



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

### **60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 8 March 2023**



## **Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly**

### **60th Parliament**

#### **Speaker**

Maree Edwards

#### **Deputy Speaker**

Matt Fregon

#### **Acting Speakers**

Juliana Addison, Jordan Crugnale, Daniela De Martino, Paul Edbrooke,  
Wayne Farnham, Paul Hamer, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant,  
John Mullahy, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor and Iwan Walters

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

Jacinta Allan

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

Ben Carroll

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

John Pesutto

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

David Southwick

#### **Leader of the Nationals**

Peter Walsh

#### **Deputy Leader of the Nationals**

Emma Kealy

#### **Leader of the House**

Mary-Anne Thomas

#### **Manager of Opposition Business**

James Newbury

**Members of the Legislative Assembly**  
**60th Parliament**

<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel <sup>1</sup>	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Benham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren <sup>2</sup>	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim	Werribee	ALP
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan <sup>5</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Famham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden <sup>3</sup>	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will <sup>4</sup>	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam	Prahran	Greens	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole <sup>6</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

<sup>1</sup> ALP until 5 August 2023

<sup>2</sup> ALP until 29 April 2024

<sup>3</sup> Sworn in 6 February 2024

<sup>4</sup> Resigned 27 September 2023

<sup>5</sup> Resigned 7 July 2023

<sup>6</sup> Sworn in 3 October 2023

**Party abbreviations**

ALP – Australian Labor Party, Greens – Australian Greens,  
Ind – Independent, Lib – Liberal Party of Australia, Nat – National Party of Australia

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**Wednesday 8 March 2023**

**The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

***Documents***

**Documents**

**Incorporated list as follows:**

**DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:

Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission:

Report 2021–22 under s 31 of the *Crimes (Assumed Identities) Act 2004*

Report 2021–22 under s 42BI of the *Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1958*

Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Department of – Report 2021–22 under s 30L of the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999*

Environment Protection Authority – Report 2021–22 under s 30L of the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999*

Victorian Information Commissioner, Office of (OVIC) – Process versus Outcome: Investigation into VicForests’ handling of a series of FOI requests under s 61O of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* – Ordered to be published

Special Investigator, Office of – Report 2021–22 under s 30L of the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999*

Victoria Police:

Report 2021–22 under s 31 of the *Crimes (Assumed Identities) Act 2004*

Report 2021–22 under s 42BI of the *Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1958*

Report 2021–22 under s 30L of the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999*.

***Bills***

**Local Government (Moirā Shire Council) Bill 2023**

***Council’s agreement***

**The SPEAKER (09:35):** I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Local Government (Moirā Shire Council) Bill 2023 without amendment.

**Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022**

***Introduction and first reading***

**The SPEAKER (09:35):** I have received a message from the Council sending a bill, the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022:

The Legislative Council transmit to the Legislative Assembly ‘A Bill for an Act to revise the statute law of Victoria, to make minor amendments to the **Competition Policy Reform (Victoria) Act 1995** and for other purposes’ with which they request the agreement of the Legislative Assembly.

It is signed by the President. I understand that the Minister for Government Services will take charge of the bill.

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Government Services, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Consumer Affairs) (09:36): I move:

That this bill now be read a first time.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

*Motions***Joint select committee**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (09:36): I desire to move, by leave:

That:

- (1) A joint select committee be appointed to inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament by 30 November 2023 on the systemic sexual abuse of children in Victorian government schools, including:
  - (a) the practices, policies and protocols in Victorian government schools for responding to allegations of sexual abuse of children, including measures put in place to respond to concerns about sexual abuse in those schools;
  - (b) a proposal on how the government should provide an appropriate institutional response to the matters considered.
- (2) In undertaking the inquiry, the committee should not encroach upon the responsibilities of investigatory agencies or the courts in relation to particular cases, nor prejudice the conduct or outcome of investigations or court proceedings.
- (3) Such committee to consist of four members from the Legislative Assembly nominated by the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business and three members from the Legislative Council nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council and the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council; and that the overall composition of the committee should be not more than three government members, three opposition members, and one cross-bench member.
- (4) The members to be appointed by lodgement of the names with the Speaker and President no later than 24 March 2023.
- (5) A message be sent to the Legislative Council requesting their agreement.

**The SPEAKER:** Is leave granted?

**Leave refused.**

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister at the table clearly nodded on behalf of the government that the government provided leave. The videotape will show that absolutely clearly. There is no question on this chamber that the minister at the table provided leave. You do not get a second option. The minister provided leave. This is a very important issue. It was clear to the chamber, and I would ask you to consider the fact that the minister clearly provided leave to the chamber.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I have not called the member for Sandringham. There is no point of order.

*Members statements***International Women's Day**

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (09:37): Dear women in my electorate of Carrum, on this International Women's Day I want to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation for all that you do. You might think that no-one notices, but your strength, resilience, courage and fortitude inspire me every day. I know each of you face unique challenges in your lives. Some of you face them alone; others of you are more fortunate and have someone to listen and help. I know you still do more of the domestic and unpaid work. You still get paid less than men. You are still more likely to take parental leave and be the primary carer and work part-time, yet you get on with your days without fanfare. You keep things ticking over. You are quite simply amazing, so please do not believe people when they try to tell you that you are not good enough, or that you cannot do something because of your age or background or sexuality or religion or education or work. Do not believe people when they try to tell you that you are not smart enough or that you are not worthy or that you are too emotional or unstable or that no-one cares what you think because, trust me, they will try.

You are not invisible. You matter to me and to every person in this government. Together we will – we must – keep slogging for a more equitable and just and fair and safe world for women and girls, because it is a slog. It is unrelenting. It is definitely not all pink or purple or cupcakes or morning teas. But International Women's Day should never go unnoticed. It is such an important opportunity to think about all the women before us – how hard they fought, how much they achieved – and equally today is a day to remind each of us that we can never, ever give up.

### **International Women's Day**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (09:39): On this International Women's Day I want to give a shout-out to some of the great women that are playing excellent roles in my electorate of Caulfield. This is not an exhaustive list because there are so many to mention, but I do want to mention a few. We have some great community organisations for women run by women. The Jewish Professional Women's Network president Lee-at Jacobson will be joining me in Parliament today. Lisa Ezekiel is CEO of the National Council of Jewish Women of Australia, and Michelle Kornberg recently celebrated 10 years of the Caring Mums program, an initiative that we have well supported. Kathy Kaplan OAM is founder and president of Impact for Women, which assists women experiencing family violence and which I am a proud ambassador for. Ronit Chrapot, the CEO of WIZO, and Ruth Scheuer OAM will be here. I look forward to MCing their fashion parade in a few weeks time; hopefully I will be able to get some tips.

Women are also running emergency relief programs: Jennifer Hunt, founder and CEO of Pet Medical Crisis; Danielle Eyssens, a unit controller at Glen Eira SES; Deb Brook, president of Bayside Community Emergency Relief; Simonne Whine, founder of NextGen Philanthropy; and Gali Blacher, co-founder of the Good Box, who we interviewed a few weeks ago.

Women in sport: Ajax football club have created history by appointing their first ever female president Alida Lipton, and Sharon Roseman is co-president of Maccabi Victoria. Thank you to our wonderful women, who are achieving so much for our community.

### **International Women's Day**

**Juliana ADDISON** (Wendouree) (09:40): International Women's Day is a day to celebrate our government's commitment to women and gender equality. From our first ever gender equality strategy to Australia's first ever gender equality act, Victoria is leading the nation on gender equality. The Andrews Labor government respects women and recognises the important contribution women make to Victoria. Sixty-four per cent of Victorian government ministers are women. Our women ministers are responsible for many progressive policies and projects, including bringing back the SEC, free TAFE, free kinder, the West Gate Tunnel, women's health and the sick pay guarantee. Having women in significant leadership roles changes conversations and changes outcomes for women and girls. The Andrews Labor government understands that when there are more women at the decision-making table better decisions are made. That is why we have gender parity on paid government boards. We are providing free pads and tampons in schools, and we are extending this to public hospitals and libraries, TAFEs, train stations and courts. We are transforming women's health with our commitment of over \$121 million over the next four years to deliver 20 new women's health clinics and an additional nine sexual and reproductive health clinics. We are building early parenting centres across the state, and we have established public IVF, making it easier for Victorians to become parents. We are also investing \$5 million for women's health, including the creation of the women's health institute. Happy International Women's Day to all Victorians.

