63, she began editing *North Central News*, the newspaper of St Arnaud, in the Wimmera.

She edited it for the next 34 years, writing and fighting for her town, harrying any politician, like Victorian premier Jeff Kennett, whom she thought didn’t respect the bush.

And wasn’t that the truth.

In 2000, she won the prestigious Country Press Shakespeare Family Award for excellence in editorial writing ... In 2013, aged 97, she was made redundant and respectfully asked to hand the editor’s job to a younger person. She was outraged. She felt she had years left to give. That was Ella.

James Button said he first spoke to Ella in 1997 when he was a journalist at the *Age* and writing a story on a rural revolt against Kennett’s Liberal government:

“Jeff has lost us, and he will lose the next election,” she declared.

James Button said:

I was quietly sceptical—my city smarts told me Kennett would be in power for a decade or more—and I didn’t quote her in the piece. In 1999, to the astonishment of nearly everyone, the Kennett government was tossed out on the votes of the bush.

Ella was warm, droll, quick-minded, sharp to the point of pugnacity, shy but not short of ego, and never lost for an opinion. One of her editorials so enraged a local MP that he reportedly said that if she had been a man, he would have come to town and hit her.

Which no-one of course would endorse. But Ella was one of those editors, one of those country voices, that will continue to be heard by this government. They were not listened to in the 1990s, but they certainly are being listened to now.

This is not a backflip, this is listening to our community, and I want to thank the Minister for Government Services for listening to our regional caucus and also for bringing these amendments back here. I think that is a sign of a good government that listens. As the member for Lara said, no government is completely perfect, and to bring some amendments back to improve a piece of legislation that has been before the house is absolutely a good thing.

I know that regional media proprietors and community papers are enormously grateful for the support through government advertising that we have given as a government throughout the pandemic in recognition of how important these organs are to the community. I just wish the sort of outrage that the opposition has exhibited they would point to their colleagues in Canberra. I recall when their government in the last term shut down the *Rural Women’s Network* magazine—they moved it to

electronic, and then they shut it down; I was glad that we reopened it. Of course you need regional voices, and with such poor internet connectivity and mobile blackspots there are enormous parts of regional Victoria that do not have that access. So when they closed down the network, that excluded hundreds, thousands of women across regional Victoria. If you confine government and community messaging only to cyberspace, hundreds and thousands of regional Victorians will be excluded. That is because that government in Canberra, despite us being the most fire-affected state in this land since white settlement—we know that; they cannot ignore it—has spent the least amount on us in rectifying mobile blackspots. So I would love to see the outrage that that side have exhibited being directed to their colleagues in Canberra to say it is about time that those mobile blackspots got fixed so that we can get rid of the digital divide and, whether communities want to read the paper in their hands, which is what I love to do, or whether they want to read it online, they can do both. The faux outrage and the criticism from that side—they are saying that we do not stand up for our communities. We absolutely do. I would like to see for the first time you lot actually stand up against your masters in Canberra, but I do not think that will happen. I will not die waiting. I commend the bill to the house.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind members to direct their comments through the Chair.

Ms BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (16:13): It is good when pressure works. Today we are here to consider the amendments put forward to change legislation that went through this house—it was poor legislation—and to amend it to fix a problem that was going to really compromise the small local newspapers in regional Victoria. It is good to see that sometimes pressure does work. It is really surprising, though, to hear from the other side that they can see that it is important to support regional newspapers. Well, where were they when the legislation went through that was passed through this house and got to the other house before it was recognised, despite the efforts made by us on this side to actually put some amendments, make some changes and put the debate forward to say, ‘This will really hurt regional newspapers’?

For regional newspapers to be able to tell the stories of our communities is very important. The government putting all the public notices online would have had disastrous effects, particularly in very rural and regional areas—financially crippling in fact. I do not know if I have actually heard anyone admit that they have got wrong, but that is what has happened. It is good that it is going to be rectified, because newspapers still play a very important role, particularly for older people who might not be tech savvy or be able to utilise the internet. There are many areas where the internet is not adequate yet for them to be able to access this information, so having it in print is still a very vital way to receive that information. I think it shows the government’s lack of understanding of how regional Victoria actually operates and how we live. It is a total demonstration of the disconnect between the Labor government and rural Victorians to hear members saying things like, ‘We’re going to take everyone into the 21st century’. In the 21st century you would expect to have some good roads, for example. Well, we have not got them, so maybe we can start with some stuff that we actually need before rushing through things like this with obviously no or little consultation, because once the voices started to be heard it was very obvious from the press that this was going to be a very poor outcome for regional Victoria.

I stand here and support the amendment by my colleague the member for Eildon that makes it very clear that what needs to be in legislation is that public notices need to be published in a print newspaper circling in that part of regional or suburban Victoria. That is very clear. We want to make sure it is very clear so this out-of-touch government cannot try this little manoeuvre again. I wonder about their intent with the lack of transparency that this would result in. I mean, it is not easy for many people to get onto a website and hunt through the plethora of information to find specific public notices. When you go into the country for a trip somewhere you do not actually think, ‘I’d better look up and make sure the roads aren’t closed’, but you do read the paper on a Saturday, when they are usually in it—in my part of the world it is often Saturday—and you do note those things. It is just the way it is still happening, because the internet is not ideal for everyone and it is certainly not a tool yet that is so usable and available that we can get rid of the print newspapers.

Papers like the *Warrnambool Standard*, the *Portland Observer* and the *Terang Express* in my electorate play an incredibly important role. If we had seen the legislation go through, that revenue they receive from the public notices would have disappeared and it would have left them possibly very close to unviable. It was a massive risk to their viability, and we need those newspapers. Many a time we saw during the pandemic the role that the newspapers played in informing the community. We are seeing in Portland the information that is playing out in the paper around the hospital and the closures and the maternity services being abruptly ceased. That is how people get their information in the community. So we absolutely needed the government to have done this backflip, and that is what it is. They sat here and they said, 'Oh, this is great; we stood up for regional Victorians'. But no, that is actually not true. They sat there silent. They watched this legislation go through. They said nothing, despite hearing that it would actually do a lot of damage to regional Victoria. You sit there and you wonder why. You think, 'How could a group of MPs who say they understand regional Victoria have let this happen?'. What is their motive? Do they not really care about regional Victoria? Well, again, as I said, when I look at the state of our roads and when I look at the way they are treating Portland hospital, I think that is probably the exact reason—that they are so city-centric as a government, they are so focused on the votes that get them into government, they are very prepared to throw the regional communities to the wolves. That is what we are seeing certainly in south-west Victoria in many ways.

I do commend the fact that this pressure has worked. I hope the government do start to recognise the importance of the regions and start thinking about governing from border to border instead of from tram tracks to tram tracks. With that, I commend my colleague's amendment to the amendment—the member for Eildon's amendment—to the house.

Ms ADDISON (Wendouree) (16:20): I too am delighted to rise to speak on the government house amendment regarding regional public notices in the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2021. It is great to follow so many strong voices for regional Victoria, particularly Labor voices, and to hear the contributions from the member for Geelong, the member for Buninyong, the member for Lara—my good friend—as well as the member for Yan Yean. I understand that the member for South Barwon is to follow me.

What you really hear when you listen to the contributions of Labor regional MPs is the deep roots they have in their community, the care they have for their community and the understanding they have for their community, because that is what it is about. We are amplifying the voices of regional Victorians in our government every day. You have only got to look at the investment in my community of Ballarat. Whether it be our GovHub, whether it be an upgrade to our Ballarat train station, whether it be our \$60 million roads package, we are making sure that the regions are heard, and I know that you do that so well too, Deputy Speaker. What you are doing for Bendigo West is extraordinary in terms of the investment that you are drawing—and bringing Elvis to the Bendigo Art Gallery is also very impressive.

But it is not just the wonderful members who have spoken so far. We have also got incredible members in Bass, in Bellarine, in Bendigo East, in Macedon and my good friend in Melton, who are very strong voices, as well as members in the other place representing the western, northern and eastern regions around Victoria. Never forget: our Premier is from Wangaratta. Right? He is a country boy who never forgets where he came from. So for us to be lectured by people like the member for Lowan and the member for Ripon, who grew up in Malvern, about what it is like to live in the country, can be a little bit rich, I can just say.

It was interesting: talking about regional newspapers, there was a great article in the *Ballarat Courier* today which I am sure will be of interest to our Liberal members that are here today. It is called 'Time running out as election approaches', because the Liberal Party has not even preselected someone to run for the federal seat of Ballarat. There is no federal candidate for Ballarat. It is very interesting that Alex Ford, the journalist at the *Ballarat Courier* interviewed—

Mr R Smith: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I would just very simply suggest that this contribution is a far cry from where the amendments are before this house.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It has been a fairly wideranging debate. It is a point of debate, but I do ask the member for Wendouree to come back to the amendment before the house.

Ms ADDISON: I will refer to the member for Lowan's contribution. She talked about this bill happening during our preselection process, so she actually brought up preselection. The member for Lowan has raised preselection, and therefore I think it is a bit inappropriate for you to complain about me talking about preselection.

Mr R Smith: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I would just remind, through you, the member for Wendouree that you have made a ruling, and for her to criticise me raising an issue that you upheld seems to be a reflection on the Chair, to me.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is not a point of order.

Ms ADDISON: In this article in the Ballarat *Courier*, which is a regional newspaper that is printed in Ballarat in my electorate of Wendouree, there was a really interesting point made by a Latrobe University expert on regional Victoria. I wish to quote the Ballarat *Courier*, a regional newspaper, which is a very important part of the debate:

I think one of the structural problems the Liberal Party has in places like Ballarat and Bendigo is a real dearth of high-quality, well-known local candidates to challenge the incumbents, and it's been that way for some time now, and there are a few reasons for that—

Mr R Smith: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, again I just find that whether they are Liberal candidates, Labor candidates, Greens candidates, whoever a party in this place selects to be their candidate has nothing to do with the amendments that are before the house.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: As I said before, it is a point of debate, and I think that the member for Wendouree is referring to a local newspaper. This has been a wideranging debate. It is a point of debate; it is not a point of order.

Ms ADDISON: Thank you. Going back to an article in a regional newspaper that was printed today, I would like to just finish the quote:

... and there are a few reasons for that—

talking about the Liberals being out of touch in my community—

the membership's getting older, and it's really hard to attract young people, so the party, in a sense, is ossifying.

If you don't pick your candidate until the last minute, like in Bendigo and Ballarat, you've really got no chance.

So as I was talking about the Ballarat *Courier* and we are all talking about how important it is that newspapers have strong voices in our regions, that is a very strong voice from our local *Courier* today. I am proud to be the member that has the home of the Ballarat *Courier*, and that is why I am so pleased to speak on the amendments made to guarantee that public notices will still be printed in regional papers and that they will be no worse off as a result of these amendments.

The *Courier* is Ballarat's and the region's leading provider of news—such as today's article—and information, and it is really amazing to think that it dates back to 10 June 1867. It is a Ballarat institution, and I note that the editor of the first edition of the Ballarat *Courier*, Robert Clark, promised to speak out boldly on issues that would impact Ballarat, which would include the preselection of a federal Liberal candidate in the upcoming state election. For nearly 155 years the *Courier* has been keeping Ballarat residents informed and entertained and is continuing to speak out boldly on the issues impacting the Ballarat community. I would really like to commend the editor, Eugene Duffy, and local journalists Rochelle Kirkham, Caleb Cluff, Alex Ford, Michelle Smith, Greg Gliddon, Jackson Russell, Maeve McKenna, Ellie Mitchell and Matt Currill as well as our incredibly talented photographers Lachlan Bence, Adam Trafford, Luke Hemer and Kate Healy.

Mr Dimopoulos: You know them all.

Ms ADDISON: I do. They are good people, and they are keeping us to account.

I have really strong ties to newspapers. My grandfather ran Gullan's newsagency at 88 Bridge Mall, Ballarat, for many years. It was also where my father worked in the family business for years before opening his pharmacy, and I delivered newspapers as a kid for three years in Alfredton in my electorate. Further, as a former national industrial officer of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union printing division, formerly the Printing and Kindred Industries Union, I am a strong supporter of the printing and packaging industry and the hardworking printers across our state. So for me support for this bill is in my DNA. I support a strong, diverse regional media, particularly the print media, and believe it is a key pillar of our democratic society. I am really looking forward to the independent member for Shepparton's contribution, because it is well known that she has played a key role in bringing this amendment to this place to ensure that the regional voice of local media is heard.

There is so much to talk about, and I have been interrupted so many times I am not going to get through everything. The original bill was about trying to make sure that we had a 21st-century approach to public notices and also reducing the cost for businesses, because it can cost up to \$1700 in print advertising per notice. However, this good government, this government that listens and acts, as my good friend the member for Lara said earlier, said that for some more diverse and vulnerable members of the community we had to keep the print going. And we understand that regional communities had concerns as well. So, importantly, our government's proposed house amendment clarifies that regional and local newspapers will be left no worse off by the government's changes to the regional public notices. So that is good news. The amendment will mean that any notice that is required by law to be published in a print newspaper circulating in a particular locality will remain unchanged after this bill is passed. That is really, really good news. In effect it guarantees the current status quo for regional newspapers, which will be very much welcomed. It will be welcomed certainly by the Ballarat *Courier*. It will be welcomed by the *Bendigo Advertiser* and by the Geelong *Addy*. It will also be welcomed by the *Frankston Times* and the *Mornington News*, which will be great news for the hardworking members for Frankston and Nepean.

We also know that because of this government our newspapers are still going okay in the regions. Since April 2020 the Andrews Labor government has invested \$17.5 million in regional press advertising, and I am being lectured to by the member for Ripon, the member for Lowan and other members of the house saying that we do not care about regional papers. We care—\$17.5 million worth of care to make sure our regional papers continue to prosper. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr Eren: Go easy, Danny, go easy.

Mr D O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (16:30): I do not know how I can follow that, member for Lara. I do note that apparently, though, in speaking on this amendment, which is about newspapers, as long as you are speaking about something that was once in a newspaper, it will be relevant. I have got a lamington recipe for you guys over there. I have got a roast lamb recipe for everyone. We are going to talk about a whole lot of things in my 10 minutes.

I find it entertaining actually, as I am sure many of us on this side do, that we have heard basically the same ministerial speaking notes for the last five speakers on that side all saying what a strong, wonderful Labor regional representation we have over there—all of them standing up for regional newspapers, all of whom said nothing when the bill went through this place, all of whom said zip, who were silent. None of them said anything about this issue when the bill went through, and now they are all standing here saying, 'What a champion I am for the Ballarat *Courier* and the *Bendigo Advertiser*, and we're filling our 10 minutes by listing every journalist that works at every newspaper'. It is extraordinary. I do not want to overstep the bounds here, but I think the member for Broadmeadows should have a crack, because at least he is a journalist and might understand what he is talking about. We will not talk about how well he has been treated by those opposite, but the member for Broadmeadows would at least have some idea.