### **Duck hunting**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (09:42): The Andrews Labor government stands condemned for its announcements around duck season this year, a blatant political decision that ignores evidence and science. Never again can we take this government seriously when it says it is acting on the best science; it will always put politics first. The decision is based apparently on 'a more precautionary approach' and

‘poor behaviour by some hunters’ and is an insult to the vast majority of law-abiding hunters. The government’s own figures showed 99.9 per cent compliance on bag limits last season. There is no new evidence to justify a decision like this, especially when environmental conditions for duck breeding and habitat are among the best we have seen for decades. I am not a hunter myself, so why they do it is perhaps better described by a fifth-generation hunter from Gippsland, who puts it this way:

Duck hunting, despite what the media and government would make you believe, is not about a lust to kill or piles of dead ducks. It’s about family, friends, relationships, boat rides in the dark, sunrises, sunsets, laughs. It’s about camp fires, wet dogs, muddy boots, smelly cars, Two stroke exhausts and a beer here and there. Duck hunting is about conservation and time spent in the field watching, listening and lots of waiting.

Many of those opposed to duck season do not want hunting of any sort and ultimately no human use of animals at all. Labor should understand this. The Labor government stands condemned for this anti-science decision.

### **Bronwyn Flack**

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (09:43): Happy International Women’s Day to all the wonderful women in my electorate and of course my colleagues in this place. I would like to acknowledge one particular woman. On Saturday 25 February I had the pleasure of joining my friend and colleague the member for Melton to attend an RSL Active day organised by the indomitable Bronwyn Flack. RSL Active is a fantastic initiative which, as the name says, aims to keep RSL members active by offering activities for veterans and their families. I am very proud that this government supports our veterans. In 2016 the Victorian government and RSL Victoria launched this new initiative called RSL Active. In the 2022–23 state budget a further \$200,000 over two years was allocated to support RSL Victoria to deliver the program. There are currently 10 sub-branches, including the combined Melton, Ballan and Bacchus Marsh RSL Active in the western region. Steve and I joined a group of members from Bacchus Marsh at Lake Dewar in Myrniong. Steve tried his hand at archery, but we both drew the line at paddleboarding. It was great to share the barbecue lunch with veterans of all ages and genders, and I want to really give a big shout-out to Bronwyn Flack, who organised the day. There are so many women in our community that need to be acknowledged, who do many, many things, but Bronwyn is someone who quietly gets on and changes the world.

### **Probationary driving age**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) (09:45): Children and young people here in Victoria are treated differently when it comes to driving and getting their licence than in any other state in this country. I think it is vital that we start to consider why 17-year-olds cannot get their licence in Victoria but just across the border they can get their licence. It impacts particularly in regional areas with young people trying to get to education or a job. If you have got an apprenticeship, you need to get your vehicle and get your licence as soon as you can. In metropolitan areas, young people cannot take tools on a bus or a train. Some of these young kids who want to get out of the education system and into a trade where we need people do not have the accessibility to get a licence, which makes it harder to get a job. We are asking our community: what do you think? Do you think we should reduce the age to 17 and change it so it is away from the same age that you can start drinking? Do you think we should be on par with the rest of the country? And it will not impact on the fact that every child will still have to do 120 hours, because we know the 120 hours is a very important aspect of the training and education to improve safety on our roads.

I am going to call on the government continuously between now and the next election. We have to strongly consider treating young people here the same, because if you are in Wodonga, you cannot get your licence, which makes it difficult to get a job up against a young person who is from Albury who can get their licence at 17, and that is simply unfair on young people here in Victoria.

**Lara electorate women in manufacturing**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (09:47): From the Avalon air show to the Geelong Manufacturing Council awards, it has been industry and innovation on display in my electorate this past week. And on International Women's Day it is an honour to highlight some of the women in manufacturing in the Geelong region. We all know that Geelong, especially the north of Geelong, is the manufacturing heart of our state, but for too long this industry has been male dominated. I am proud to say, as the first female member for Lara, this is changing. Standing next to the member for Geelong and the member for Bellarine, we can see the women of Geelong stepping up and taking on these challenges.

Last week I attended the Geelong Manufacturing Council's 25th anniversary celebration. The Geelong Manufacturing Council is ably led by two remarkable women: chair Lyn George and CEO Jennifer Conley. Together Lyn and Jennifer are leading manufacturing in Geelong and into the future, creating more jobs, more opportunities, and paving the way for the women of Geelong to take up careers in the manufacturing sector. Lyn Morgan is no stranger to Geelong's manufacturing sector. Since 2017 Lyn has led the team of Northern Futures, a not-for-profit organisation addressing disadvantage in Geelong's north. Over this time Lyn has worked closely with the manufacturing sector. She was honoured last week with the Geelong Manufacturing Council's community manufacturing award, and I congratulate her on this remarkable achievement. And finally, I acknowledge Adele Welsh from the Geelong Trades Hall Council, a trailblazing woman in our town.

**Euroa Health**

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (09:48): I rise today to place on the record my support for one of Victoria's last community-owned hospitals, Euroa Health, and their fight to secure their long-term future. Our state was once home to more than 40 community hospitals, with now just a handful left. With the decline of private health insurance, veterans care and an ageing population, Euroa Health is operating at a significant deficit every financial year. This crucial local health service does so much to take the strain off GV Health while serving the community with high standard aged and acute care services. With our health system in such a dire state through bloated waitlists and a 000 system in crisis, it is crucial regional Victorians have local, accessible and high-quality health care – exactly what Euroa Health provides.

Strathbogie remains the only local government area in Victoria that has no publicly funded health system. Last year a petition was tabled bearing more than 1500 signatures collected in a little over a week calling for the government to financially support Euroa Health. It is clear the community is right behind their hospital. This petition was driven by outgoing CEO Cherie Hunter, who in her time in the role contributed so much to the community. The region thanks you for your service, and we wish you well for the future. My predecessor Steph Ryan raised the need for recurrent public funding with multiple ministers. I am glad to hear the Department of Health is now engaging constructively with Euroa Health, and I look forward to the positive news in the future.

**Leopold Early Learning Centre**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (09:49): It was with much pleasure that I visited recently the wonderful children and staff at the Leopold Early Learning Centre. I was visiting their kinder program last week, and as a mum, I clearly remember that excitement when the kids head off to kinder. It is such an important part of a child's life.

At the centre a highlight for me was presenting the three-year-olds with their free kinder kits, and I can genuinely say they were snapped up with squeals of delight and high excitement by the children. The free kinder kit is fully funded by this state government and contains educational tools, books and other important resources for creating creative play and activities, and these kinder kits are a great way for families to get directly involved with their children's education while having some fun.

It was my first visit to the centre, and I have to say it lived up to its fantastic reputation. It is managed and staffed by highly professional, committed educators, led by the centre manager Kate. The centre

is only a few years old now and is a purpose-built facility with state-of-the-art learning areas and a terrific outdoor space that on the day was literally in full swing.

As a former teacher I know this once-in-a-generation kinder reform is not only giving our kids the best start in life but saving money for families and, significantly on International Women's Day, supporting women with the choice to return to work. Just up the road Leopold Primary School is being fully modernised by this state government, and now with this early learning centre I know that Leopold families have great facilities in their community.

### **Albury Wodonga Health**

**Bill TILLEY** (Benambra) (09:51): Albury Wodonga Health is not in crisis. It is in a full-scale tailspin into the abyss. Now, had the Minister for Health truly had the real commitment to Albury Wodonga Health and attended the AGM held in Wodonga last week, she would be hitting the eject button. She would go back to the table and renegotiate the parochial interstate hospital infrastructure deal – and I have got to say New South Wales, Smallbury, you have outdone yourself on this one. What we heard at the AGM was they start every day down 35 beds – that is 35 patients over capacity. They prop up staff numbers with 100 fly-in fly-out workers in motels every night so there are estimates of over \$100,000 a day in costs to the hospital budget.