I stand here with a conflict of interest, if you like, as an ex-country journo. The member for Broadmeadows will know the Printing and Kindred Industries Union and the journos—it was never pretty. Even when I was a young whippersnapper cadet at the *Gippsland Times* back in the early 1990s there was tension between the printers and the—

Ms Addison interjected.

Mr D O'BRIEN: I was an AJA member for a very brief period of time. I found that they did absolutely nothing for me, so I did not stay there. But it is true, irrespective of the sudden conversion by those opposite, that our regional newspapers are an absolutely critical part of our local communities. I am sure it is true also in suburban parts of Melbourne but I do not think to anything like the same extent as in our regional communities. All regional members will understand how important they are.

I do find it a bit amusing that we heard the member for Wendouree just then repeat the Assistant Treasurer's commentary about the apparently huge support that the government has given to regional newspapers since the start of the pandemic—\$17.5 million. I remember that announcement that the Premier made at the time. I think at the time it was a \$6 million commitment, and I remember looking at the rough numbers and going, 'Well, that's basically what the state government would spend on regional newspapers every year', and I am sure if we did a comparison, \$17.5 million since April 2020 is not that different probably to the previous two years. So we can talk it up, but the reality here is governments always spend money on newspapers, and there is a bit of spin going on with that particular issue.

Absolutely our regional newspapers have struggled, and what this original change to legislation was going to do was be another straw on the camel's back. I know from my own experience in the Gippsland South electorate I have got the *Gippsland Times* based in Wellington shire; the *South Gippsland Sentinel-Times* covering both the South Gippsland and the Bass Coast areas; the mighty *Foster Mirror*, which is a very little paper run on an oily rag, but it is a ripper, run by Rabs and Kate down there; the *Bridge*, which was only set up in the last couple of years, during the pandemic, by Deb Lucas in Yarram—a fantastic local paper that has filled the void left by the *Standard*, which actually had to close; and the *Mirboo North Times* as well, which is a wonderful little community paper run entirely by volunteers. There are numerous other newsletters, but those are the actual newspapers that I am talking about. Unfortunately, as I said, as a result of the pandemic we lost the *Yarram Standard News* and the Great Southern *Star* based out of Leongatha, and I know that loss has been felt sorely by the people of Leongatha and surrounds in particular; they do not feel often that they are now serviced as well by local news.

All of those papers I mentioned did get in contact when this legislation was first presented to the chamber. They certainly emailed me and expressed their concerns about it. I am very pleased that the advocacy of those on this side has actually resulted in these amendments being agreed to in the upper house and that they are now being debated here. I think it is critical, as the member for Eildon said, that the regional newspapers are a training ground for our journalists across the country. She talked about people going on to bigger and better things. I am not sure if it is a bigger and better thing, but I am now here as a member of Parliament—the member for Gippsland East likewise and the member for Euroa. There are others. The member for Broadmeadows has gone on to bigger and better things. He was at the *Age*, so I think being a Labor MP is much better—

Mr McGuire: ABC. Two Walkleys.

Mr D O'BRIEN: ABC. All right, we will pay that. But I can look through the by-lines in our metropolitan dailies or through the tags on the nightly news on the major networks here in Melbourne, and a huge volume of them have come through regional media, whether it is through newspapers, like me, or whether it is through regional TV, which I also progressed to, many of those have gone on to great things. It is a bit of a job, I guess, for country MPs keeping up with the WIN journos, previously

the Nine journos. We had both there for a short period of time. You just get to know one and they get snapped up and go on to bigger and better things.

I guess I have touched on an issue there that we have lost many of our voices. We have lost the Channel 9 bulletin. It was fabulous when it came in—I think around the start of 2017 or 2018. Channel 9 was the Southern Cross Austereo network, and ironically in setting up the business one of my former cameraman colleagues was actually a sales rep at Southern Cross in Gippsland. He and I were there at the official launch of the Channel 9 regional news service. Ironically enough he and I had both been retrenched by Southern Cross in 1994 when it axed its local news, so the wheel does go full circle, and sadly again it has not lasted. They disappeared. Of more concern, I am sure, for all of us in regional Victoria when it comes to TV is the loss of WIN News as a local bulletin. We still have obviously the statewide bulletin with the local angle to it, but it is certainly diminished, and that is a great loss to us. Like I said, the pressure on our local newspapers has been immense. So that is one of the issues that I was concerned about with this change in the previous legislation, which is now being overturned by the amendment.

The second bit is the transparency issue. Many of the newspaper owners and editors that I have spoken to about this issue actually raised this as well. It is not good enough to simply say, whether it is a state government, local government or statutory authority notice, that, ‘We’ve put it on a website somewhere’, particularly if it is a dedicated website off in the ether that no-one is going to find unless they go looking for it. People do find them in their local papers. Whether they are reading the hard copy local paper or—as I do now often on my iPad—the digital edition of it, you do go through the classifieds. When you are reading the sport or the real estate you are seeing those advertisements in there. You would not have seen those if they were simply just advertised on a website somewhere that you had to go looking for. While I think we can have that as well as a good addition to a bit of transparency, to take it out of the newspapers full stop would have been a loss, because so often people stumble across this sort of information. They are not scanning the newspapers to find out what the local council is doing in their street or what the state government is doing with a planning application; they find it when they are in the process of reading their local news looking for a photo of their grandchild playing netball or whatever it might be.

That was the other thing that concerned me about what the government had been doing with this legislation. It is another reason as to why I am happy that the amendment has been put forward. I think the member for Eildon’s amendment to that amendment actually clarifies the situation much better and should be supported by the chamber. But I am pleased that country newspapers will be protected and supported through this process, not just for the financial benefit that they need but for the transparency and accountability that they provide to government and local government right across this state.

Mr CHEESEMAM (South Barwon) (16:40): It is with pleasure that I rise this afternoon to speak on this bill and the amendments that have come from the Legislative Council. I am someone who grew up in regional Victoria—

Ms Settle: In my electorate.

Mr CHEESEMAM: Very much in the member for Buninyong’s electorate. I must say that the regional media market in that community was very, very important for that community to be able to tell its own story to itself, to its community, and to be able to shine a spotlight on things that governments of all sorts of different political persuasions did not want to have a spotlight shone on and was very important for holding power and authority to account.

I have had the great pleasure of being a representative of the community for a long time and have through that period of time had a robust relationship with the media. I have no doubt most politicians, particularly in the regions, have had periods of good fortune with the local media and periods of not so good fortune when they seek to hold us, as people with authority and power, to account for the

decisions that we make. I must say that regional Victorians—and I am a proud regional Victorian—very much appreciate our stories, and we very much appreciate that opportunity of our stories being told through our various news outlets in the country. I think that has provided a real hallmark of difference between regional Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne.

We have also seen over the last couple of decades a lot of change that has happened in the media landscape. We have seen concentration happening, and we have seen all sorts of different attempts by different levels of government to intervene in the media market to ensure that we do have regional diversity and diversity of media ownership across continental Australia. But what we have seen I think in some ways is two parallel challenges: one is concentration of media ownership, and the second is the introduction of really disruptive, new social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram and other things. That has changed fundamentally the financial underpinnings of many of our newspapers, and we have seen so many different newspapers and media outlets in regional Victoria and across Australia disappear over the last little while or be merged into bigger and stronger entities to ensure their ongoing financial underpinnings.

What we have also seen on top of that is that massive disruptive event that has happened in our economies called COVID. Fundamentally the way our communities work and the way we organise ourselves has been challenged and changed. What the Andrews Labor government has very much recognised over that period is the important role that our media market, particularly our regional media market, has played in us as a government getting important information out into the community to ensure the health and safety of all of our communities. Certainly I have taken up, as many of my regional colleagues have, that opportunity of telling the story, of making that strong case on behalf of our communities—the importance of our regional media outlets—and I would very much like to acknowledge the minister for having taken our soundings, for having listened to the strong representations that I and my regional colleagues have made.

In my context in South Barwon, but particularly as an MP in Geelong, we have got a number of very, very strong media players, of course. We have got the *Geelong Advertiser*, which is a very historic and longstanding daily newspaper. We have got K Rock/Bay FM, which has been providing radio services to the Geelong community for a long time, and then we have got a number of weekly newspapers. We have got the *Surf Coast Times*, the *Bellarine Times*, the *Armstrong Creek Times*, the *Geelong Times* and the *Geelong Independent*. All of these media players have played an important role in telling our stories, in holding governments to account, in shining a strong spotlight on authority and on power and in making sure that the community's stories are being told. I am very grateful for their tremendous contribution to Geelong community life and to us being able to not only tell our stories locally to ourselves but importantly engender issues that the Geelong community has where they are seeking outcomes from either Canberra or, importantly, Spring Street.

In closing, I have heard some fantastic contributions from my regional colleagues, and I certainly very much wish to acknowledge them and thank them for their efforts and to thank the minister for taking those soundings. I think these amendments are the appropriate approach, and I look forward to them passing so that we can get on with governing this state and making sure that we have strong regional media players in this state for many years to come.

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) (16:47): What a fantastic debate it has been. If there is one thing we have seen come from it, it is an absolute commitment to regional media. That alone really speaks volumes, because it is an industry that is so under threat. It is under threat in relation to newspapers, radio, television. All our regions are seeing an absolute diminution in the amount of availability for our stories to be told, for us to actually have access to a whole range of media.

I was delighted to be able to raise this matter as my matter of public importance last year, and it was terrific then to see so many regional members get up and have their say on it—perhaps in a different context where there was a lot more concentration on the importance of regional media rather than a bit of a competition between the parties on who loves them the most, as we have seen today. But seeing

the amendments that have come back today, it shows an understanding in this place of the issue that was raised by our country newspaper associations. For me, raising this issue and bringing on the reasoned amendment when the bill was first before this place was very important to put the spotlight on the fact that this bill, quite a big bill that deals with many pieces of legislation—amending children’s services, children’s wellbeing, education, education training and reform, the Electoral Act 2002, many acts—had tucked away a section that with the stroke of a pen would wipe out the necessity for publication of a whole range of government notices in our printed newspapers. So the spotlight was put on that. All of us were probably lobbied by our local newspapers and by the Victorian Country Press Association.

I was pleased to bring that reasoned amendment before this house and pleased to have the support of everyone on this side of the house when that was voted on. I was then able to lobby members of the upper house on the crossbench on this issue. I was pleased also to raise it in question time with the Premier and get a commitment from him that that would not be proceeded with and that the necessary changes would be made by the government to not allow that particular clause to go ahead that effectively would have wiped out the need for those notices to be printed in regional newspapers.

It cannot be stressed too much how important that access to the printed press is in regional areas, and I think it has been said by many how so many people still do not have access to the internet. So many people live in black spots where they simply cannot get access to it. But that aside, there are many older and disabled people in our community who do rely on printed newspapers very much for their access to information and to see what is happening in their communities. We had a recent incident in Shepparton where a local government notice about a project that was about to be launched was published. It was seen by many people, and a residents group formed around it. A whole lot of advocacy was born out of that simply because they saw it in the local newspaper. These are not people who would go and search a single website page run by the government to find that sort of information. It is really important that our local newspapers do that.

It is so important too that we have journalists in our community who have the opportunity not only to learn but to put the spotlight on what is happening, whether it be at local government level or in our organisations. They tell all our stories. They go to all the sporting events, they go to clubs and organisations, they take photos. There is the preppies page of all the young preps starting school. These are all really pivotal parts of what makes a community, and so the ability for our newspapers to continue to be viable is essential. Part of that viability is the reliance on government funding—government paying for advertising in those newspapers—whether it be public notices, whether it be all the advertising that has been done over the past two years in relation to COVID. I think the federal, state and local governments have continually advertised in our local newspapers to make sure that people have access to the information they need.

There really is an underpinning of the financial viability of our regional newspapers that is brought about by that government commitment to publishing in our regional newspapers, and it would be devastating to lose any more. We have lost so many newspapers across regional Australia. In Shepparton alone at the moment we do not have a television station with a cameraman. At the moment there is no-one there to do a press conference in front of, to film, to have that one chance to be on WIN TV, which is circulated now across the whole of Victoria—a half-hour regional bulletin where the whole of regional Victoria has to compete for one spot. We used to have our own regional television stations with our own journalists with our own half-hour, or even an hour in some cases, to have all our stories told. That is all gone, and we are now faced with a situation where we have a monopoly over so much of the news, particularly in television. I have to say that if we did not have the ABC in regional areas, we would be in dire straits, because with the streaming that now goes on of other television stations we are faced with just getting one side of the spectrum. Having that balance, that capacity for balance, is also really important.

We have very small towns with newspapers. Dookie has the *Major Saddleback News*, would you believe. Nathalia has the *Red Gum Courier*. All our towns have newspapers, and they do a really

important job when it comes to communicating with our communities, so the amendment that has been put forward by the government seems to me to hit the mark. I have looked closely at the one put by the member for Eildon, and I can see that there is a genuine attempt to try and tighten things up by referring to suburban and regional areas in Victoria. But I am just concerned by the word ‘circulating’, because I think the *Herald Sun* circulates right across regional Victoria, and for me that is not good enough. I am talking about supporting our regional newspapers in our regional towns, the ones that are written there by local journalists, published by local organisations. We have many independent and small newspapers across our regions that are not part of a bigger conglomerate, that are not part of News Corp. The *Herald Sun* has the whole sweep of Victoria, but not everyone reads it. A lot of people do not read it for a lot of good reasons, but mainly they are looking for their local news and they will always support their local newspapers. I am concerned that, while the word ‘published’ in the government amendment is a much stronger, better word and it embeds the newspaper in the town region that the government will have to support, ‘circulating’ to me is just a bit too loose, and I just cannot be satisfied that it does what needs to be done.

The opportunity to have this issue dealt with—as I said, it was a big bill and this was just tucked away in it. If we had had the opportunity for consideration in detail in this place, I think it would have been flushed out quite early on and everyone would have had a chance to put these questions to the minister, and perhaps the amendment would have been moved by the government in this place instead of having to go through all the convolutions of going to the upper house.

Similarly, I think it nevertheless shows a bit of democracy at work here because the spotlight was put on it here, it was argued up there and the amendment has been made. It has been picked up, and it has been brought back here. In a sense it is a house of review in the other place and it has done its job, and the government has got on board and brought forward an amendment which will achieve the outcome that all of us wanted to see. It has been said by many of us in this place that this is not about circulating a metropolitan newspaper in regional areas. This is not about the *Herald Sun*, which does have a wide circulation in many regional areas. It is about supporting our local newspapers, and the government is on notice that that is what that amendment means. I am confident that that is what is intended and what should happen, and on that basis I support the amendment from the Legislative Council.