The hospital is simply not fit for purpose. The staff have been gagged, but the patients talk. In two days last week in Wodonga they performed 120 surgeries. They have five beds in recovery. The overflow defaulted to day surgery wards, and they are sitting in chairs. All hail the Albury-Wodonga hospital reno – God help us! It is five years away at best, it is a partial fix with no future funding, the business case is kept secret, if it even exists at all, and Wodonga hospital is completely ignored. The staff are exhausted; they are stressed. The community is outraged. Does someone have to die? Do the clinical outcomes have to be so poor and continue to be poor? The reno is not the solution. Please get back to the table. Be our hero, Labor government.

### **Regional health services**

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (09:52): Last Friday the Premier and I officially opened the brand new \$4 million student accommodation in Maryborough for trainee doctors, nurses and allied health students. What a great day it was. The accommodation can now house 20 students and is right next to where the \$100 million redeveloped hospital will be next year. It is an incredible community asset that will mean we can attract and retain more healthcare workers in rural and regional Victoria, helping to address local workforce shortages and boost our health services for years to come. I am proud that our government continues to deliver improvements to our rural and regional healthcare system.

In Ripon we have hundreds of dedicated healthcare workers that look after us every day and fantastic investment in their hospitals, whether it is \$8.6 million for the redevelopment of the Ararat hospital's radiology and pathology unit, \$480,000 for the St Arnaud hospital to replace ageing medical imaging equipment, \$4 million to upgrade the Creswick nursing home, providing more dignity and space for residents, or over \$500 million to redevelop the Ballarat Base Hospital.

We have also upgraded nursing homes in Skipton, Beaufort and Avoca, and the Elmhurst Bush Nursing Centre have received \$60,000 to expand their centre and replace their vehicle. This is on top of our investments for more paramedics and upgraded ambulance stations in Ararat, St Arnaud, Avoca, Beaufort and Inglewood.

We have also got more nurses into our hospitals with free degrees for nursing and midwifery and more ambos on our roads. Rural and regional Victorians deserve world-class care, and we are not wasting a minute getting it done.

**Mornington electorate bus services**

**Chris CREWTER** (Mornington) (09:54): The residents of Peninsula Grange and Beleura retirement villages in my electorate have been advocating for many years for a bus service to their retirement villages. I first met with them in January last year and have been advocating for them ever since. They have been fighting for years for the service. It is a service that would benefit not only thousands of local residents but also the residents at two retirement villages, St Macartan's Parish Primary School and the local holiday village. There are existing bus stops and bus shelters in place that have been there for many years, so all that it would take is a simple change to routes 781 and 785 to effect this change that would benefit thousands of residents and take them to Mornington, to Frankston, to health services and to anywhere else that they need to go.

I was pleased during the campaign to go out with the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Caulfield, to make a commitment from the Liberals that if we were elected to government we would deliver these bus route changes. Unfortunately we were not elected to government. But I have invited an upper house member for Eastern Victoria, Labor's Tom McIntosh, to a meeting with advocates from the retirement villages on 15 March, and I look forward to hopefully working with him and others on a bipartisan solution for these bus services.

**Monbulk electorate schools**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (09:56): Happy International Women's Day to the women of Monbulk and all the women in this place. I rise to acknowledge the fantastic student leaders of some of the school communities across the district of Monbulk. I have had the distinct honour of attending several leadership ceremonies over the past three weeks, and I would like to acknowledge these leaders in this place and wish them well for the year ahead as school leaders. At Mater Christi College the college captains are Martha Box and Emily Tyquin. At Monbulk Primary School the school captains are McKinley Norris and Scarlett Thorp, the sport captains are Harry Arnott, Rori Garbutt and Mitch Fraser; SRC captains Alex Jones and Audrey Ross; and sustainability captain Elora Strong. At Ferny Creek Primary School the school captains are Genevieve Askew and Frankie Edquist, vice-captains Kyra Pickup and Seb Hayton, sports captains Archie Green and Hayden Allsopp, arts captains Thomas Abbott and Emily Timmermans, environmental captains Lucas Murray-Woods and Aster Hill, Arunta red house Sophie Pringle and Liara Adeson, blue house Liam Eisenegger and Tahlia Dawson, green house Noah Packer and Jade Lancaster and yellow house Max Coutts and Hudson Ashby. At Ferntree Gully North Primary School the school captains are Angus Shuttleworth, Brax Taafe, Hannah Makin and Bridge Mercuri; Gordon house captains Marcus Claassens and Chloe Bell; Patterson house captains Hamish Mactaggart and Hamish Joyce; Lawson house captains Olivia Leonard and Kiara-Jaye Suttman; and Dennis house captains Lara Pascoe and Seth Wootten. There is not enough time to go through the next one; I will pick that up another time. But these are our future leaders, and it is wonderful to be able to acknowledge these people, amongst whom are no doubt future women leaders.

**Arts sector support**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (09:57): Art is fundamental to our society. It brings us joy, deep thinking, connection with one another and a deep understanding of the world we live in. If that does not do it for you, the arts contribute 7 per cent of our economy here in Victoria and 9 per cent of our workforce. Yet the arts are chronically underfunded. There is not one arts organisation in my electorate that is not struggling with funding uncertainty, and I hear from artists who are leaving the sector in droves because it is just too hard to make ends meet. This government has done good work to support the arts during devastating federal cuts and during the pandemic, but independent artists, who are the bedrock of our culture, have been overlooked, have been made to compete against each other and miss out on paying themselves because project-based grants just do not stretch far enough.

We know that Helen Garner wrote *Monkey Grip* while on the dole. Today that would be impossible. While my colleagues at a federal level are pushing to raise the rate of income support for everyone and abolish mutual obligations, we propose a groundbreaking trial to introduce a living wage for

artists. I hope that the Minister for Creative Industries and this progressive government will consider this to support artists with the stability that they need to create the important work of our time.

### **International Women's Day**

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (09:59): Today we celebrate International Women's Day, and I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge some of the amazing, strong and resilient women across the Geelong region. Many of these women are in important leadership roles, others are trailblazers and there are those that work hard supporting others with little recognition – women like Corrina Eccles, a Wadawurrung woman who shares Wadawurrung culture, mentors young Aboriginal people and spends time supporting the Aboriginal community, including Wadawurrung elders. Adele Welsh volunteers her time working tirelessly for the Geelong Trades Hall women unionists network, ensuring working women have a voice. Helen Bolton, CEO of the Sexual Assault and Family Violence Centre, is advocating for an end to violence against women. Jen Cromarty has been a great champion for creatives across the Geelong region. Diana Taylor is a well-known trailblazer who strongly supports and mentors others and has just published *The Playbook*, a highly recommended read. Fiona Threlfall is a strong advocate for women in sport and female-friendly facilities, who actively works to ensure women have access to sanitary and wellbeing products. Our new women MPs for the electorates of Lara and Bellarine are fierce advocates for their constituents. Renee Owen heads up the Aboriginal health unit at Barwon Health, ensuring that community members have access to culturally safe health care. Marsha Uppill, an Adnyamathanha woman, has established her own business aimed at applying a First Nations lens to the strategic operations of business.

### **Casey citizenship ceremonies**

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (10:00): Recently I attended many citizenship ceremonies in the City of Casey along with many of my south-east colleagues, including the member for Cranbourne, the member for Bass, the member for Narre Warren South and a member for South-Eastern Metro in the other place Mr Galea, as well as the federal members for Holt and Bruce. At these ceremonies hundreds of residents took the pledge to become citizens of Australia, many of them also calling my electorate of Narre Warren North home, and I was so proud to be able to welcome them in person.