The SPEAKER: The house is considering Council amendments to the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2021. As the member for Eildon has moved an amendment to the Council’s amendments, the amendments will be dealt with separately. The question is: that amendment 1 be agreed to.

House divided on amendment 1:

Ayes, 46

Addison, Ms
Allan, Ms
Andrews, Mr
Blandthorn, Ms
Brayne, Mr
Bull, Mr J
Carbines, Mr
Cheeseman, Mr
Couzens, Ms
D’Ambrosio, Ms
Dimopoulos, Mr
Donnellan, Mr
Edwards, Ms
Eren, 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
Merlino, Mr

Pakula, Mr
Pallas, Mr
Pearson, Mr
Read, Dr
Richardson, Mr
Sandell, Ms
Settle, Ms
Sheed, Ms
Spence, Ms
Suleyman, Ms
Tak, Mr
Taylor, Mr
Theophanous, Ms
Ward, Ms
Wynne, Mr

Noes, 22

Angus, Mr
Blackwood, Mr
Britnell, Ms
Bull, Mr T
Burgess, Mr
Hodgett, Mr
Kealy, Ms
McCurdy, Mr

McLeish, Ms
Morris, Mr
O'Brien, Mr D
O'Brien, Mr M
Rowswell, Mr
Ryan, Ms
Smith, Mr R

Southwick, Mr
Staley, Ms
Tilley, Mr
Vallence, Ms
Wakeling, Mr
Walsh, Mr
Wells, Mr

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment 2 agreed to.

The SPEAKER: The minister has moved that amendment 3 be agreed to. The member for Eildon has moved an amendment to this amendment. She has moved:

That all the words after 'be' be omitted and replaced with the words 'disagreed with but the following amendments be made in the Bill:

1. Clause 38, page 25, line 2, after "subsection (1)" insert "or, if subsection (2A) applies, by complying with the requirements set out in subsection (2A)".
2. Clause 38, page 25, after line 2 insert—
 "(2A) Despite subsection (1), if a requirement in an Act, a statutory rule or any other subordinate instrument for notice (however described) to be published in a print newspaper applies in respect of any locality or part of Victoria which is regional or suburban Victoria, publication—
 (a) must be in published in a print newspaper circulating in that part of regional or suburban Victoria; and
 (b) in addition, may otherwise be published in a manner specified in subsection (1)(a) to (c).".

The question is:

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

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

House divided on question:

Ayes, 46

Addison, Ms
Allan, Ms
Andrews, Mr
Blandthorn, Ms
Brayne, Mr
Bull, Mr J
Carbines, Mr
Cheeseman, Mr
Couzens, Ms
D'Ambrosio, Ms
Dimopoulos, Mr
Donnellan, Mr
Edwards, Ms
Eren, 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
Merlino, Mr

Pakula, Mr
Pallas, Mr
Pearson, Mr
Read, Dr
Richardson, Mr
Sandell, Ms
Settle, Ms
Sheed, Ms
Spence, Ms
Suleyman, Ms
Tak, Mr
Taylor, Mr
Theophanous, Ms
Ward, Ms
Wynne, Mr

Noes, 22

Angus, Mr
Blackwood, Mr
Britnell, Ms
Bull, Mr T
Burgess, Mr
Hodgett, Mr

McLeish, Ms
Morris, Mr
O'Brien, Mr D
O'Brien, Mr M
Rowswell, Mr
Ryan, Ms

Southwick, Mr
Staley, Ms
Tilley, Mr
Vallence, Ms
Wakeling, Mr
Walsh, Mr

Kealy, Ms
McCurdy, Mr

Smith, Mr R

Wells, Mr

Question agreed to.

Ms McLeish's amendment defeated.

Council's amendment agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

The SPEAKER: A message will be sent to Legislative Council informing them of the house's decision.

PUFFING BILLY RAILWAY BILL 2022

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Mr PAKULA:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms HALL (Footscray) (17:07): I rise to support the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022. As someone who grew up in the Dandenong Ranges, Puffing Billy was an ever-present part of my life. My dad and mum moved from Footscray to the hills when we were young so that they could live on a couple of acres of land in Olinda, where my dad as a horticulturalist could have a greenhouse and work on plant propagation. We were raised to respect and understand the forest. If it was a still day at our house, you could hear Puffing Billy all the way up the mountain. It was an idyllic place to grow up, and at high school I walked past Puffing Billy most days on the way to Mater Christi College and to Upwey High where I went to school.

While many of us have fond memories of visiting Puffing Billy, and as kids it was like having the world's greatest toy in your backyard, it is important for us to recognise that this was not a universal experience. It is important for us to acknowledge the suffering of victim-survivors, which partly led to this bill being necessary. In recent years the Emerald Tourist Railway Board and governance structures under the current act have been closely scrutinised. The Ombudsman found significant failings of governance, including conflicts of interest arising from a poor legislative framework. As a result, the Puffing Billy Preservation Society were effectively able to control the Emerald Tourist Railway Board, and Robert Whitehead's offending has been outlined at length in this debate.

PricewaterhouseCoopers were commissioned to undertake a review into the governance arrangements at the board in response to the Ombudsman's investigation. A review conducted by the former Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources undertook a review of the current act in 2016. This review recommended that the Emerald Tourist Railway Act 1977 be replaced, as the current act did not provide sufficient support for growth and development of the Puffing Billy Railway in a contemporary context.

This bill addresses findings and recommendations from both reviews, including to improve corporate governance reporting mechanisms to better position the railway for growth as a significant state tourism attraction. Key provisions include disclosure and reporting obligations that align with modern standards and improve ministerial oversight of the Puffing Billy Railway Board's operations; increased corporate governance obligations; a requirement to report to the minister on a range of incidents and risks rather than just accidents, which is the position in the current act; a requirement to present a rolling four-year strategic plan annually and develop a rail corridor plan every decade; an updated conflict of interest provision, including the requirement for a director to disclose to the board if they currently hold or held a membership of the Puffing Billy society within the last 12 months; and for all appointments of directors to be made by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the minister. This replaces the power in the current act for the society to nominate up to four members to the board.

Another group it is important to recognise are the volunteers, who provide a vital contribution to the operation of the railway, doing everything from driving the locomotives to preserving trains and maintaining the track. Last year the railway was supported by approximately 300 volunteers. We know this because all the volunteers are registered and insured by the Emerald Tourist Railway Board. Volunteers may be members of the Puffing Billy Preservation Society; however, it is not a requirement. The bill acknowledges the significance of volunteers by including an objective of the board to recognise the importance of volunteer participation in the operation of the railway. In performing its functions the board will also be required to have regard to the benefits of volunteerism and the expectations of the community in relation to the board's use of volunteer time.

This bill will impose various restrictions on society representation on the board, including that the society will no longer have the right to nominate directors, society members who are or who were elected to any position in the society within the last 12 months will be prohibited from holding directorship, and a maximum of two directors who are currently non-elected members of the society or who concluded their membership within the previous 12 months may be nominated as directors. These restrictions align with modern standards, enhance government oversight of the board and improve accountability.

The restrictions on the society are important to consider in the context of the Ombudsman's report. The Ombudsman found significant governance failings at the Emerald Tourist Railway Board, a poor legislative framework with respect to conflicts of interest and inappropriate board and management composition. The Ombudsman found that these factors combined had facilitated Robert Whitehead's offending, and this is something that should never be repeated. While the lives of victim-survivors were altered forever, this bill is an important step in ensuring the mistakes of the past are not repeated. The purpose of these restrictions is to reduce any prospective risk of the society controlling the board in future.

However, the bill does not completely remove the society from the board. The bill will permit a maximum of two current non-elected members or members who concluded their membership within the previous 12 months to serve on the board. If a director acquires membership of the society during their term in office, the minister will be empowered to recommend to the Governor in Council that the director be suspended or removed from office for engaging in improper conduct or in performing their duties as a director. These measures are important in the context of the historical wrongs and improprieties and I think are a very reasonable response. This bill will enhance the separation between the society and the board. A key finding of the Ombudsman's report was that the close relationship between the board and the society had enabled the society to effectively control the Emerald Tourist Railway Board.

The department will work with the Emerald Tourist Railway Board to identify current skills, knowledge and expertise on the board. They will also identify any skills under the current act which are not present within the current membership of the board and increase the skill set and capabilities. All members of the Emerald Tourist Railway Board will be transitioned to be directors of the Puffing Billy Railway Board on establishment of the new act. This recognises the skills, knowledge and expertise in areas required by the bill. Another important change to the board will be the requirement to report to the minister on a range of matters relating to incidents and risks more expansive than the current act.

This is a worthy and important bill. As I mentioned, as a kid growing up the Puffing Billy Railway was an everyday part of our life and childhood in Belgrave and something that we just loved. Being locals we were able to basically go on it whenever we wanted. We were very familiar with it. I have incredibly fond memories. Actually in recent months I have been trying to book tickets to take my own children on Puffing Billy, but it is enormously popular. I think we would all know how treasured it is in Melbourne and in Victoria as a tourist destination, so I am pleased to support this reform. It was a terrible time in our community up in the Dandenongs when we learned of these absolute horrors that

took place, and I hope that these reforms help transition the Puffing Billy Railway again into a place that is a fun memory for every child who attends Puffing Billy. Thank you.

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) (17:17): I rise to make a contribution to the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022 and make some observations about how we have got to this point with the introduction of this bill and the legislative remedies that it seeks to provide into the future. As we are fully aware, it seeks to establish the Puffing Billy Railway Act 2022 and repeals the Emerald Tourist Railway Act 1977. There are a considerable amount of changes coming with that, and previous contributors from both sides of the house have outlined them, but there are observations I want to get to. I was having a brief conversation with my colleague just a minute ago, the Shadow Attorney-General and member for Malvern, about how Benambra is a long way from Puffing Billy in the Dandenongs. Yes, it was a good point to make. But the thing is, the investigation from the Ombudsman has a far-reaching impact right around the state of Victoria. In this contribution I will speak about some of the close connections I have with some of the people that have been impacted by the nature of the violations that were committed on some of the young men that volunteered with Puffing Billy.

But the thing is, it has got a great history. It is a fantastic Victorian tourism attraction which has lasted for 121 years. There are not many things around as an ongoing concern. Even though they had some changes of management and closed down from time to time, here we are in 2022. Victoria is seeking to recover and rebuild and with it is a great Victorian tourist attraction. Prior to COVID we were seeing something in the order of about half a million people participating in and enjoying the fantastic journey and the tourism opportunities of going down to the Dandenongs and riding Puffing Billy. So I am looking forward to seeing in a very short period of time people coming back to visit and ride and getting those numbers above 500 000 people annually using what is a great tourist railway.

On the biggest changes and the impact, I am not laying blame on any government of either persuasion of the major parties that have served this state over a number of terms of Parliament because the reasons were—it was highlighted by the Ombudsman, and I will get to that shortly—the failures of the previous committees, the boards, the people, because people will exact the most horrible things on each other. But the point I am making about that is that these changes that come today were brought about by the failures that allowed paedophiles to be closeted from scrutiny. I will get to these people in a minute, but the very fact that it took 30 years—30 years—to come to a conclusion is frankly a disgrace for everybody.

One particular very brave person who I call a friend—a good friend—lives in the electorate of Benambra, Bill Elms. He was one of only two young men that were victims in this whole thing that came out. I commend Bill for the extraordinary bravery of what he has done, and I call Bill a friend. The great thing about it is that Bill makes some great contributions to our community in north-east Victoria, and the fantastic thing is his passion as a volunteer when back in the 1980s he was shut out because he was a victim of a heinous crime. He was excluded and he was isolated, but today he still works as a railway man. He still provides service to the public. He demonstrates all that the commuting public would like to enjoy, whether it be by rail, bus or otherwise. The funny thing about our relationship is that once upon a time Bill was a Labor candidate for Kew. That was back in the days when Jan Wade, a great Liberal Attorney-General, was the sitting member for Kew. We all make our mistakes, but anyway, we live and let live and we move on. But the conversations I have with Bill are fantastic regardless of what our political views or differences may be. The important thing is that Bill is a fantastic railway man and he has lived his dream and worked his dream after the impacts that he experienced as a young teenager. I am going back to the 1980s, and here we are—I think Bill just had his 50th. I cannot remember, because COVID put us into a bit of a spin and we have missed out on so many reunions and parties with a whole range of people around the district. I will probably give him a ring tonight and we will have a chat and find out what birthday party we actually missed recently.

The important thing, and I want to quote from the Ombudsman's report, is:

On the basis of the evidence obtained by the investigation, the Emerald Tourist Railway Board—Puffing Billy—acted in a manner that is unreasonable, unjust and wrong, pursuant to section 23(1) of the Ombudsman Act, in failing to:

- consider the rumours and reports of Whitehead’s offending against children in deciding to appoint him as Secretary of the Puffing Billy Preservation Society in 1980

The point that I am getting to there—and the accuracy of that is great—is that there should be more. We have seen other investigations and we have seen other royal commissions that have highlighted miscarriages of justice. We will always seek—and I think people on both sides of the house should always seek—to remedy those things that humans will do to one another.

Going back to the bill and the findings from the Ombudsman, the fact still remains that Robert Kingsley Whitehead was convicted of 24 counts of child sexual offences back in 2015—offences committed as a volunteer for that great tourism destination. The thing is, it took till 2015, but his accomplice, a fellow volunteer by the name of Anthony Hutchins, was convicted of 66 child sexual offences back in 1987. The difference between 2015 and 1987—this should all have come to light a hell of a lot sooner. This was a cover-up by these people, these creeps, these creatures that are within our society. As parents we always try to protect our kids, our family, our friends, and it is a responsibility upon every one of us to make sure that we protect the most precious things—the future generations in this great state of Victoria. But it should have been done back in 1985. We know that.

In the short time that I do have I would like to acknowledge a couple of people, colleagues from the other side. I would like to mention in particular the member for Lara, John Eren—and I apologise, Acting Speaker, for breaking with convention by calling him by name. John did a lot of good work in that space, and I would like to place on the record my thanks for the personal conversations that he had. With that one, there is some unfinished business. Hopefully I will have a conversation with the member for Lara at some stage and talk to him about another commitment from when he was the Minister for Tourism and Major Events that is unfinished business and should be completed when this bill goes through both houses and becomes enacted as legislation. It is about another young victim who has not come out. He was promised and guaranteed a number of things. It is unfinished business. He still volunteers at Puffing Billy. To fulfil his dream—he wants to work on the engine, he wants to be an engineer—some undertakings were made, but we will resolve those hopefully in the future.

Also I thank the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events for his apology to all those people for the impact that it has had on them. I would just like to acknowledge this work. From time to time in this place we banter and fight and clash our political swords, but on behalf of Bill and all the other victims—the victims who are unnamed, unknown to this day—I thank them for their contribution to remedying what is a dark, dark past. I appreciate the opportunity to go into consideration in detail so our opposition spokesman can ask some questions, because there are a number of questions. I commend the bill to the house and look forward to the questions, and hopefully they will be frankly answered in the future.

Mr TAYLOR (Bayswater) (17:27): It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak in support of the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022. Can I first at the outset acknowledge the work of the member for Lara as the previous Minister for Tourism and Major Events and of course the current Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events as well as their staff and the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions—all those involved in this critically important bill, which I know has been very well supported. It is great to see bipartisan support in this place today for what is important legislation going to the very heart of the structure and governance model of the board and addressing some of the deep and grave issues and disgraceful conduct of offenders in years past. I am glad that this place is absolutely addressing those, with the support of all members in this place.

It is critically important, as the previous speaker said, to make sure that we protect children, which is something that you feel like you should not have to say. It is critically important to acknowledge that part of the legislation and the purpose of it today. This legislation addresses some quite disgusting and

disturbing behaviour many, many years ago that still to this day has severe ripples throughout the community and of course through the Puffing Billy community.

I know other members in this place have spoken about some of the things that we know and love about the Puffing Billy. As someone who grew up in Dandenong and has spent their entire life in the south-east, and the outer eastern suburbs over the last decade or so, I know that Puffing Billy is a huge part of that community and a huge part of the foothills and hills communities and of course the community that I represent. I have many fond memories of Puffing Billy from I was a young tacker and of putting my legs out the window, which I know we are now back to doing again. I know that there are many in the community who have amazing memories of Puffing Billy. It is an institution in the Dandenongs, and this legislation will make sure that we can make it more sustainable and draw more visitors for years to come. It is critically important to make sure this legislation addresses exactly that.

We know that this will provide for the ongoing management and sustainability of the iconic Puffing Billy Railway and that it will of course repeal the Emerald Tourist Railway Act 1977. It will replace it with legislation which modernises provisions relating to good governance practices and the operation of the railway. The bill proposes to repeal the ETR act and establish the Puffing Billy Railway Act 2022 as the new principal act and introduce a framework to provide for the ongoing management and sustainability of the iconic railway, which is indeed critically important. It changes the name of the Emerald Tourist Railway Board to the Puffing Billy Railway Board and introduces a modern corporate governance reporting mechanism. It will update the functions of the PBRB and outline clear objectives relevant to the operation of the railway as a state significant tourist attraction. It will change the title of the persons appointed to the PBRB to directors rather than members to remove any ambiguity with members of the Puffing Billy Preservation Society. It will transition the PBRB to a skills-based directorship, conferring the power to appoint directors on the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the minister, and it will permit the making of regulations to support the day-to-day operation and management of the railway. It will support the growth and sustainability, importantly, of the PBRB while also recognising the heritage significance of the railway—significance critically of its volunteers because without its volunteer base there would be no Puffing Billy. So this will make sure it supports them and the amazing work that they do day in, day out in making sure that people get to enjoy the Puffing Billy for all it is., It is important, as I went through, to local communities out my way, but there are probably few people across Victoria, indeed within a 1000-kilometre radius, who have not heard of Puffing Billy. Importantly, this bill will make sure it strengthens that and adopts a framework that does align with modern standards and addresses findings from reviews of the ETR act and governance structure of the ETRB.

Members in this place have gone through the extremely dark—and there probably are not many words that properly characterise it—and chequered history that Puffing Billy has had. As has been well detailed by many members in this house, we know on 12 July 2017 that the Victorian Ombudsman announced an investigation into a range of concerns regarding Robert Whitehead. We know that on 25 June 2018 the Victorian Ombudsman then released her report *Investigation into Child Sex Offender Robert Whitehead's Involvement with Puffing Billy and Other Railway Bodies*. The Ombudsman provided a suite of recommendations, which the Victorian government of course accepted in full and included a recommendation to review the current structure and composition of the Emerald Tourist Railway Board. In this place today we are directly addressing that recommendation. In response the Victorian government commissioned a review by PwC into the current structure and composition of the Emerald Tourist Railway Board, which was completed in late 2019.

In November 2019 the state, as detailed here by a number of members, importantly made a formal apology in Parliament to those people who suffered childhood sexual abuse in connection with the Puffing Billy Railway and other railway bodies. I remember being in this place and just how moved I was by that apology. It needed to occur and this government made it. I know it has not healed all wounds and it never can, but it is critically important that this place took that time to apologise.

We know that the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022 does address the findings and recommendations from the Ombudsman's investigations and later reviews in relation to the Emerald Tourist Railway Board's operations and adopts a framework that, as I stated, does bring it up and closely aligns it with modern standards we will all be used to today in modern boards, whether in corporate or in public life. Importantly, as I stated, it does really support future growth and sustainability. We know that work on the proposed legislative amendments was progressed in 2020 and 2021, and the bill now being brought forward was introduced on 1 March. I did state this before, but it is always refreshing and nice when we do have in this place matters that have bipartisan support. Of course we would expect nothing less, and it is important to make sure that we do continue to protect, enhance and support what is one of Victoria's most popular and iconic tourist attractions.

It is with great pride that I say Puffing Billy is at the doorstep of my local community. It is an amazing place that I know that locals will continue to visit for years to come. One of my more recent memories was—I do not know if anyone has ever tried before—racing against Puffing Billy. You can never beat the first train. It is an amazing place. So, whether it is racing on the train or dangling your legs out of it, it is an amazing tourist attraction, an amazing tourist icon for Victoria.

Importantly, this legislation responds to those very, very dark and concerning days within the Puffing Billy board under its previous name, and this legislation addresses directly a recommendation from the Ombudsman's report and will ensure that the Puffing Billy Railway's 300 volunteers, including many from the Puffing Billy Preservation Society, will be well supported under a modern and up-to-date governance structure. And I want to place on record my thanks to the many volunteers who still work there to this day, good people who support the volunteer railway industry out their way. They do an incredible job, and I know this legislation will go a long way to supporting them in making sure we can continue to work in response to the Ombudsman's report. This is a critical step in doing that and supporting a fantastic Victorian icon. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) (17:37): It is a pleasure to join this discussion on the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022. There was an interesting comment by the previous speaker about supporting volunteers; I am not quite sure that that is the way many of the volunteers actually see the outcome of this bill, but that is probably by the way.

The bill is pretty much stock standard, the sort of thing you would expect setting up any sort of authority of this nature, and it is not really that much different to the old Emerald Tourist Railway Board. It is interesting, some acts seem to endure forever. I can remember from my first weeks in this place debating the Prahran Mechanics' Institute Act, amendments to the act of 1899, and I think it is still around. It certainly was in those days; it was being amended in those days. Yet here we have an act, the Emerald Tourist Railway Act 1977, 44 years old, and it is absolutely and completely out of date. It is not that many years ago, 1977—certainly from my perspective—but Victoria is a very, very different place. Australia is a very, very different place, and it has to be said this organisation is also a very different place. Others have talked about the growth of permanent positions; the number is either 70 or slightly under. That of course puts pressure on the volunteer side, and I know that there are reports—and I do not know that they are any more than reports—that there is what has been described as a toxic relationship between the current board and the volunteers. And I would certainly hope that this legislation—not that it is apparent in the words on the paper—will go some way towards resolving those differences.

As I said, it is a pretty stock standard piece of legislation. It establishes the board; provides the objectives, functions and powers; provides for the growth and development of the Puffing Billy Railway—well, you would hope so; requires business and strategic planning; recognises the heritage significance; and, coming back to the volunteers again, recognises the importance of the volunteers. I am not quite sure that it actually does that; the way the board in future conducts itself will certainly have far more to do with that, with repairing the relationship with volunteers.

As others have mentioned, of course, no matter how outdated this piece of legislation is it probably would never have really been looked at if there had not been that dark history. I am not going to refer to that person by name. I do not think he should be referred to by name in any further part of this debate. You just wonder. We have heard far too many times in recent years of these sorts of incidents, the sorts of abuse that occurred. The fact that someone with the history of this individual could then come back and have a senior role in the organisation and easy access to victims is just appalling. In the 1950s and 1960s, while I am sure they were very much conscious of the issues and aware of the need to take protective measures, the community standards were no different. You simply wonder why it was allowed to happen. So the Ombudsman's recommendation, which was a review of the current structure and composition of the Emerald Tourist Railway Board, and it was a little bit longer than that, was—I will not say the minimum that could have been done, but it was one of the absolutely essential aspects to come out of the report. The minister's response—and the response was reproduced in part in the Ombudsman's report—talked about the sensitive matter and tragic events and was an appropriate response in the circumstances. But further on the minister said:

... I have requested that the department manages and oversees their implementations—that is, the recommendations—

as soon as possible.

Well, that was in June 2018; this is March 2022. I know we have had some events in between that may have slowed things down a little bit, but I do not think it is unreasonable to ask why it has taken four years. Why has it taken four years? The Ombudsman pointed to the gravity of the problem and made a strong recommendation to have the review. The review was conducted. Others have talked about the dates. That was early in the piece. And then the government has just dropped the ball.

The other aspect of this that does concern me, and the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee highlighted this in the *Alert Digest*, is that the act does not come into operation until 1 July next year. Now, we were told a couple of weeks ago, last sitting week, that it was terribly important to get this bill on for debate today. It could not be adjourned for two weeks; it had to be adjourned for 13 days. It is not going to come into operation until 1 July next year. But there has been no explanation of that, no explanation at all, from the government. There is an expectation, certainly from SARC but I think from the Parliament as well, that if we are going to debate legislation—we are going to, I am sure in this case, agree to this legislation—the government owes us an explanation as to why it is going to take another 15 months to implement it. Frankly, it is not going to take that long. It should not take that long. It should be a matter of months at most before this new board is operative. Unfortunately while the minister—I think it was the minister at the time—responded absolutely appropriately to the Ombudsman's recommendation, the follow-up from the government I can only say has been somewhat mediocre.

I just want to move on to another question, which is why we need specific legislation for this railway. We have had since 2010 the Tourist and Heritage Railways Act. We have 21 organisations that operate under that act, yet apparently we need a separate act for Puffing Billy. I do not think that aspect has been covered. Clearly when you look at VicTrack's so-called blueprint for the future—and it is a damn skinny blueprint in terms of heritage railways—while they note that there is separate legislation for Puffing Billy, the Puffing Billy organisation itself is very much treated as just another heritage railway. There may well be justification for separate legislation, but it is pretty hard to see from this vantage point. I am aware that there are some arguments around who owns what assets and there are certainly some financial pressures with Puffing Billy, as with other railways, but I am not sure there are any less than at Puffing Billy anywhere else.

The Mornington Railway Preservation Society wrote to me right at the start of the pandemic, after their income had dropped to zero, and they detailed their expenses, like spending \$25 000 to refurbish a steam locomotive. They had obtained some sleepers from the Avon rail bridge project, and they were able to bring those sleepers back to Moorooduc, but it was going to cost \$4000 to get those sleepers

back to Moorooduc—a big cost for a volunteer organisation. For public liability insurance to run an operation like that, to run a train, the figure quoted—and this was two years ago—was \$15 000 to \$20 000. We have not had that explanation as to why this particular railway, as iconic as it might be, should be treated any differently to the other 21 organisations around the state. I would certainly have liked to have seen that.

The legislation, as far as it goes, sets up quite a respectable statutory organisation, and I think it will fill the bill, but perhaps it is not the best outcome that could have been delivered.

Mr CHEESEMAM (South Barwon) (17:47): It is my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak on the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022. I must say I rise this afternoon to speak on this particular bill with very clearly mixed emotions, as I have no doubt everyone in this chamber does. Puffing Billy of course is a much-loved tourist railway that has provided a valuable experience to many, many Victorians and indeed international visitors to Victoria for a very long time. It has got a very, very substantial history. The railway line was, as I understand it, first constructed and opened in 1900. It is older than our nation, and indeed very early on it provided a service to the Dandenong Ranges and that part of Melbourne to enable people and products to get in and out of the Dandenong Ranges.

In more recent times, it has been run as a tourist railway and has provided, I think, a great deal of entertainment and pleasure to the Victorian community and indeed very much to national and international visitors who have come to Melbourne, to Victoria, to experience all that we do have on offer. It has provided a great deal of entertainment. In my own personal circumstances, when my boys were young I on a number of occasions brought them to Melbourne to the Puffing Billy railway line to head down the length of that service to enjoy a picnic and a little walk at the other end of the line. I know my young boys, Isaac and Noah, enjoyed their time exploring it. I also know that for a very, very long time there have been all sorts of iconic tourist-related activities, such as road races against the iconic Puffing Billy, where people have tested their running abilities against the old steam locomotives.

I know as a volunteer organisation they have been very well regarded by people who have contributed and who have provided their time and their labour as volunteers to Puffing Billy to make sure that that experience has very much been on offer. But we also have become in more recent years aware of a very dark and sinister history to Puffing Billy, where the governance arrangements that were in place underpinning that as an enterprise failed young people and where we saw horrendous crimes taking place and we saw firsthand, I think, a failure of a whole raft of different governance procedures and processes that saw offenders being able to have their offending activities covered up and indeed offenders being able to continue to participate in senior roles.

I would very much just like to acknowledge the hard effort of the Ombudsman and particularly of course of my friend and colleague the member for Lara, who as Minister for Tourism and Major Events put in place where he could an appropriate government response to make sure that the iconic Puffing Billy had new governance arrangements that could be implemented to ensure that that iconic tourist railway could continue to do what it did and become a safe place for people to volunteer and a safe place for young people to be around.

I think this reform very much is modern reform, it is appropriate reform and it is consistent really with what we would see in many other iconic tourist-related activities. We have other enterprises around the state, and Sovereign Hill comes to mind, where we have organisations—I see the member for Wendouree here—that have large volunteer workplaces where we have huge interaction between volunteers and young people, and the act that is put in place here in so many ways reflects other enterprises such as that.

I just want to in the short time that I have left indicate that over the last couple of years globally, nationally and indeed in Victoria we have been responding to the significant challenges of COVID-19, and that has meant that many other legislative reforming activities that this government has wished

to get on with came with those challenges of responding to that global pandemic. That meant that unfortunately some things we have not been able to as a government get to quite as quickly as we would otherwise have liked. But we have the time and the space now to in a legislative sense put this legislation to this chamber, and I very much wish it a speedy recovery.