### **Narre Warren North electorate multicultural communities**

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (10:01): Our electorate has an incredible multicultural community, and it is a privilege to represent so many diverse cultures in Parliament. I want to give a particular shout-out to a few amazing multicultural groups in my community, including the Afghan Women's Organisation Victoria, the Multicultural Youth Support Services, the Hallam mosque, the Bakhtar Community Organisation, the Xinjiang seniors group, the Afghan–Australia Philanthropic Association and everyone at the Vaishnav Sangh in Hallam. Thank you for the work you do in supporting our local multicultural community. You make our community a better place. I would like to encourage all multicultural groups in my electorate to apply for the multicultural festivals and events grants program, which closes on 3 April. Local multicultural groups can contact my office for more information and apply for this amazing program.

### **Pakenham electorate schools**

**Emma VULIN** (Pakenham) (10:02): February was a busy month for education in the Pakenham electorate. On Wednesday 1 February I had the honour of attending the opening of Kurrun Primary School with the Minister for Education. This is one of the 13 new schools that the state government is opening this year. It was a pleasure to meet with principal Gavan Hughes once again and be led on a tour by the amazing student leaders Shraddhaa and Shyam. It was an absolute joy to meet students and families and great to hear the children give the school a rating of a million out of a million. This was the first school I have visited as the member, and it was wonderful to see the finishing touches – the

gardens, open spaces and modern administration buildings, along with outdoor play spaces, art rooms, the gymnasium and the incredible library.

The Andrews Labor government is investing in education not only in our state but for our growing community in Officer. With lots of new houses being built in the Officer area, this is a fantastic new school that will give young families in the area a state-of-the-art facility for their children to learn and grow close to home. I look forward to being a part of the new school community and visiting on many more occasions.

On 15 February I was joined by the Premier at Pakenham Secondary College. Principal Aaron Smith and student leaders Abigail, Tara and Arshdeep took us on a tour of their amazing school. We were there to back in our election commitment of \$11.3 million to upgrade the college. The teachers, support staff and students were wonderful, and I appreciate their having us. I look forward to coming back again.

### **Hume Central Secondary College**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (10:03): Recently I had the pleasure of attending the first school-wide assembly of the Hume Central Secondary College to celebrate the achievements of the 2022 graduates who achieved top ATARs and to present badges to student voice leaders. I would like to congratulate 2022 dux Murabit Ali, who is off to study engineering at RMIT, and other high ATAR achieving students Mulad Abdul Masyah, who has been accepted into data science at RMIT; sisters Meena and Maryam Alkas Toma, who are both off to study science at Melbourne Uni; Haider Al Shaher, who is into pharmacy at RMIT University; Manisha Regmi, who has been accepted into law at RMIT; Sebastian Vue, Dareen Abu Ghalyoun and Vivian Habeeb, who are all off to study biomedicine at Melbourne; Michelle Huynh, who has been accepted into social work at RMIT; Ameer Shohani, who is off to study education at La Trobe; Riarne Waqas, who has been accepted into aviation management at Swinburne; Mya Manweel, Eylona Kanoun and Franswa Sawa, who are all studying architecture at RMIT; Halimo Sheikh, who is doing law at Monash; Bishal Chhetri, who is doing software engineering at RMIT University; and Gita Bhatarai, who is off to study property and real estate at Deakin Uni. I also congratulate the highest achieving vocational and applied learning student, David Barcham, who completed his senior VCAL certificate – *(Time expired)*

### **International Women's Day**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (10:05): I would like to take this opportunity to join my colleagues in commemorating and celebrating International Women's Day this week, because there is so much we have to celebrate in this building. For me, one of the highlights is that we have more women in our Parliament right now than ever before. Fifty-four per cent of Labor MPs in this place are women, and nearly two-thirds of our cabinet are women, something that decades ago simply would have been unheard of. So many achievements have been made in this place because women sit here on this side of the chamber.

As for my community of Laverton, I want to give a really big shout-out to just a couple of the fantastic women's groups and organisations I have gotten to know. There is the Australian Vietnamese Women's Association, which has been faithfully serving our local community since 15 January 1983 and has just celebrated its 40th anniversary, which I had the privilege of attending very recently. There are also the wonderful and welcoming sisters from Laverton's Baitul Ma'mur mosque. They did my hijab absolutely beautifully on Sunday morning before I spent the day touring around my local community for Victorian Mosque Open Day. And of course there is Braybrook's incredible East African Women's Foundation, with Fartun Farah being able to join us for the celebrations here in Parliament today. They do a fantastic amount of work supporting women in our local community from East Africa. Congratulations to you all.

**International Women's Day**

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (10:06): Following on from the member for Laverton and her theme, I want to let everybody know that I hosted my first Kororoit International Women's Day lunch this week. I was surrounded by talented women and girls from our community and inspiring stories about the grassroots work that each of them is doing to change the lives of women and girls in our community. I want to thank Hannah and Bethany, the school captains from Southern Cross Grammar, and their senior teacher Jacqui; I wish both of these ladies the very best for their year 12. Suzanne and Jane from Zonta Melton – the work that they do is simply inspiring. Jen Waddell is a busy mum, local community activist, small business owner and Aintree Primary School council president. Cecilia Gomez-Benitez – the amazing work that she does in our multicultural communities is inspiring. Niti Bhargava using her skills from the finance sector to empower other women in the community with financial freedom is truly amazing, and dear Nikki Sachdeva, who I met during the campaign, is a small business owner and working mum who owns the pizza shop in Deer Park. Thank you to all of these amazing women and the local cafe Culpa for hosting us.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I raise a point of order in relation to a matter that occurred just before member statements, and I raise it now so as to not interrupt members as they made their statements earlier. The member for Sandringham sought leave from the government to move a motion, and both of the ministers at the table provided leave. The minister on duty was audibly heard to say yes. The whole chamber heard it. If I can refer you to *Rulings from the Chair* –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! If I can just rule on –

**James Newbury:** Can I finish making my point of order?

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The issue at hand is that the Speaker has already ruled on this point of order.

**James Newbury:** I am seeking guidance in relation to a matter that happened earlier, and I refer you to standing order 115. In light of standing order 115, may I refer you, Deputy Speaker, to Speaker Delzoppo's ruling that leave is either granted or denied and an explanation is not needed. Clearly the chamber heard that leave was given, and I would ask you if you would refer the matter to the Speaker for consideration, especially in light of what the chamber saw and heard from both ministers. Perhaps if the minister wanted to close his trading app, he could pay better attention to the chamber.

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order!

**James Newbury:** But I would ask that you refer the matter to the Speaker for review.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I note, as I said, that the Speaker did rule upon the point of order at the time. I will refer your request to the Speaker. We shall move on.

***Statements on parliamentary committee reports*****Integrity and Oversight Committee*****The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate***

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (10:10): The 60th Parliament received *The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate* report, and it is that report I want to speak to today. This is a report that was produced after a review that was instigated after the legislative change in 2018 that required a review to be done.

We looked at organisations such as IBAC and the Victorian Inspectorate, and we set up IBAC as a Liberal government when we were in government between 2010 and 2014 for the reasons that we felt

it was important to have openness, transparency and to make sure that people have confidence in the systems because corruption after years and years of Labor was something that was concerning. I am very proud to be part of a team that set up an organisation such as IBAC, and it is very disappointing that we stand here today and we have got a report that says we were supposed to be able to have a review take place but as a result of the legislation needing amending – today, still – we are not really able to do the proper review.

So there was the appointment of the auditor, and the auditors then spent a long time, rather than being able to complete the audit, working out what they were allowed to have access to and were hamstrung by the secrecy that was preventing them from being able to do their job. As a result of that, a minority report was produced which recommends that the legislation be amended so that these audits can take place properly, but I am not sure we will see that in this term of government despite the recommendation by the minority of the committee. Clearly the majority of the committee did not require –

*Members interjecting.*

**Roma BRITNELL:** I would like to continue. It is very difficult when you cannot actually hear yourself speaking, but thank you very much.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order!

**Roma BRITNELL:** Thank you for that, Deputy Speaker. As I was saying, it is important to have integrity and oversight, and the Integrity and Oversight Committee who actually got this review happening according to the legislation were unable to actually get the results to understand whether there is effectiveness in IBAC and the Victorian Inspectorate. Now, why do we need that?