Over the next little while we will find around the state our tourism enterprises will be up and running. I would expect that of Puffing Billy, particularly as national tourists start coming back into the state and international tourists. I think we now have a 13- or 14-month transition to the new legal structures. Those legal structures will see that we have a modern governing board. I am sure that that modern governing board will set up a whole raft of appropriate policies to underpin that organisation, particularly around making sure that people get working with children checks done, that volunteers are appropriately trained and appropriately supervised and that the organisation has appropriate complaint mechanisms in place so that when members of the public believe that volunteers are acting inappropriately, those complaints are adequately investigated and appropriate actions are taken.

That is what I would expect to see undertaken by the new board once these new structures are in place, that deep drill down into all the various appropriate underpinning policies to make sure that Puffing Billy is well managed going forward, that it is a safe place for volunteers and that it is a safe place for children to be. I certainly wish the new board and the new governance arrangements that we are putting in place speedy passage through this, and I hope that we never, ever, ever see again Puffing Billy being used by paedophiles to exploit vulnerable young children, which is what we I think have heard in this place, which is so disappointing.

Puffing Billy has a strong future. It will be a strong tourism asset for this state, and these new arrangements are appropriate. The government has listened and it has appropriately responded. I very much want to put on record my thanks and I am sure the government's thanks to the member for Lara, who championed this work for those people, and his record will be strongly reflected in many contributions to this debate over the coming few weeks. I very much see a strong future for Puffing Billy, and I am very much commending this legislation to this Parliament.

Ms SULEYMAN (St Albans) (17:57): I rise to speak on the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022 and echo the contributions that have been made in this house already. Everybody knows the Puffing Billy Railway is clearly an iconic part of Victorian tourism, and today we have heard many stories shared by members across the chamber of how popular Puffing Billy is not only for children but also for local communities. I have also been chatting with staff and other members in relation to Puffing Billy. Although St Albans is very far from Puffing Billy, it certainly is quite popular with Victorians. Everybody has clear memories from their childhood, and as I said previously, it was really intriguing hearing the stories. I myself do not have any memories to share of Puffing Billy. As a child I did not have the opportunity to travel to the other side of town. But I will make it one of my priorities at some point to take my niece and nephew to Puffing Billy.

Coming back to this important bill that is before us, we clearly have heard why we are here today. The Victorian Ombudsman's report reveals so much disappointment and that Puffing Billy, being an iconic tourism attraction, needed to change and to be brought up to the standards of today. I also want to acknowledge the incredible work and contribution of the former Minister for Tourism and Major Events the member for Lara and not only his passionate, heartfelt work in his contribution to working with Puffing Billy Railway victims of child sexual abuse but also the profound impact that that made on the victims. The whole episode that was unfolding at the time was so tragic. It was pleasing to see the member for Lara take the lead and then follow up as the Minister for Tourism and Major Events with an apology to the victims, which was so important as part of the closure or a step towards closure. It was really important to see the member for Lara, as the minister at the time, strongly taking action once the Ombudsman's report in 2018 was handed down and making sure that action was taken.

The Victorian government is a strong supporter of the Puffing Billy Railway. We have heard that it attracted over half a million visitors annually prior to the pandemic. Close to \$12 million was provided

in last year's budget to protect local jobs and support its operation in that local community. That is really important—making sure that kids do have the opportunity to visit Puffing Billy but also providing and securing those jobs. We have heard a lot about the investment that has been made, such as at Lakeside visitor centre, which was backed by a \$12.7 million commitment from our government and includes world-class facilities for tourists, daytrippers and school groups. I hope some of my schools in St Albans venture to the other side to see this iconic ride. The centre boasts many opportunities and also features seasonal produce from the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges. It is a space to host workshops, conferences and school excursions. We can see that the Andrews government continues to support this region, and that is why this bill is important.

To give a bit of context, in 1977 the Victorian government established the Emerald Tourist Railway Board. As we all know, the Victorian Ombudsman's report identified outdated governance of the ETRB. This bill is about making sure that there are appropriate structures in place so that kids are protected and, most importantly, there is scrutiny of the board and real checks and balances for the board and that we separate key elements of Puffing Billy. This bill separates the ETRB from the Puffing Billy Preservation Society, fulfilling a key recommendation from the Ombudsman and following through on an important report on the Puffing Billy Railway.

This bill also changes the name of the ETRB to the Puffing Billy Railway Board. Again, as I said, this is about reflecting and updating to the standards of today. When we look back from 1977 to where we are today, a lot has changed, and clearly our boards and directors need to be reflective of those changes. The bill also safeguards the Puffing Billy Railway as directors are appointed by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the minister and candidates are recommended based on merit and skill. Most importantly, as I said, checks and balances are in place for candidates so we do get the right people on these boards of governance to make sure that the Puffing Billy train and its governance is on track, as one would say, but also to make sure that we do not see a repeat of what has been done in the past, and that has been acknowledged.

Most importantly, I would like to acknowledge the volunteers and the incredible work that they do as part of their giving back to community and making sure that they are protecting a piece of Victoria's history, being Puffing Billy. This bill ensures that these amazing volunteers get to continue doing this and, most importantly, to the greatest effect. This bill specifically recognises these volunteers and supports further volunteer engagement, and that is really important to make sure that volunteers do understand and have those important engagements so that this historic railway can continue to flourish.

As I mentioned earlier on in my opening remarks, the Victorian government are major supporters of the Puffing Billy Railway, and this bill further delivers on that support and strengthens the guidance and structures of the Puffing Billy Railway. We are making sure that there is a long-term vision and objectives to get the most productivity out of Puffing Billy, to improve the vision for Puffing Billy and to increase tourism across that particular region and also across the state. It is a vital piece for the local community, where it is creating jobs and investment. It is a whole chain of an approach, where local businesses are also chained to this iconic destination.

Again, I want to commend the work of the member for Lara, the then Minister for Tourism and Major Events. His contribution and leadership in this space has been phenomenal. With his work on these important reforms we have seen strong leadership when it mattered, and that response was required when the Ombudsman's report was tabled. The minister at the time, the member for Lara, really was very passionate. He gave his heart. Even in his contribution today he continued his passionate thoughts and sentiments when it comes to this bill.

Most importantly, our thoughts are with the victims. These are important reforms for our state's local and, most importantly, tourism economies. This is something that we did not want to do, but unfortunately we have had to make these changes to stop what has happened in the past.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Blackwood): The member for Narre Warren South.

Mr MAAS (Narre Warren South) (18:07): Thank you, Acting Speaker Blackwood. It is good to see you in the chair, incidentally. It too gives me pleasure to rise to speak to the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022. Like many others before me have said, Puffing Billy conjures just so many fantastic memories for most Victorians. Indeed I too can remember, gosh, probably going back to the 1970s now, being a youngster, being on Puffy Billy, hearing the steam whistle go off and probably getting covered in a bit of soot too that was coming out of the top of the chimney out the front—great memories. And it was great to relive those memories when my children, a decade or so ago, got the chance to do that. It was great to relive it through their eyes. Indeed I think *Harry Potter* has made this iconic tourist attraction even more popular. In fact I was informed by colleagues recently that these days you actually have to book in advance just to get a ticket to be able to get on the iconic attraction.

Since I was going back down memory lane, I will take you to 1977, which was the time that the Victorian government established the Emerald Tourist Railway Board as a statutory authority. That was done under the Emerald Tourist Railway Act 1977. It was under that act that the board was created. It was responsible for the preservation, development, promotion, operation and maintenance of the railway and for carrying out other related operations which were consistent with the operation of the railway as a major tourism attraction. The bill will repeal the said act and replace it with legislation that will provide for the ongoing management and sustainability of the iconic Puffing Billy Railway.

It will modernise provisions relating to good governance practices and the operations of the railway. It will change the name of the Emerald Tourist Railway Board to the Puffing Billy Railway Board to reflect the more commonly known name of the railway and recognise the heritage significance of the railway and the importance of volunteers to its operation. The board was established, as I have noted, as a statutory authority under that act along with the current governance structure and is responsible for the preservation, the development and the maintenance of the railway.

So what the bill is seeking to do is to provide a modern framework to futureproof the operations and the governance of the attraction so it can operate more effectively and continue to draw more visitors to the Dandenong Ranges for many years to come. It modernises provisions relating to the governance practices and the operation of the railway, including now requiring the board to develop strategic plans and empowering the minister to make written directions and to request information.

The bill also provides a new legislative framework for the Puffing Billy Railway that supports its future growth and sustainability as a state-significant tourist attraction. The bill provides a range of objectives for the new Puffing Billy Railway Board, and these include to ensure the economic sustainability and viability of the railway, to maintain the heritage significance of the railway, to manage and promote the safe operation of the railway, to promote the tourism offering of and enhance the visitor experience provided by the railway and surrounding region, to recognise the importance of volunteer participation in the operation of the railway, to promote understanding of and education relating to rail heritage, to promote the preservation of narrow-gauge rail heritage, to develop and maintain partnerships with community organisations and businesses, to also develop and maintain harmonious relations between the board and the community and to provide a safe, inclusive and diverse working environment for employees as well as volunteers.

I think it is also important to look at the stakeholder comments that have been made and who was actually consulted as the bill was put together, and the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions consulted with various Victorian government departments and bodies during the preparation of the bill, including the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Department of Treasury and Finance, the Department of Transport, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, the Department of Justice and Community Safety and Land Use Victoria as well as Victoria Police. There were also opportunities to contribute to the bill that were provided to Cardinia Shire Council, Yarra Ranges Shire Council, Parks Victoria and VicTrack as well, given their obvious connection to the railway. Extensive consultation was undertaken with the Emerald Tourist Railway Board in 2021 as well, and whilst the railway board were largely supportive of the measures in the bill, they recommended that some of the limitations in there on society representation on the board be removed. The proposed limitations are

to, however, ensure functional separation between the board and the Puffing Billy Preservation Society, and so they are still there.

The bill also stipulates a range of functions of the board that are relevant to the contemporary operations of the railway, including that of operating, managing and maintaining the infrastructure and assets of the railway and doing so in a safe, effective and efficient manner; also managing volunteer engagement with the railway; developing suitable marketing and communications strategies for activities relating to the railway; and reporting to the minister as required under the act.

The bill of course responds to the Victorian Ombudsman's report which was released in June 2018, *Investigation into Child Sex Offender Robert Whitehead's Involvement with Puffing Billy and Other Railway Bodies*, a very dark history to Puffing Billy, which thankfully with these new governance structures will be coming to an end. Whilst I obviously commend the work of our current minister, I would also like to reflect on the work of the previous Minister for Tourism and Major Events, the member for Lara, who did a power of work in ensuring that this bill is now coming to fruition.

The Ombudsman did provide a suite of recommendations, which the Victorian government accepted in full, including to review the current structure and composition of the Emerald Tourist Railway Board. The bill addresses findings and recommendations from this investigation and related reviews into the Emerald Tourist Railway Board's operations. It found the existing act contained outdated and redundant provisions that required updating in a contemporary tourism environment. The bill will support the growth and sustainability of the Puffing Billy Railway Board while also recognising the heritage significance of the railway, the significance of its volunteers and its importance to local communities. The Puffing Billy Railway is supported by some 300 volunteers, including many from the Puffing Billy Preservation Society. These volunteers do make a vital contribution to the operation of the railway through driving the locomotives, preserving the train tracks and carrying out the maintenance. This is a good bill. Its time has well and truly come, and I commend it to the house.

Ms COUZENS (Geelong) (18:17): I am pleased to rise to contribute to the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022. In 2016 Wayne Clark sent a letter seeking an investigation into a range of concerns regarding convicted child sexual offenders Robert Whitehead and Anthony Hutchins and their involvement with the Puffing Billy Railway. I do want to pay tribute to the then Minister for Tourism and Major Events, the member for Lara, for his role in pushing for the investigation into child sex offences. On 12 July 2017 the Victorian Ombudsman announced an investigation into a range of concerns regarding Robert Whitehead. I also took my children to visit Puffing Billy when they were younger and had great experiences, had great memories—lots of photos, fantastic—and enjoyed the day. But we know that for many that was not the case, and I do commend the previous minister for the work that he did in ensuring that the Ombudsman's report did expose what had taken place.

The Puffing Billy Railway is one of Victoria's most popular and iconic tourist attractions. We know that those dark times that have been identified need to be put in the past, and I am sure for victims that is not an easy thing. But we do need to make significant change, and that is what this bill does. It improves the governance of the organisation. A lot of our tourism opportunities are reliant on many volunteers, and there are many volunteers involved in the running of Puffing Billy. I think it is fantastic, the work that they do, but the governance of something like this, given what we know has happened in the past, is really, really important for our community. It is important that people know that when they go to something like that their children are safe, so the governance of this is really significant.

The bill provides a modern framework to futureproof the operations and governance of the attraction so it can operate more effectively and continue to draw visitors to the Dandenong Ranges for years to come. The bill changes the name of the Emerald Tourist Railway Board to the Puffing Billy Railway Board to prevent confusion and reflect the more commonly known name of the railway. It modernises provisions relating to good governance and practices and the operation of the railway, including requiring the board to develop strategic plans and empowering the minister to make written directions and requests for

information. It is critical that our boards operate in a safe way with good governance to ensure we never again see the horrific events that occurred and have come out in the Ombudsman's report.

The bill provides a new legislative framework for the Puffing Billy Railway that supports its future growth and sustainability as a state-significant tourism attraction. The bill provides a range of objectives for the Puffing Billy Railway Board, including to ensure the economic sustainability and viability of the railway; to maintain the heritage significance of the railway; to manage and promote the safe operation of the railway; to promote the tourism offering of and to enhance the visitor experience provided by the railway and surrounding region; to recognise the importance of volunteer participation in the operation of the railway; to promote understanding of and education relating to rail heritage; to promote the preservation of narrow-gauge rail heritage; to develop and maintain partnerships with community organisations and businesses; to develop and maintain harmonious relations between the board and the community; and to provide a safe, inclusive and diverse working environment for employees and volunteers. The bill also stipulates a range of functions of the board that are relevant to the contemporary operations of the railway. These include to operate, manage and maintain the infrastructure and assets of the railway in a safe, effective and efficient manner; to manage volunteer engagement with the railway; to develop suitable marketing and communication strategies for activities relating to the railway; and to report to the minister as required under the act.

The bill responds to the Victorian Ombudsman's report released in June 2018, *Investigation into Child Sex Offender Robert Whitehead's Involvement with Puffing Billy and Other Railway Bodies*. The Ombudsman provided a suite of recommendations, which the Victorian government accepted in full, including to review the current structure and composition of the Emerald Tourist Railway Board. The bill addresses findings and recommendations from this investigation and related reviews into the Emerald Tourist Railway Board's operation that found that the existing act contained outdated and redundant provisions that required updating in a contemporary tourism environment. The bill will support the growth and sustainability of the Puffing Billy Railway Board while also recognising the heritage significance of the railway, the significance of its volunteers and its importance to local communities.

Puffing Billy volunteers make a vital contribution to the operation of the railway through driving locomotives, preserving trains and track maintenance. As I said earlier, I think the volunteer component is a really important part of this bill. It is very significant to the operation of Puffing Billy. Without those volunteers obviously it would not operate as well as it does, so having those volunteers there is really important and we need to recognise how important those volunteers are. The Puffing Billy Railway is supported by 300 volunteers, including many from the Puffing Billy Preservation Society. The expressed recognition of volunteers in the bill will have a positive impact on volunteer engagement at the railway.

The Dandenong Ranges has been home to Puffing Billy Railway for 121 years, with generations of families making lifelong memories. The Victorian government is a strong supporter of Puffing Billy Railway, which attracted around 500 000 visitors annually prior to the pandemic. \$11.2 million was provided in the 2021–22 budget to protect local jobs and support its operation as it recovers and draws tourists and daytrippers. It was further strengthened as a tourist attraction by the recently opened state-of-the-art \$24.8 million Lakeside visitor centre. The Lakeside visitor centre was backed by a \$12.7 million commitment from the Victorian government and boasts world-class facilities for tourists, daytrippers and school groups. It honours the rich history of the century-old heritage railway through a collection of steam-era artefacts and an immersive multimedia experience. The centre boasts a range of dining options featuring seasonal produce from the Yarra Valley and the Dandenong Ranges as well as a high-tech function space to host workshops, conferences, events and school excursions.

Two-thirds of Puffing Billy Railway suppliers are Victorian companies. The bill will support Puffing Billy's partnership with Dandenong Ranges and Yarra Valley businesses, including wineries and gourmet producers, to showcase the region and their products to visitors. In February 2022 the return of the time-honoured tradition of sitting on the sills of trains running from Belgrave to Lakeside stations was also welcomed by the community, and my children also enjoyed being able to do that,

which are great memories. As I said, we have got lots of photos of our time spent there. The return of the iconic experience will deliver significant benefits to local businesses as visitors get back to enjoying doing the things they love with family and friends.

Puffing Billy is a major driver of our local economy, and families all over the world can enjoy the magic of a steam train ride through some of the most beautiful scenery in Australia. The Puffing Billy Railway Bill will ensure this iconic experience can continue well into the future. Again I stress how important this bill is to ensure the safety of everyone—visitors, the board and the volunteers. It is really, really important, so I commend the bill to the house.

Mr RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (18:27): I rise this evening to speak on the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022 and join other members who have shared their contributions on Puffing Billy and have acknowledged some of the changes in legislation. I want to focus on a couple of key elements of the economic outcomes and better governance and board oversight that this bill brings and also acknowledge some of the significant changes that have happened since the Ombudsman's report in 2018 and subsequent improvements following those deeply tragic events.

Puffing Billy is synonymous with Victoria through those beautiful Cardinia Hills and the Yarra Ranges. I grew up in the south-eastern suburbs, in Berwick, and worked for the former member for Gembrook when I was a pup back in the day. I have very fond memories of that beautiful rail line running through the member for Monbulk's and the former member for Gembrook's seats and now the current member for Gembrook's seat as well. It really brings the community together. When you go around schools with the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education one of the first things he does in the Q and As with kids is ask whether any of the kids know what Puffing Billy is, and 95 per cent of the hands shoot up because they all know what that means and what that beautiful experience is. Then generally he follows on by talking about his beautiful electorate.

It is a source of a parent's or grandparent's or guardian's great joy to take their child or their grandkids on that beautiful steam rail. There is the experience of hanging your legs out of the carts—and potentially getting about 3 tonnes of soot in the eyes, like I have before—and there is the joy of families and tourists as well. It is a beautiful attraction running through some of the most pristine places in Victoria all the way to where my in-laws are at Gembrook. Sometimes people stop at Emerald—they do not go further along the line. But some of the beautiful attractions that are in the Cardinia Hills all the way through to Gembrook now send people all the way through to the end of the train line as well.

We need to make sure that Puffing Billy and the rail authority through there are the strongest they can be into the future, and this is what this bill is all about—providing that ongoing management and sustainability for generations to come of the Puffing Billy Railway, repealing the Emerald Tourist Railway Act 1977 and replacing it with legislation that modernises provisions relating to good governance practices and the operation of the railway. That is a really key element of this bill. The tragedies of the past and decades of systemic failure in the protection of children were passionately acknowledged by the Premier, the then Leader of the Opposition and the then Minister for Tourism and Major Events. When you read those three contributions, you see the significance of this report from the Ombudsman and the great work that was done.

But it took the courage of people like Wayne Clarke and other survivors to tell their stories, to courageously come forward and to detail substantial and horrific failures in governance and the wilful neglect of a range of people's duties that put children at risk and that saw lives suffer. The huge toll that was taken on people was just an absolute tragedy. It was appropriate that that was acknowledged and the recommendation was supported by leaders in this place. When you read the contributions of the member for Lara—and to have heard that live at the time—it is extremely moving. There was a huge failure of the people that were impacted during the decades. Like the member for Mornington, I will not name those people. But to Wayne Clarke and those survivors: we owe you a great debt of gratitude for your courage and for your perseverance in seeking justice.

Hopefully all the governance changes and all the work that has been done ensure that this never happens again, the child safe standards that we have in Victoria now make sure that we have all of those important checks and balances on child safe standards to make sure our kids are protected at all times, and where there are allegations that are put forward they are investigated by Victoria Police as soon as possible and action is taken to ensure that people impacted by these absolute monsters are supported and that the crimes are brought to justice. It is a really key element of this bill and something this Parliament, together, in a bipartisan way, should be very proud of—the efforts that have been made to reform and send this bill through with those recommendations that have been implemented.

It is really great reading the annual reports of the Puffing Billy board; every time there is a report from the board and the director there is a report on the compliance with the Ombudsman's recommendations, detailing year-on-year the lessons learned. The governance and improvements that have been made are a really important recognition of the huge amount of work that needs to be done and that is ongoing in that approach as well.

The Victorian government is a massive supporter of the economic and tourism benefits of Puffing Billy. Just recently in the Victorian budget the Victorian government provided \$11.2 million for the iconic tourism attraction to protect local jobs. I think the minister might have been there at the time. It was a bit cool that day. Maybe he was in a coat and a hat. I might have seen that on the news, the doorstep. It was a great announcement that goes with the many years of support that this Labor government has provided to this wonderful tourism attraction.

More than 500 000 people took a trip back in 2019 on Puffing Billy—an extraordinary number when you think of the populations through there—and it is not just Puffing Billy itself that is the attraction. That might bring people into the region, but there are so many other things to do in the Yarra Ranges, the Cardinia hills and that Upper Yarra region. It is such a beautiful and pristine place. There are overnight stays and you are on the edge of the Yarra Valley. There are so many ancillary things to what is a wonderful tourism attraction. Think of the 500 000 people that are drawn into that region and that get on the Mount Dandenong Tourist Road or might go up to Belgrave, through to Emerald and the lake side and all those beautiful regions or through Pakenham Upper into Gembrook. These are some of the best places that you can come across in Victoria. The benefit and the need to strengthen that into the future is so very critical, and it is underpinned by a substantial amount of support from volunteers—some 400 volunteers that are contributing to the support of Puffing Billy as well. So it is important that we make sure that in every element and every bit of focus we are supporting the future preservation of this incredible tourism outcome.

That is exactly what this bill does. It puts the economic sustainability and viability of Puffing Billy right at the forefront, maintaining the heritage significance. It is pretty challenging to maintain an over-100-year-old railway line through there, with all the heritage elements that go towards supporting Puffing Billy. That is a significant element that is complemented by the need for safety at all times, and those safety and operation standards are really challenging in such a historical piece of infrastructure as well. The recognition of the importance of volunteer participation and how that has underpinned so much of the work and the effort that has been put forward is a really important element that is put forward in this bill as well.

The bill requires the board to think about sustainable marketing and communication strategies for activities relating to the railway. This is really important when we think about how it links in with our tourism strategy in Victoria and how as we come out of COVID this is so much more important now after two years of the impact of the pandemic. You see in the annual report of Puffing Billy for 2020–21 a substantial impact to visitor numbers—I think it had around 52 000 visitors during that time in the times it was able to operate. So coming back out as strong as we can possibly be and focusing on Puffing Billy's future in a post-COVID frame is really important as well.

We know all the safety compliance measures that a range of tourism operators have had to go through. That is really critical work of the board as well, and obviously it is really important, in each year and in

each interaction of the board, that the minister has oversight and that we are on track with that strategy and always pushing forward on that. So this is a really important bill in that frame, in terms of sustainability and economic development—how important this is as a key pillar in Victoria’s economic and tourism approach, how important this is for the outer east, the Yarra Ranges, Cardinia shire and Upper Yarra communities. This is a really important piece of legislation to modernise Puffing Billy into the future and make sure that with generations having enjoyed this asset, this tourism attraction, it is sustainable into the future for many generations to come. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms KILKENNY (Carrum) (18:37): I am pleased to rise today to speak on the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022, which, as we have heard, is an important bill in a number of really meaningful ways. It got me thinking: I actually have not taken my own son on Puffing Billy. I remember pre pandemic we were talking about going on it, but I can tell you now I feel quite inspired to take the trip up there, to do the trip on Puffing Billy and to have him enjoy what I got to enjoy as a child as well, because of course when we speak about Puffing Billy it brings back so many fond memories. My grandparents lived in Upwey, and on so many occasions we would go across and take Puffing Billy up through the Dandenong Ranges. I will never forget that feeling of sitting on those open-sided carriages with my legs dangling out—as the member for Mordialloc said, the soot in the face, the steam, hearing the train horn—and feeling as though it was a bit daring, a bit risky actually, to be hanging out the side of a train. It is wonderful that that has returned, that that experience is now available again for so many not just Victorian families but families from across Australia and obviously international visitors as well.

This has been operating for the past 121 years, give or take a few years with the pandemic, bringing so much joy to so many families. This significant railway has also supported some terrific local communities with tourism, with visitors, assisting those local economies and also, as we have heard, so many local companies that are involved in bringing this tourist attraction together. This is not just a tourist railway; this is really a significant state tourism experience and attraction. The point of it having its own piece of legislation and the focus that that brings really highlights just what a significant tourism destination this is and how important it is for the local communities. Of course we want to make sure that Puffing Billy is supported to delight generations to come—as I said, not just Victorians but visitors from across Australia and around the world—and support them to build their own really fond memories, to draw visitors to the ranges, to continue to support those wonderful local communities and to keep it operating as a significant state tourist attraction.

It is also about working hard with the volunteers to make sure that we preserve and truly acknowledge the heritage value of this railway and support the hundreds of volunteers who really do give so much of their time and energy and commitment and absolute passion to preserving this so that we can continue to enjoy it. I know that so much work goes into maintaining the locomotives, driving the locomotives—I mean, that is a skill in itself—and of course undertaking all of the track maintenance. This bill is designed to do that—to support the Puffing Billy Railway to continue for generations to come. As we have heard, it will completely replace the Emerald Tourist Railway Act 1977 with a much more suitable and contemporary framework, really again just recognising the contemporary operation of this significant railway in the context of its place as a railway that is a significant state tourist attraction.

Importantly this bill will effect a really significant name change, from the Emerald Tourist Railway Board to the Puffing Billy Railway Board—again, to better align the name and the overall recognition of the railway. We have heard that the bill will really modernise governance practices and processes, including things like having to develop a strategic plan, but I think importantly it also really clearly articulates and sets out the objectives of the new Puffing Billy Railway Board. These include: to ensure the economic sustainability and viability of the Puffing Billy Railway; to maintain the heritage significance of the Puffing Billy Railway; to develop and maintain harmonious relations between the board and the community; to recognise the importance of volunteer participation in the operation of the Puffing Billy Railway; and to provide a safe, inclusive and diverse working environment for

employees and volunteers. We know that for many reasons the old act is just not fit for purpose, and we now need to implement this new piece of legislation to properly support the growth and development of Puffing Billy, again in the contemporary setting as a state tourist attraction.

But of course we know, sadly, that there is very much another side to this story, a much darker side to the story and a story that really should have been told much earlier—many, many years earlier. It is a story, sadly, of young children who were ignored, not believed, silenced—a story which is a blight on all of us. It was one where childhoods were destroyed and people turned a blind eye—a story perhaps that is all too familiar, where a perpetrator was protected and victims cast out and abandoned. We know that systemic failures, organisational failures, worked to destroy these lives.

We have heard that it was in 2016 that Wayne Clarke sent a letter to the then Minister for Public Transport seeking an investigation into concerns regarding convicted child sex offenders and their involvement with Puffing Billy. Ultimately the Victorian Ombudsman announced an investigation into a range of those concerns in 2017, and in 2018 she released her report. It was chilling reading, that report, and she found that regarding the perpetrator who the report focused on, his conviction and death left many unanswered questions. We do not even know how many victims there might have been, and the investigation sought to answer some of those questions. I really want to acknowledge the strength and bravery of those who came forward to assist in the investigation, and I really commend their courage and persistence. But that report did shed light on a systemic failure by organisations including the Emerald Tourist Railway Board—ignoring, failing to identify and failing to notify police of serious child sexual abuse allegations over more than five decades.

The report found really serious, significant issues associated with the current board structure and the governance structure at Puffing Billy. It found that the volunteer organisation actually operated to conceal a lot of the activity that was going on. Volunteer groups were not informed of allegations; people were not supported to come forward. It found, tragically, that the society had an inappropriate level of control over the board that actually facilitated some of the conduct that took place over those many decades. That is something that this bill is seeking to address to ensure that there is proper independence, proper oversight and proper governance, because I think all of us agree that what we need to do now, what is incumbent upon us, is to do everything that we can to ensure something like this never, ever happens again. We are committed to that, and that is what this bill is a part of as well.

There were difficult findings by the Ombudsman, tragic findings, but as I said, it is incumbent upon us to act on them and to acknowledge that responsibility lies with all of us and that we need to do everything we can to minimise that risk of it ever happening again. I commend this bill to the house.