We need that because the community want to have faith in their government, and we have got examples like in South-West Coast where the Victorian Inspectorate has been asked to review a case with a local council that did not go through due process – that will be investigated – and there was the sacking of the CEO who was then later reappointed by a court decision. As a result, the community have referred the issue to the Victorian Inspectorate. As a result of that we are still waiting, for some years now, for that case to be heard. Consequently, the community are very angry and have spoken to me on a number of occasions about the fact that that case has not come before the Victorian Inspectorate and there is no time frame. There is no understanding of when that will happen, and as a consequence, one of the people who is to be investigated stood in the last election in November 2022, as a candidate, and now works for a member for Western Victoria Region in the Parliament.

So you can understand why the community are unhappy that they cannot get an answer from the Victorian Inspectorate as to when that case will be heard. That is why we need transparency. That is why this minority report quite clearly states that the legislation needs to be changed, but we have got a government who wants this corruption to prevail, who wants this despite recommendations by their own Labor-appointed Commissioner of IBAC last year Robert Redlich, who I believe wrote to the Parliament via the Speaker and the President in the other place, and yet we have not been able to see that information. We have no transparency. We argued last week that we should have independent chairs of committees so the majority is not from the government so there is more transparency, which was exactly what Commissioner Robert Redlich recommended when he spoke on radio last year.

But unfortunately we have got a government who do not want to see that. They want majority so they can continue to put things under secrecy and under cover. We have five – that we know of – IBAC investigations of our Premier. This is a disgraceful state of affairs.

**Integrity and Oversight Committee***The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate*

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (10:15): It too gives me great pleasure to rise to make a contribution on a committee report, and indeed it is the same committee report that the member for South-West Coast was just speaking on, that being *The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate*. The report is from October 2022 and was tabled towards the end of the 59th Parliament. I suspect over the coming sitting weeks it will be this report and another from the Integrity and Oversight Committee that will be spoken to, given that these are the only two reports that we have at this point to speak to.

In the report, in the chair's foreword – and towards the end of the 59th Parliament that was me, and I must say I am very proud to have recently been elected the committee chair for the 60th Parliament –

**James Newbury** interjected.

**Gary MAAS:** The young fogey from Brighton, if he is going to continue –

*Members interjecting.*

**Gary MAAS:** Well, he is not an old fogey; he is a young fogey. The committee expressed –

**Danny O'Brien:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member well knows the correct use of members' titles, and I ask you to bring him to order.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member should be using correct titles.

**Gary MAAS:** Thank you, Deputy Speaker. In the foreword of that report I did express disappointment that IBAC and the Victorian Inspectorate did not provide the information required in order for the independent auditor to conduct performance audits to the fullest extent possible. Parliament must remain supreme, and if it is to remain supreme, audits of our integrity agencies must also be held in high regard. To that extent the integrity agencies relied upon other acts and did not provide the information requested by the committee-appointed auditor, Callida.

There will always be a tension between parliamentarians and lawyers, and I understand that there might be one or two lawyers around this place who can wear both caps. Some will say the Parliament remains supreme – that this is the place where bills are initiated, committees are formed based on proportionality and then elections are held. Lawyers will always say that the law remains supreme. And between those two there remains a fabulous tension which gives us the great rule of law and also gives us this magnificent thing that we call 'the separation of powers'.

I understand that in an *Age* article earlier this week some were saying that we should somehow overhaul this great tension that we have, which actually gives us the institutions of power which allow the fabulous democracy which occurs in the state of Victoria to continue to exist. Some, like the Greens – the Greens political party – are saying they are even going to put a bill forward to ensure that neither the chair nor more than half of the members of committees are from the governing party. So, yes, sure, let us just throw out hundreds of years of Westminster tradition so that you can do that – Westminster tradition which has held our communities in Victoria in really great stead. Think very carefully when you make these outrageous claims and outrageous statements. You are purportedly the conservatives of this place, who uphold this type of rule of law. The committee report is an excellent report, and I commend the report to the house.

**Integrity and Oversight Committee***The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate*

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (10:20): It is amazing to follow the member for Narre Warren South. After being lectured to by this government for eight years about being progressive and moving forward, now apparently we all have to be conservative and stick with traditions because it suits the government.

I am also rising to speak on *The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate* by the Integrity and Oversight Committee, and I agree with the member for Narre Warren South and the member for South-West Coast on the importance of these reports, the importance of our watchdogs and the importance of watching the watchdogs through the audit process. It was of some disappointment to me to learn of the difficulty that the committee had in undertaking the audit reports of both IBAC and VI, because they do play a very important role in our society and our systems of government. We need to know who is watching the watchers and that they are doing the right thing by the community and in accordance with the law set by this place.

I had a read of the minority report and was concerned to see, obviously, from both the minority report and the majority report the concerns about the audit being unable to be completed, but I note the recommendation by the minority for changes to the legislation to get over the issues that were encountered by the auditors. I think these suggestions should be taken seriously. I think the Parliament also should take very seriously the concerns raised by the minority about interference – direction from the audit subcommittee to the auditors. There are clearly going to be times when an auditor will need assistance from its employer, being the committee in this case, and direction, but the suggestion of interference is of concern. It is something that I am particularly concerned about and particularly aware of given my history as a member of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee – this is generally speaking probably one of the most contested committees – where we see consistently government members and particularly the government chair seeking to shut down scrutiny of the executive.

The member for Narre Warren South talked quite rightly about the separation of powers. We have a separation of powers in Victoria and under the Westminster system, where we have the legislature – that is us – the executive and the judiciary, and ne'er the twain shall meet; they shall be separated. I am a very strong supporter of the separation of powers and the Westminster system, but one of the weaknesses that we have is that crossover between the legislature and the executive, particularly under this government, where we have seen the government, that being the executive, starting to treat the legislature, the Parliament, as an audience, not as a partner in governance, not as a check and balance and not as something that will ensure that the government of the day is held to account.

I do not wish to sound patronising, but my message to new members of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and the Integrity and Oversight Committee and indeed to all new members of this Parliament on both sides is that our role is not to be cheerleaders for the government; our role is to hold the government to account. That is what question time is for, that is what reports such as this one that I am talking about are for and that is what the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee is about. I say that not just in respect of ministers of the Crown who sit at the table here but of the executive, the public service. It is absolutely critical that this Parliament actually holds them to account. There are multiple examples every year, but some that have stuck in my mind from the last couple of years are simple things like Parks Victoria's inability to rebuild a bridge at Thurra River and, most recently in the news, its inability to reopen the Sealers Cove track at Wilsons Promontory in my electorate for three years. That is where the government of the day, the executive, the public service, needs to be held to account on why things take so long, why budgets overrun.

All of these issues need to be addressed, so I say to members of new committees, to new members of Parliament: it is important. Yes, there are going to be politics, and of course you will support your side

of the debate, your political party, your government, whatever it might be, but we have an important role in that oversight, in that accountability of the executive.

It is disappointing that the audit process did not work as it should, and I support the members of the minority who have made suggestions for changes to legislation to ensure that we are continuing to watch the watchers properly.

### **Integrity and Oversight Committee**

#### *Performance of the Victorian Integrity Agencies 2020/21: Focus on Witness Welfare*

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (10:25): I am pleased to give a contribution to the Parliament of Victoria's Integrity and Oversight Committee *Performance of the Victorian Integrity Agencies 2020/21: Focus on Witness Welfare* report. I think that when we are talking about issues such as the Westminster tradition, I hope there is agreement on this that we are not talking about tradition for tradition's sake; of course we are looking at the purposive nature of these traditions and how they assist in delivering the most fair and reasonable outcomes in terms of supporting our democracy. I would like to think that there is some sort of congruence on the central tenets of these traditions in terms of giving the greatest strength to the outcomes of committees and committee reports. So I think that is more the tangent that we would wish to take, as opposed to tradition for tradition's sake.

I would like to commend all the committee members, of course we have the Chair Gary Maas, we have Brad Rowsell MP, Deputy Chair Stuart Grimley MLC, Dustin Halse MP –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! You need to refer to members by correct titles.