Mr J BULL (Sunbury) (18:47): I am pleased to have the opportunity this evening to contribute to debate on this bill, the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022. As others have mentioned and as the member for Carrum has just alluded to, this bill contains a number of important changes that go to the safety and the surety of people within our state, particularly young people within our state. I want to acknowledge the important contributions that have been made, I think, right across the house as this bill has been before the house this afternoon.

This is indeed a specific piece of legislation that goes directly to the management and the structure of management around the iconic Puffing Billy Railway. Our state, Acting Speaker Blackwood, as you know, is extremely lucky to have a number of iconic attractions right across the state, those such as Puffing Billy. Whether it be the Puffing Billy itself, the ski fields, Melbourne Zoo, Werribee zoo, the penguins at Phillip Island, the forests and parks and natural waterways right across the state; whether it be Wilsons Prom; or whether it is in the north or the west, there are of course some terrific things that Victorians can do each and every day with their families. It is a very extensive offering.

However, what we know is that when our community and communities right across the state have the opportunity to visit these attractions, what is incredibly important to this government and should be important to all members of this house is that these attractions need to be safe, they need to be

accessible for all and they need to be well managed and well maintained. These are key pillars of what the experience for the user should be.

It is for these reasons that the bill before the house is with us today and, as I mentioned earlier, makes some key and critical changes to the management of Puffing Billy, and they come off the back of some extremely devastating and extremely concerning matters that other members have canvassed in their contributions this evening. These are matters that are, as I mentioned, devastating for those victims, those families who were tragically affected by child abuse that was found to have occurred. These are shocking, terrible, tragic circumstances. Of course the referral to the Ombudsman was the right decision. It had to be done, and it uncovered a devastating set of circumstances. I do, as other members have done, take the opportunity to extend my thoughts and condolences to all of those that have been affected. As the member for Carrum and other members have said in their contributions, these are important measures that go to improving safety and security and the management of the Puffing Billy Railway.

In recent years the Emerald Tourist Railway Board and governance structures under the current act have come under scrutiny. We know that the ETRB and the governance structures around the Emerald Tourist Railway Act 1977, the current act, came under particular scrutiny through that important Ombudsman's report of June 2018 entitled *Investigation into Child Sex Offender Robert Whitehead's Involvement with Puffing Billy and Other Railway Bodies*. The Ombudsman found significant governance failings at the ETRB and a poor legislative framework under the current act with respect to conflicts of interest and an inappropriate board and management composition that had enabled the Puffing Billy Preservation Society to control the ETRB. The Ombudsman concluded that those governance failings that I have just outlined included that the society's position of control had facilitated the offending. In response to the Ombudsman's investigation the government commissioned PwC to undertake a review into the governance arrangements, and many of these matters have been canvassed in other members' contributions this evening. What we know of course is that prior to the Ombudsman's investigation the former Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources undertook a review into the current act in 2016, which recommended that the ETRB act be replaced and a new act be established in its place—so a whole range of measures have occurred since the important tabling of the Ombudsman's report.

The bill will go to improve the governance arrangements at the railway. It goes back to those original values, those important points around making sure that there is safety, there is a surety, but that the framework and the mechanisms that are put in place around the railway are as robust and as good as they can be. The bill will introduce disclosure and reporting obligations that align with modern standards to improve ministerial oversight of the Puffing Billy Railway Board and its operations. The corporate governance obligations in the bill are more extensive than in the current act, and there are a number of key provisions, which given the time I will not go through, but I know other members have had the opportunity to reference those in their contributions.

We know that the Puffing Billy Railway is one of Victoria's most popular and iconic tourist attractions, and we know that the bill repeals and replaces, as I mentioned, the Emerald Railway Tourist Act 1977. The bill provides a range of objectives for the Puffing Billy Railway Board. Those include: ensuring the economic sustainability and viability of the railway; maintaining the heritage significance of the railway; managing and promoting safe operation of the railway; promoting the tourism offering, which is significant, and other members have spoken about that; recognising the importance of volunteer participation in the operation of the railway; promoting and understanding of education relating to rail heritage; and promoting the preservation of narrow-gauge rail heritage, something that I know members have spoken about. For those that are very much into the history and the evolution of trains within the state, I know that is something that some people are uniquely and particularly passionate about. I think we know that whenever you meet these people in the community they are very much train enthusiasts and people who can certainly give you a lot of information about the evolution of railway, whether that be in our state, other states or across the country.

It goes on—to develop and maintain partnerships with community organisations and businesses. It is certainly important to not look at an iconic attraction such as the Puffing Billy railway in isolation. We know, and I am sure you know in your community, Acting Speaker Blackwood, that it is critically important that any local iconic attraction within a community works with that community and that the community is well informed about any operations that are occurring. There is the management around the site, there are all sorts of measures, whether it be traffic or locals who come in for additional tourism. Whether that be supporting small business because you are visiting that area to see that attraction, these are really important operations. What is important, and it goes to the point that is provided in the direction for the board, is that that community work is maintained.

And of course I mentioned earlier providing a safe, inclusive and diverse working environment for employees and volunteers, something that I know all members should support and certainly something that I support as well. As I mentioned, this is a critical response, a really important response to the Ombudsman's report released in June 2018. We know that the volunteers that are involved make a vital contribution to the operation of the railway through driving locomotives, preserving trains and track maintenance, and we know that there are, as others have mentioned, 300 volunteers, including many from the Puffing Billy Preservation Society.

We know that the work around the governance is critically important—working with the community, making sure that at each and every opportunity the board and those that are involved with this iconic attraction for our state are doing everything they can to ensure that the safety and the security of those visitors, those tourists who come, is maintained.

I will finish my contribution where I began, and that is by saying that this government and indeed all members of the house should value and respect all of our iconic tourist attractions that exist in this state. What we have seen over this journey is that when things go wrong they need to be addressed as soon as possible. Particularly the member for Lara, I think, spoke incredibly passionately about what happens when these instances occur in our community. They are shameful, they are disgraceful and at each and every opportunity in government we need to call them out. With those remarks I commend the bill to the house.

Ms HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (18:57): I also rise to make a contribution to the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022 in the short time that is left. First just a bit of an overview of the bill: the purpose is to provide for the ongoing management and upkeep of the iconic Puffing Billy Railway, which has a 121-year-old history in Victoria. It attracts something like half a million visitors every year. Of course that was prior to the pandemic, and I am sure it will be welcoming many, many visitors back from now. The way that this will be achieved is by repealing the Emerald Tourist Railway Act 1977 and replacing it with this legislation, which will modernise and recognise the significance of the railway and the importance of volunteers in its operation and also amend the name of the board to reflect the more commonly known name Puffing Billy.

Although the Puffing Billy has been a fun day out for families, filled school calendars with excursion locations and made for a classic feet-out-of-the-carriage snap—probably not too safe—the bill acknowledges the devastation and trauma that has destroyed the childhoods of so many Victorians for decades. The Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022 addresses findings and recommendations from the Ombudsman's investigation and related reviews in relation to the Emerald Tourist Railway Board's operations and adopts a framework that closely aligns with modern standards to protect children. In June 2018 the Victorian Ombudsman released a report titled *Investigation into Child Sex Offender ... Involvement with Puffing Billy and Other Railway Bodies*—I have left out the name because we do not want to speak such awful names. The Ombudsman found significant governance failings at the Emerald Tourist Railway Board, who were responsible for the preservation, development, promotion, operation and maintenance of the railway—namely the Puffing Billy Preservation Society's ability to control the board and subsequently play a role, because it did. At that time it played a role in allowing the most awful of people to commit the most heinous crimes against children, and it was with the

knowledge of the board about the convictions of crimes against children that they still continued to re-employ this person.

In November 2013 I spoke in this house on the Family and Community Development Committee report—

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

ROOMING HOUSE REGULATION

Mr SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (19:00): (6276) My adjournment is for the Premier, and the action I ask for is an immediate review of Melbourne Home Share Pty Ltd's licence to operate a rooming house and a fundamental policy review to crack down on rogue rooming house operators. Imagine someone pacing down your local street in the middle of the night waving a large machete. Imagine being woken at 5.00 am by the sound of a neighbour smashing a car on the street with a hammer. Imagine having someone high on drugs knocking on your door and demanding money. Well, this is a daily occurrence in terms of what goes on in Albion Street. The residents have been saying for some time now that they want an investigation into the operator of this rooming house, which is not only putting those in the street at risk but also putting those in the rooming house at risk.

Melbourne Home Share has abrogated its duty to the community and to the vulnerable residents in this house. Melbourne Home Share runs four rooming houses in my electorate. On 25 April 2021 Victoria Police conducted a raid and uncovered 100 illicit marijuana plants—these are not small ones; they are my height, 6 foot—and this resulted in an arrest. Ten months later, on 25 January 2022, it happened again—200 plants and 200 arrests. This was all under the eyes and under the supervision of Melbourne Home Share. Residents are simply at their wits' end.

On five separate occasions over the last year we have raised this in Parliament. Nothing has been done. I have raised it with the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. I have raised it with the Minister for Police. Each time we have gone to the Premier's ministers nothing has been done to address this. The Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation has washed her hands, telling us that Melbourne Home Share complies with the necessary standards under the Rooming House Operators Act 2016 and thus no action can be taken.

Premier, if a rooming house operator is able to continue to hold a licence despite two separate police raids eight months apart to secure 300-plus full-size marijuana plants, then clearly there is something wrong with this law. How can a landlord inspection miss 200 full-size plants? Premier, you as the government set the agenda and you control the rules. Therefore I urge you to again review the suitability of Melbourne Home Share Pty Ltd to hold a licence, to guarantee the safety of residents both inside the rooming house and in Albion Street and to commit to policy reform in the area of rooming house regulation.

MARYBOROUGH EDUCATION CENTRE

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (19:03): (6277) My matter on the adjournment tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Education, and the action that I seek is for him to visit Maryborough Education Centre to see firsthand the amazing work the teachers are doing across an amazingly diverse cohort of students. I had the privilege of visiting this amazing school last week with eight regional caucus colleagues, including yourself, Deputy Speaker—a Maryborough gal—the Minister for Training and Skills and the Minister for Regional Development together with Labor's candidate for Ripon, Martha Haylett, who was educated at the neighbouring Castlemaine Secondary College. I am sure that the minister remembers, like I do, our first year in Parliament, when former member for Ripon Joe Helper

and late, great member for Ballarat Province John McQuilten simply would not stop talking about how amazing this school was when it opened in 2005.

Aspiration, kindness and respect are the school's values, and it shows. Maryborough Education Centre aims to deliver the highest possible teaching and learning experience to every child every day, and there are 1000 students. The school caters for all students through the delivery of a comprehensive prep-to-year-12 curriculum. A specialist setting provides tailored programs individually developed to meet the students' needs. They are rightly proud of their flourishing, inclusive and respectful culture, which includes 66 students who identify as Indigenous. The school hosts a doctors in schools program, a school breakfast program and many extracurricular activities. As you are aware, Deputy Speaker, the principal advised us of how important the mentoring program has been following COVID and also that they look forward to the Smile Squad and how it will help with students' dental health.

It does not bear thinking about what could happen to the students at this school should the coalition win government at the November election, because Liberals always cut education—it is in their DNA. Some in this place have said that the main performance measures that matter are the TER scores and whether students apply for tertiary education and get a place, rather than a tailored education for every student that connects them to work, to university or to TAFE, together with health and wellbeing support. I know that we as a government really value that individualised approach that is occurring at Maryborough Education Centre. It is often seen as a disadvantaged community, but this school is really looking at each child and preparing them for life after school, the life of work and beyond. I look forward to seeing the minister visiting this great school and also many other schools across the Ripon electorate.

LABOUR SHORTAGES

Mr D O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (19:06): (6278) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to take action to alleviate the chronic labour shortages around Victoria. Now, bear with me on why this is going to the Minister for Health. There are two issues in particular that I think are the Minister for Health's responsibility, and he could assist with these issues, acknowledging that labour shortages have myriad reasons behind them. But there are two at the moment that are causing huge problems for our employers and workers right across the state, particularly in Gippsland South. One is the seven-day isolation period required for household contacts, which is placing enormous stress on workers and businesses, with many fit, healthy people forced off work because someone else in their household has tested positive to COVID. Now, I appreciate this is something that needs to be carefully managed from a public health perspective, but it is time that we look at whether it continues to be necessary to ensure that all household contacts are actually isolating in the case of someone testing positive. Of course there are exemptions for critical workers, so if there can be exemptions for critical workers, I think it is getting to a point where that should be looked at across the board. I am aware also that this is an issue that is probably being discussed at a national level.

The second issue is the ongoing exclusion of some workers due to the vaccination mandates, which surely are no longer serving any public health purpose, when we have 94 or 95 per cent of the population already vaccinated, with the exception of health and aged care workers, where I believe it continues to be necessary, given the vulnerable people that they are working with. But everywhere I go in my electorate of Gippsland South at the moment and in every business I walk into, labour shortages are an issue. Whether it is a coffee shop, whether it is schools, whether it is the health system, whether it is restaurants and pubs, small manufacturing and everywhere in between, it is just a constant story. Coupled with a lack of available and affordable housing—that is another issue, because often people can get the new employees but they cannot actually find anywhere to live—these are significant issues.

As I said, these are not the only two reasons for a shortage of labour. There are myriad reasons for it, not the least being of course the closed borders in the last couple of years, the lack of backpacker labour and many others. But there are two things the government could do, I believe, that would actually get some people back into the workforce to increase the pool for everyone, and they are:

remove the seven-day isolation period and the vaccine mandates. These are impacting on other workers because many businesses are actually closing—many cafes, for example, are closing two days a week because they simply do not have the staff to keep open—so those staff are missing out. So I ask the minister to take this action to ensure that we do have the staff to employ in our businesses.

MENTAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS PROGRAM

Mr HALSE (Ringwood) (19:09): (6279) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education. The minister recently shared online a statistic that in 2019–20 the recurrent Victorian government expenditure exceeded \$15 500 per government school student. This is a point of pride. As a Labor government we continually invest in our young people and their education. Victoria was, it should be noted, the first Australian state to make education free, secular and compulsory for all students aged six to 15 no matter where they come from or what their home looks like. We continually invest in this outstanding legacy of making sure that everyone has access to a fantastic education.

In my electorate alone over my term as the member for Ringwood the Andrews Labor government has invested more than \$47 million in our local schools, building outstanding facilities. But although world-class facilities are fantastic and a great starting point, education, as we know, is about much more than infrastructure. It is about much more than the academics. It is a holistic investment in future generations and every single angle of wellbeing and educational pursuit and growth. Buildings are fantastic, and building brand new buildings is a fantastic achievement, but what really matters is that holistic approach.