**Nina TAYLOR:** Yes. The member for Ringwood –

**A member** interjected. You're in a different place.

**Nina TAYLOR:** I am in a different place – and other committee members are there as well. I am learning; come on, I am getting there. The other place has a slightly different flavour to the way that certain matters are delivered. It is all good. But I respect those matters.

In any case, thank you to all the committee members for their excellent contributions. Can I also commend the secretariat throughout the review, Sean Coley, committee manager; Dr Stephen James, senior research officer; Tom Hvala, research officer; Holly Brennan, complaints and research assistant; and committee administrative officers Maria Marasco and Bernadette Pendergast. I must say I concur with the Chair that it was an excellent report and there is always going to be a tension on all sides and all committee members having their particular perspectives on these matters, but I would like to think that, certainly from the perspective of government, the goal and certainly the outcome was to deliver the most fair and reasonable outcome possible for all involved, and I believe that was done.

### **Integrity and Oversight Committee**

#### *Performance of the Victorian Integrity Agencies 2020/21: Focus on Witness Welfare*

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (10:28): I rise today as my colleagues from the 59th Parliament have afforded me the privilege to give a report on the Victorian parliamentary inquiry into the *Performance of the Victorian Integrity Agencies 2020/21: Focus on Witness Welfare*. This review was prompted by the tragic death of former councillor and mayor of Casey Amanda Stapleton. I have spent the last couple of days reading through this report. This factor was widely acknowledged in the confidential submissions made to the inquiry along with the broad-ranging public commentary, which certainly is not helpful, particularly after a tragic event like that occurs – and also before and during, which is why the minority report of this review holds the recommendations that it does, and that is what I will be speaking on today.

Following this avoidable and devastating situation, the Integrity and Oversight Committee – which I have had the privilege to join recently – had a responsibility to listen to witnesses and make

recommendations to government to ensure such events never happen again. The committee failed to call any witnesses through its public hearing process that were directly and personally involved in the subject matter. The committee also failed to engage in comprehensive dialogue with the Commissioner of IBAC at his request. We have heard other members today talk about the government dominating different committees and the same appears to have happened here, which fundamentally fails in its responsibilities to witnesses, the integrity bodies that oversee the Parliament and ultimately the people of Victoria. So let us go through the recommendations from the minority report. Recommendation 1 states:

When undertaking a call for submissions, this Committee should fully disclose how the submission could be received and treated. This should include information relating to a submission being received as public, confidential or partially confidential as well as advice about the possibility of presenting to the Committee in a public or private hearing.

The second recommendation is:

A short public statement, accompanying every confidential or partially confidential submission, should be included on the Committee website that articulates the reason why the Committee has determined confidentiality.

In my mind, it makes complete sense. It is a little bit of common sense and again in my mind we need a little bit more of it. The third recommendation is:

If this Committee states that it will hear from individuals and a determination is then made not to do so, this decision of the Committee – and the members who favoured that outcome – will be published on the Committee website.

**A member:** Accountability.

**Jade BENHAM:** Accountability. Who would have thunk it? Recommendation 4 states:

Undertake a review of the legal framework that restricts the Committee from inquiring about and questioning a witness that may be the subject of a confidentiality notice issued by an integrity agency.

Recommendation 5 states:

Integrity agency leaders should be afforded the opportunity to meet or present to the IOC when they so request, in any instance. The facilitation of this meeting should be the obligation and responsibility of the Committee Chair and Secretariat and must be undertaken as a matter of priority.

And the last recommendation is:

Committee members must be required to disclose, at the earliest opportunity, any interference in Committee business that they become aware of – or are party to – by the PPO or any other politically aligned individual or body.

These are pretty simple, pretty commonsense accountability and integrity recommendations. The stated intent of this inquiry and the process that followed, including the hearings, just do not match. The recommendations within the committee report have been unreservedly affected by the limitations placed upon the inquiry process by Labor government members of the committee.

**A member:** As always.

**Jade BENHAM:** As always. The government members of this committee did not act with integrity during the course of this inquiry, and for all of these failures that are set out in the minority report the opposition members of this committee were compelled to oppose the adoption of the committee report and table the minority report.

### Integrity and Oversight Committee

#### *Performance of the Victorian Integrity Agencies 2020/21: Focus on Witness Welfare*

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (10:33): I rise to contribute to the committee report for the Integrity and Oversight Committee, *Performance of the Victorian Integrity Agencies 2020/21: Focus on Witness Welfare*. The Integrity and Oversight Committee (IOC) is responsible for monitoring and reviewing

the performance of Victoria's integrity agencies such as the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, IBAC; the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner, OVIC; the Victorian Inspectorate; and the Victorian Ombudsman. This report goes to 2020–21 and the inquiry reviewing the management of witness welfare.

Firstly, I would just like to extend my thanks to the secretariat and the great work that they do in assisting the committee and assisting with the outcome of this report, in particular Sean Coley, the committee manager; Dr Stephen James, the senior research officer; Tom Hvala, research officer; Holly Brennan, complaints and research assistant; Maria Marasco, committee administrative officer; and Bernadette Pendergast, committee administrative officer. As the initial chair of the IOC in the 59th Parliament, I could not thank the secretariat enough for their support of myself and the committee at the time, and the deputy chair, the member for Sandringham, is nodding his head and acknowledging that also. They were fantastic and still are fantastic. They do great work, and sometimes it is thankless work. I want to acknowledge the contribution of the committee members in particular during my period as the chair of the IOC in the 59th Parliament.

The report reviews the performance of the agencies during 2020 and 2021, focusing on their management of the welfare of witnesses and others involved in their investigations. The committee closely examined the integrity agencies' annual reports for 2020–21. The agencies also appeared before the committee at public hearings, provided written submissions and answered questions on notice regarding their performance during the reporting period and their management of witness welfare. Finally, the committee received written submissions and other responses from interstate and international integrity agencies, non-integrity organisations with expertise and experience in witness welfare and members of the public relating to the agency's management of witness welfare. I should say in my previous life as the secretary of the ambulance union I was representing a number of my members, paramedic members, that were called as witnesses before IBAC investigations, and I have a firsthand knowledge of the effects of the process of being a witness under these investigations and the mental trauma, I suppose, that happens out of these investigations.

I congratulate the member for Narre Warren South for his re-election as the chair of the IOC. It is not an easy role. Sometimes there is conflict and tension, but I know that he will do a wonderful job, as he has done previously in the 59th Parliament. I know he will carry that through into this Parliament and chair the IOC very well with some support from, I believe, the same deputy chair as in the 59th Parliament – I hope. I wish him well going forward.

This is a very good report, and as I say, it is an important report in regard to witness welfare and some of the recommendations that have been made in dealing with witnesses and supporting witnesses when they present under investigation processes. It is a great report, and I commend this report to the house.

### *Business of the house*

#### **Notices of motion**

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (10:37): I advise that the government does not wish to proceed with notice of motion 1 today and ask that it remain on the notice paper.

I move:

That consideration of government business, notice of motion 2, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Bills***Building Legislation Amendment Bill 2023***Statement of compatibility*

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:38): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Building Legislation Amendment Bill 2023.

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

In my opinion, the Building Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 (**Bill**), as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

**Overview of the Bill**

Parts 2 to 5 of the Bill amend the *Building Act 1993* (**Building Act**), the *Architects Act 1991* (**Architects Act**) and other Acts to address systemic issues with Victoria's building system. These Parts of the Bill will –

- establish a statutory position of State Building Surveyor to be appointed by the Victorian Building Authority (**VBA**). This position will provide technical expertise through binding determinations on the interpretation of building and plumbing regulations, codes and standards for the building and plumbing sector. As a public authority, the State Building Surveyor must ensure that binding determinations are compatible with the Charter;
- establish a statutory position of Building Monitor to collect, analyse and publish information, and provide advice to the Minister and others, regarding systemic issues affecting domestic building consumers and to represent, at a systemic level, domestic building consumer interests;
- broaden the VBA's power to enter into information sharing arrangements with other persons and bodies who exercise functions related to the building sector;
- amend two categories and insert two new categories of building practitioner, who will be required to be registered before they can carry out a prescribed kind of work in relation to building;
- require a relevant building surveyor to provide an information statement to an owner of land or a building, for which an application for a building permit has been made in relation to a prescribed class of building, with prescribed information relating to the surveyor's role and responsibilities, when issuing the building permit;
- provide a process for, and requirements relating to, the preparation and approval of a building manual for a prescribed class of building before an occupancy permit may be issued for the building;
- enable a wider range of circumstances in which the cladding levy can provide financial or other support to owners who are not eligible to receive funding under the current cladding rectification program;
- make other technical or minor amendments to the Building Act; and
- improve the governance arrangements for the Architects Registration Board of Victoria under the Architects Act.