Our mental health practitioners in secondary schools program utilises this safe space and gives children and young students access to the types of facilities that they need to make sure that their education is holistic. A year ahead of schedule we have put a mental health practitioner in every single government secondary school in my electorate of Ringwood, of which there are three. The action I seek from the Minister for Education is to provide an update to the house on this program's implementation in secondary schools in Ringwood and what levels of support it will open up for the typical Ringwood student.

V/LINE BICYCLE BOOKING SYSTEM

Ms BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (19:11): (6280) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public Transport, and the action I seek is for a booking system to be implemented on V/Line services to allow certainty for passengers carrying bikes on trains. As regional Victoria looks to recover and rebuild from two years of lockdowns and restrictions that have crippled the tourism sector, there has never been a more important time to encourage holiday-makers to get out and see the sights of our state. But under current V/Line policy people who want to travel on the train to Warrnambool with their bikes face the prospect of being stranded on the platform. Likewise, there is the possibility they could travel to Warrnambool with their bikes on the train but not be allowed to get back on the train with them.

Bikes are only allowed on V/Line trains if there is space available, and the conductor has the final say. Should bikes be allowed, it is on a first-come, first-served basis. This system lacks the clarity and certainty travellers need when planning a holiday. Having a situation where somebody could be trying to return home and turn up to the station with their bike only to be told they cannot take it with them is archaic and unworkable. For many people a bike is part of their luggage, so it seems nonsensical to have a system where they might or might not be able to bring it with them. It is putting obstacles in front of travellers that just are not needed at a time when we should be making travel in regional Victoria easier, not harder. The rising price of petrol looms and also acts as a deterrent for people visiting regional Victoria by car, which opens the door to encourage more people to travel via the V/Line service. This makes it even more crucial to have policies that encourage rather than hinder people from travelling on our trains.

I have been urging the minister for months to intervene in an ongoing issue which prevents a Warrnambool tourism bus operator from accessing the public car park at the station for easy access for tourists to her service. It is yet another example of the roadblocks this government is putting in front of tourists and tourism operators who have been trying their hardest to rebuild and recover from the pandemic. South-West Coast has many popular bike tracks and trails for riders of all ages and experiences. One of them is the Port Fairy–Warrnambool Rail Trail. The 38-kilometre rail trail has two main sections, Port Fairy to Koroit and Koroit to Warrnambool, which circles the picturesque Tower Hill Wildlife Reserve. It is an extremely popular trail for locals and tourists, particularly those interested in cycling.

I am sure many bicycle enthusiasts would love to explore our region, but the rail uncertainty situation prevents them from taking off. Cycling is a terrific form of exercise for both health and wellbeing, so it makes no sense to have a barrier in the way of people who would like to travel with their bikes via the V/Line service. An online booking system is an easy fix, and it makes sense. I urge the minister to consider this as another way to attract travellers to our region to enjoy the many bike trails on offer.

SICK PAY GUARANTEE

Ms THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (19:14): (6281) My adjournment is for the Minister for Workplace Safety in the other place, and I ask the minister to join me in Northcote to meet some of our casual and contract workers to talk about our new sick pay guarantee. For too long and for too many Victorians there has been a dismal choice to make when they fall ill. The choices are to either stay home and lose out on getting paid or struggle through your workday when your body just needs to rest. And if you have ever worked in a casual job, you know that it is not just that one day that matters. It is the fact that on any given night you might get a call or a text at 11.00 pm to say, ‘Thanks, but you aren’t needed tomorrow’—there goes that day’s pay. It is the fact that at any time at all you might be told, ‘Sorry, but we no longer need you. You no longer have a job’, and there is no severance, no built-up leave to pay out—nothing. When your job and your pay are that insecure, every paid day counts. You may literally not be able to afford being sick. We are changing that.

The industries covered by our new sick pay guarantee are some of the most insecure industries in our state. They cover hospitality, retail, food preparation, cleaning, laundries, security and supermarkets as well as aged and disability care. These represent more than 150 000 workers, who for the first time will have access to five days sick and carers pay. It is an Australian first, welcomed by our unions and thousands of hardworking Victorians. It is also something that only Labor would deliver. This kind of policy would just never make it into the wheelhouse of either the Liberals or the Greens, yet it is the kind of reform that will launch us into a new way of thinking about our work and our wellbeing. It is the kind of reform that will allow us to not just recover from the pandemic, where so many of our insecure workers lost out, but to transform our economy and our society into a fairer, more equal and more prosperous state.

We are not wasting a moment in this mission. Since coming into this Parliament I have been proud to support groundbreaking reforms to protect the lives, wellbeing and rights of Victorian workers: our historic workplace manslaughter laws; a provisional payment scheme for mental health injuries; making wage theft a crime; and wage subsidies for sole parents. This sick pay guarantee builds on our record and will be deeply felt by my community, where we have a very large number of young casual workers, particularly in hospitality and retail.

No-one should have to choose between their pay and their health or the health of someone they love. As the member for Northcote, I will be making it my mission to make sure that as many local workers as possible know about our sick pay guarantee and sign up to receive the benefits of this landmark new scheme. I welcome the minister to my electorate to help me get the word out and to hear directly from our local workers and businesses about just exactly what this means.

TRAM ROUTE 78

Mr HIBBINS (Pahran) (19:17): (6282) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public Transport, and the action I seek is for the minister to upgrade the 78 tram. Now, we love the 78 tram in my community. It is our neighbourhood tram. It runs right through the electorate along Chapel Street but then up across the Yarra to Church Street and is a really vital connection between communities on both sides of the Yarra. It is one of the few cross-city trams that does not pass through the CBD, but it has been neglected by governments for many years and is in desperate need of attention. My recent survey of residents and people who use the 78 tram found that this is one of the main issues. It is a really slow route—in fact I believe it has actually been called previously one of the slowest trams in the world. The waits between services are far too long, and the tram stops are dangerous and inaccessible.

Residents, the overwhelming majority, responded that they would use it more if it was improved. I have heard that people mainly use the 78 tram for meeting friends, for shopping and for connecting to other public transport. People use it often on the weekend or during the middle of the day, but due to the limited frequency of services people will often use a car instead. One resident even mentioned that taking the 78 tram to work takes the same amount of time as walking. That is a common reflection on the 78 tram, that often you might be better off just walking the length of Chapel Street rather than catching the tram. These concerns are common and really highlight the importance of upgrading this local tram route.

There are several achievable upgrades needed to improve the 78 which have the support of residents, including increasing the frequency of services, increasing the speed and priority of services, for the tram stops to be upgraded and for new, accessible trams to be rolled out along the route. The stops along the 78 tram are dangerous and inaccessible, especially for schoolkids, people with limited mobility, parents with prams, wheelchair users and the elderly, and this discourages many people from using the route 78 tram even more. So, yes, level-access tram stops are needed along the route to make sure that it is accessible and comfortable for everyone. Upgrading the route 78 tram will help ensure that everyone has access to safe, accessible and frequent trams along this important route.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Mr McGUIRE (Broadmeadows) (19:19): (6283) My request is to the Minister for Education. The action I seek is to accelerate the promotion of practical skills that deliver pathways to Victoria's most in-demand jobs. This is critical to make the transition from deindustrialisation into the new jobs of the future, particularly in Broadmeadows, where I am delighted that I have been able to leverage an off-the-leash dog park and a bike track delivering no jobs to get private sector investment of a billion dollars that is predicted to create 5000 jobs at no cost to taxpayers. This is centred on the old derelict Ford site. We know it devastated Broadmeadows when that was closed, and that marked the demise of Australia's once-proud automotive industry. We are bringing Broadmeadows back. We are delivering the new industries and the new jobs and of course we are making the vaccines. It is the highest level of manufacturing that defines the sophistication of what is needed to fight the pandemics of our time and to look after these catastrophes, and we are soon to have another revolution with a \$1.8 billion deal for new vaccines against influenza nearby.

Now, to bring it down to its practical situation here, we want to look at the senior secondary pathways reforms. I describe this as being for students who think better with their hands. We need these students and we need to make this connection. The Victorian government has reforms planned to integrate the Victorian certificate of applied learning, VCAL, into the Victorian certificate of education. This is a really important evolution in what we are doing to give Victorian students high-quality practical skills to make these pathways to Victoria's most in-demand jobs. This fits within the bigger picture structure that is being delivered.

In May I was delighted to be with the Minister for Training and Skills in the other place, Gayle Tierney, and we both signed off as witnesses to the memorandum of understanding at Kangan Institute's

Broadmeadows campus. This agreement delivers a new, much-needed collaboration between Kangan Institute and Northern Health, leveraging the capabilities of both facilities to support future training and the health sector vital for Melbourne's north, and there could be no better time than in a time of pandemic. The Andrews government has also delivered \$60 million for the new Broadmeadows Health and Community Centre of Excellence. This means that we can provide the pathways for blue-collar jobs. We have got plumbing in there as well. We can connect the disconnected to opportunity. We have brought in the billion-dollar investment, and now is the time just to add this other critical pathway at secondary school as well.

POLICE MENTAL HEALTH

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) (19:23): (6284) I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police. The action I seek is an urgent investigation into the causes of mental health injuries to officers in eastern region division 4 that includes an explanation of what actions are being taken to identify and remove the dangers to these officers.

The lack of police in my electorate is putting the members on the beat and the public at risk. Last sitting week I raised the issue of the young single mum, with her house under siege from a drunk who had smashed a window at her home. You may recall that a neighbour intervened and was hit over the head with a beer bottle for his troubles. Police never attended, despite 000 calls.

On Valentine's Day a Wodonga woman called police on behalf of her mum who had a car driven at her in the street. She called 000 and again no-one attended. The daughter rang the police station the next day, and the police member was apologetic. By the time they had gotten to the job it was 4½ hours later, and it was a drive-by. She was told that the lesser jobs were prioritised because of the lack of staff. I do not think an assault with a weapon is a low priority, but anyway.

There is more of this going on. A 72-year-old man with mental health issues is suffering through a lack of action over repeated illegal weekend fireworks in West Wodonga. He phoned 000 without response. He sent an email to the station commander that included his fireworks log. His interpretation of the response was 'Poor us; we don't have the resources. You're the only one who cares, and we have more serious things to do'.

A wellbeing officer at a Wodonga school was threatened by a student. Police did not charge him despite having admissions of the offence. An intervention order was invoked. Even though that order was breached multiple times, police refused to extradite the offender from just across the border in New South Wales, in Albury. The victim believes the child's disability made it too hard for the police, and she was in constant fear for her life. It took nine months for police to act on that breach.

I could go on with all these case histories, but at the start of the month I understand there were 28 police members in eastern region division 4 sick or broken as a result of workload and/or management practices. It is not only responding to incidents, it is the follow-ups, investigations and paperwork that are falling by the wayside. Mental health injuries and the causes of those injuries cannot be ignored. Minister, you have a responsibility morally and under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 as well. I fear for my former colleagues, those members that are all left behind to carry this weight. The extra workload puts their own health and wellbeing at risk.

This is not a numbers game. These officers are not disposable, so do not blow me off with, 'This government has given more police resources', because they are not coming to country and regional Victoria. It is not backing up those hardworking people in country and regional Victoria. So for the sake of Victorians and our members of the police force, please, you need to act now.

EASTERN COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (19:26): (6285) My adjournment matter is directed to the Attorney-General, the Honourable Jaclyn Symes in the other place, and the action I seek is for her to join me to visit the Eastern Community Legal Centre, which provides vital support for my constituents and

indeed all residents of Melbourne's eastern suburbs. The Andrews government recognises the importance of what community legal centres do. They are critical parts of our social fabric, because all Victorians deserve timely and equitable access to justice. That is why in the last state budget the Andrews government committed to investing \$30 million in vital legal assistance and critical early intervention support services, including support for community legal centres, legal aid and dispute resolution services, to support their critical work.

Our community legal centres are a critical component of our justice system, and some of the crucial programs being funded by this government through community legal centres include the Mabels family violence service and specialist services for the LGBTIQ+ community. This of course is in addition to the funding provided for the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to implement a civil response scheme to address harmful LGBTIQ+ plus change or suppression practices. There is no doubt that the pandemic has highlighted social and economic inequality both locally and around the world, and only an Andrews Labor government is committed to tackling these complex and multifaceted challenges. One element of our response has been to fight injustice at its roots. Whether it be the sick pay guarantee, the 12 000-dwelling Big Housing Build or a \$3.8 billion rebuilding of our mental health system, each of these reforms will go a long way to reducing systemic inequity in our state.

But alongside these broad legislative and policy reforms it is crucial we support Victorians to tackle injustice on an individual level in their day-to-day lives, which is where our community legal centres come into play. For many of my constituents it is the Eastern Community Legal Centre that comes to their aid, providing free high-quality legal advice and guidance on a broad range of issues. In serving my constituents my electorate office makes many referrals to this legal centre, and those referrals cover a whole range of matters, including family law, victims of crime compensation and neighbourhood disputes. Often these constituents are from lower socio-economic backgrounds or diverse backgrounds, and if it was not for our local community legal centres, they would not have access to the justice they deserve and we would all be worse off. This has been especially true in the times of economic and social upheaval brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. So I would be delighted if the Attorney-General could join me at the Eastern Community Legal Centre to hear firsthand about the terrific work they do for constituents in Burwood and right across the east.

RESPONSES

Mr PEARSON (Essendon—Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services, Minister for Creative Industries) (19:28): The member for Caulfield raised a matter with the Premier in relation to rooming houses in his electorate, and I will pass that matter on. The member for Yan Yean raised a matter with the Minister for Education about a ministerial visit, and I will refer that item on as well. The member for Gippsland South asked a question for the Minister for Health in relation to public health rules, and I will pass that item on. The member for Ringwood raised a question, again to the Minister for Education, in relation to mental health practitioners and the rollout of those practitioners into his electorate, and I will pass that matter on. The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport in relation to a booking service for bikes, and I will pass that matter on.

Ms Britnell: I'm sure you will.

Mr PEARSON: I will. I will see him on Friday night. The member for Northcote raised a matter for the Minister for Workplace Safety seeking a ministerial visit, and I will pass that item on. The member for Prahran raised a matter with the Minister for Public Transport around upgrading the 78 tram, and I will pass that on. The member for Broadmeadows raised a matter for the Minister for Education in relation to the acceleration of pathways to in-demand jobs, and I will pass that matter on. The member for Benambra raised a matter for the Minister for Police in relation to an investigation around mental health injuries in eastern region, and I will pass that matter on. Finally, the member for

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Burwood raised a matter with the Attorney-General in relation to visiting the Eastern Community Legal Centre, and I will pass that matter on as well.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house now stands adjourned until tomorrow.

House adjourned 7.30 pm.