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

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

- right to privacy and reputation (section 13); and
- right to take part in public life (section 18).

For the following reasons, I am satisfied that the Bill is compatible with the Charter and, if any rights are limited, those limitations are reasonable and demonstrably justified having regard to the factors in section 7(2) of the Charter.

**Privacy and reputation**

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. Section 13(b) provides that a person has the right not to have their reputation unlawfully attacked. An interference with privacy will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious,

unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought. An interference with privacy will not be arbitrary provided it is reasonable in the particular circumstances.

***Building Act amendments***

In Part 4 of the Bill, clause 47 will replace section 259AB of the Building Act to widen the circumstances in which the Victorian Building Authority (VBA) can enter into information sharing arrangements with one or more persons or bodies. Such persons or bodies are defined as a “relevant agency” in new section 259AB(7). The Bill will enable one or more relevant agencies to enter into an information sharing arrangement, provided the VBA is a party to the arrangement.

To the extent that the information shared between the VBA and any relevant entities includes personal information, the Bill will engage the right to privacy.

*Any limit on the right to privacy by Part 4 of the Bill is reasonable and justified*

Although these provisions require and permit the VBA and relevant agencies to deal with personal and identifying information, I do not consider these dealings are unlawful or arbitrary.

The purposes of these amendments are to: (a) ensure the VBA and each relevant agency has access to the information it requires to perform its functions effectively; (b) support a cohesive approach to provision of government services to building consumers, including regulation, by empowering agencies to share information in an efficient and effective way; and (c) to enable information to inform a robust understanding of trends and issues in the building system.

Clause 47 of the Bill imposes several limitations on how information can be shared under an information sharing arrangement made under substituted section 259AB(1) of the Building Act. Under new section 259AB(2) and (3)(a), if the information is to be shared between the VBA and a relevant agency, the information must be reasonably necessary to assist in the performance of the Authority’s functions under the Building Act or the functions of the relevant agency. Under new section 259AB(2) and (3)(b), if the information is to be shared between two relevant agencies, it may only be information that: (a) the receiving relevant agency could have requested from the Authority under section 259AB(3)(a); or (b) is reasonably necessary to assist in the performance of the relevant agency’s functions under the Building Act.

Further, the VBA and each relevant agency that is a public entity within the meaning of the *Public Administration Act 2004* is bound by the requirements of the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* and must ensure that any collection, use or disclosure of information is undertaken in accordance with the Information Privacy Principles set out in Part 3 of that Act.

In my view, these provisions will not be an arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, as any disclosure of personal information authorised by these amendments will only occur to the extent necessary to perform the functions of the Victorian Building Authority or relevant agency and, for the sharing of information between relevant agencies, the functions of the relevant agency are confined to any functions the agency has under the Building Act.

Accordingly, I consider that these provisions under clause 47 of the Bill are compatible with the right to privacy under section 13 of the Charter.

Part 3 of the Bill will provide for the appointment of a Building Monitor to (amongst other objectives) improve the experiences of domestic building consumers and affected parties of the building system by advocating for their interests at a systemic level and providing independent expert advice on these issues to the Minister and to persons and bodies involved in the building industry. The Building Monitor will be empowered under new section 208K of the Building Act to require, by notice in writing, a person or body to give the Building Monitor information specified in the notice. The purpose of this power is for the Building Monitor to gather and analyse information from certain building system entities to identify issues affecting domestic building affected parties. Under new section 208P of the Building Act, the Building Monitor will also be required to annually publish a Building Monitor Issues Report that is to specify the systemic issues that the Building Monitor has identified as affecting domestic building affected parties and make recommendations to the Minister on ways to address these issues.

To the extent that the information obtained by the Building Monitor includes personal information, the Bill will engage the right to privacy.

*Any limit on the right to privacy by Part 3 of the Bill is reasonable and justified*

Although these provisions require the Building Monitor to gather and analyse personal and identifying information, I do not consider these functions are unlawful or arbitrary.

The types of information that can be requested are limited under section 208K(1) of the Building Act to information that is relevant to the performance of the functions of the Building Monitor. The functions of the Building Monitor, to be specified in new section 208F of the Building Act, relate to matters of concern to

domestic building affected parties. Clause 18 of the Bill will also insert a definition of “domestic building affected parties” into section 3 of the Building Act to further contain the functions of the Building Monitor.

Under new section 208K(1), the Building Monitor is also required to consult with a person or body before giving them a notice under that section to provide information or data. This is intended to enable the Building Monitor to gain an understanding of what information is held by the person or body who will receive a notice and to ensure the notice does not unintentionally gather information that the Building Monitor does not need for their functions.

The persons or bodies from whom or which the Building Monitor may require information be provided are limited to those listed in new section 208K(3) of the Building Act and they are confined to public sector persons or bodies.

Further, under new section 208P, the Building Monitor will be required to gather information transparently, by including in an Issues Report information about when and to whom a notice under section 208K(1) was given, the type of information or data required under the notice and whether the Monitor is a party to any information sharing arrangements or agreements.

Clause 25 of the Bill will also insert new sections 208L and 208M in the Building Act to limit how the Building Monitor may use the information it gathers. Under new section 208L, the Building Monitor must not publish or authorise the publication of any personal information or data or commercially sensitive information or data that has not first been de-identified or aggregated with similar information (as the case requires) before it is published.

Further, new section 208M makes it an offence if the Building Monitor or any person assisting or acting on behalf of the Building Monitor uses or discloses information (including personal information) obtained in the course of performing the functions of the Building Monitor other than for the purposes of performing the Building Monitor’s functions.

Clause 25 of the Bill will also insert new section 208G to provide that the Building Monitor, when exercising its powers, must comply with any relevant requirements specified by or under any other Act. The purpose of this provision is to restate, for the avoidance of doubt, the obligation of the Building Monitor, as a statutory entity, to comply with legislation such as the *Victorian Data Sharing Act 2017* and its de-identification guidelines issued under section 33 of that Act and with the Information Privacy Principles set out in Schedule 1 of the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*.

These provisions establish an appropriate balance between enabling the Building Monitor to perform its functions and achieve its statutory objectives, by ensuring it can transparently gain access to the information needed to understand where the issues in the building system exist for domestic building consumers and affected parties, while protecting the rights of individuals to have their privacy and reputations protected.

Consequently, I consider that these provisions under the Bill are compatible with the right to privacy under section 13 of the Charter.

#### **Right to take part in public life**

Section 18 of the Charter protects the right of persons to take part in public life, which includes the right to participate, without discrimination, in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through a freely chosen representative. This right is subject to reasonable limitations under section 7 of the Charter.

#### **Building Act amendments**

Clause 25 of the Bill inserts new section 208N, which will enable the Minister for Planning to establish a Building Monitor Reference Group (Reference Group), to be chaired by the Building Monitor.

The Reference Group is intended to provide a forum in which the Building Monitor can hear directly about the experiences of “domestic building affected parties”. This defined term captures only people having a home constructed for them or whose enjoyment of their home is affected by adjacent building work. The purpose of the Reference Group is to communicate the experiences and views of people who, because they are not building professionals, do not have a working knowledge of the building system and are therefore not proficient in navigating that system.

New section 208N(5) provides that the Minister must not appoint a person to be a member of the Reference Group who is a registered building practitioner, a registered architect or an endorsed engineer, or who, in the opinion of the Minister, has a conflict of interest in being appointed as a member of the Group. This provision will engage the Charter right of persons to take part in public life.

However, I consider any limitation on this right is reasonable and justified to ensure that the experiences of people who are not building professionals are obtained and that there are no other less restrictive means of obtaining these views. In addition, each of these classes of building professional (a registered building practitioner, registered architect or endorsed engineer) have their own professional associations, in which and

through which they can participate in public life. The Building Monitor can also engage with these building professionals through other forums (including the Building Regulations Advisory Committee and Plumbing Advisory Council), through their stakeholder representative bodies and via engagement with other building system entities.

#### ***Architects Act amendments***

Clause 60 of the Bill substitutes section 47 of the Architects Act to provide for the qualifications, skills and experience that members must have to be appointed to the Architects Registration Board of Victoria. This substituted section limits the right to public life by excluding certain classes of people from being members of the Architects Registration Board of Victoria. However, I consider these limitations to be reasonable to ensure that the Board has sufficient expertise, skills and qualifications in performing its powers and duties.

**The Hon. Sonya Kilkenny MP**  
**Minister for Planning**

#### *Second reading*

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:39):  
I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

#### **Incorporated speech as follows:**

The Victorian Government is committed to delivering a building system that provides safe, compliant and durable housing and buildings. This requires a workforce of skilled and experienced practitioners and a strong and viable system of regulation to enforce compliance. This Bill makes a series of legislative amendments that will implement reforms to reshape the regulatory landscape in Victoria, with a key focus on consumer protection, which the Government has placed at the centre of the process, heralding a new era for the integrity of building regulation in Victoria.

#### **Legislative changes**

The Bill will primarily amend the *Building Act 1993* and the *Architects Act 1991* and make minor or consequential amendments to the *Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020*, *Owners Corporation Act 2006*, the *Sale of Land Act 1962*, the *Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995*, the *Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002* and the *Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998*.

These legislative amendments will create the following reforms:

- Formalise and strengthen the role of the State Building Surveyor;
- Establish a Building Monitor;
- Expand the categories of building practitioner that will be required to be registered;
- Enhance the building approvals process by introducing further safeguards to better inform consumers;
- Strengthen information sharing between statutory entities with a role in the building regulatory framework;
- Amend the distribution of the cladding rectification levy; and
- Strengthen and improve the governance arrangements of the Architects Registration Board of Victoria under the Architects Act.

#### **Establishing a statutory role for the State Building Surveyor**

The State Building Surveyor (SBS) was established by the Government as an executive staff member of the VBA to provide authoritative compliance advice, technical guidance and interpretation of relevant building standards. The Government now seeks to strengthen this role through recognising it in legislation with statutory objectives and functions.

The creation of a legislated role for the SBS will enable greater focus on critical functions and thereby bolster support for industry practitioners. The legislated role will remain within the VBA to enable economies of scale, facilitate information sharing and avoid further fragmentation of oversight within the regulatory system.

Under this Bill, the SBS will be positioned as the primary source of technical expertise and guidance for the building and plumbing industries. The SBS will encourage improvements to regulatory oversight and practices within these industries, with a particular focus on the building surveying profession and councils.

The SBS will have the power to issue binding determinations relating to technical interpretation of building and plumbing standards and requirements. Industry practitioners will be required to ensure that they carry out building work or plumbing work or exercise particular functions in accordance with any relevant binding determination.

### **Building Monitor**

In order to better protect the interests of domestic building consumers and put them at the centre of our legislative framework, the Government has established a Building Monitor, tasked with representing and advocating for these consumers at a systemic level. The Building Monitor will be a statutory appointment made by the Governor in Council, who will advise the Minister for Planning on systemic issues and risks facing domestic building consumers and make recommendations to address identified issues.

The Building Monitor will collect and analyse information and data to identify issues and work collaboratively with building system entities to improve the coordination of information. Most significantly, the Building Monitor's findings and recommendations will be published in an annual Building Monitor Issues Report. Preparation of this report will involve direct and ongoing engagement with domestic building consumers to ensure the experience of those navigating the building sector from end to end is better understood.

### **Expanding the registration framework for building practitioners**

The Bill will expand the building practitioner registration system to achieve greater national consistency, thereby improving compliance with national building standards and facilitating national labour mobility. It is anticipated that the expanded practitioner registration system will not only strengthen practitioner competence, accountability and regulatory oversight, but improve consumer protection. Gaps in Victoria's building practitioner registration framework will be addressed initially by establishing the following categories of building practitioner:

- Building Designer;
- Project Manager;
- Building Consultant; and
- Site Supervisor.

Consistent with how existing categories and classes of building practitioner are set, the regulations will prescribe the authorised work and registration requirements of these practitioners.

The new 'Building Consultant' category could support follow-on regulation to extend registration requirements to new classes of practitioner who perform:

- pre-purchase due diligence inspection work;
- essential safety measures maintenance work;
- disability access work; and
- energy efficiency work.

### **Building Manuals**

The Government is committed to improving consumer confidence in the building industry and enhancing transparency. To this end, this Bill will amend the Building Act to introduce a requirement that a draft building manual be prepared by the applicant for an occupancy permit and provided to the relevant building surveyor for approval. Building manuals are intended to be a single repository of all relevant information relating to the design, construction and ongoing maintenance of a building.

The building manual will address a significant hurdle for owners and owners corporations in accessing information about their building. By making information about the design, construction and maintenance of a building more readily accessible, the building manual will aid not only owners and owners corporations but also other parties such as building practitioners and regulators in future.

Once the draft building manual has been approved by the relevant building surveyor, the manual will be provided to the owner or the owners corporation, who will be responsible for maintaining and keeping the documentation current.

Minor amendments are being made to the Owners Corporation Act and the Sale of Land Act to require that the building manual is provided at the first meeting of a new owners corporation and also to future purchasers of the land.

Subsequent amendments to the Building Regulations 2018 will prescribe a number of matters necessary to operationalise the building manual requirements, including what classes of buildings and building work will

require a manual to be prepared or updated, the digital format of the manual, and the information that must be contained within a manual.

#### **Building surveyor obligation to provide information statement**

Consistent with the Government's commitment to promote and protect the interests of consumers of building work, this Bill will require the relevant building surveyor to provide, at the time of issuing the building permit, a document that clearly details their roles and responsibilities. This will increase transparency and assist consumers to be fully informed about the critical role that their appointed building surveyor plays in their building project, as well as the broader approvals process for the work. Regulations will prescribe the building work to which this new requirement will apply, as well as the form of the information statement and the information it must contain.

#### **Strengthening Information Sharing**

The Victorian building sector is made up of myriad agencies, each with an important role to play in maintaining a safe and well-regulated industry. The Government is taking steps to enhance the ability of these agencies to better share information and improve collaboration. By integrating building system information, clarifying information sharing arrangements and making that information accessible through clear pathways, participating agencies will have the opportunity to aggregate data to better inform targeted and evidence-based decision making. This will also enable better transparency and reporting on the health of the building system.

#### **Amendments to the distribution of the cladding rectification levy**

Amendments to the Building Act will also allow the Government greater flexibility to determine how the cladding levy should be directed to support rectification of buildings found to have non-compliant combustible cladding. The cladding levy was introduced by the *Building Amendment (Cladding Rectification) Act 2019* and came into effect on 1 January 2020. Currently, the levy is collected by the VBA and paid to Cladding Safety Victoria under the Cladding Rectification Program.

This Bill will enable buildings that fall outside of the funded cladding rectification activity to be supported with funding made available to deliver relevant programs to facilitate cladding rectification.

#### **Improvements to the Architects Registration Board of Victoria**

To ensure the Architects Registration Board of Victoria (ARBV) is well-placed to be a modern, fit-for-purpose regulator of the architecture profession in Victoria, amendments to its institutional and governance mechanisms are required. The Bill will amend the Architects Act to ensure appointment requirements for the ARBV and its Tribunal reflect best practice governance standards for a skills-based board. The nominations process will be replaced with an open and merit-based recruitment procedure overseen by the Minister for Planning, to secure a board that has the knowledge, experience and expertise required by a professional regulator.

The ARBV will be required to prepare and implement a four-year strategic plan approved by the Minister to strengthen decision making and enhance operations. The amendments provide for an increase in the maximum appointment term of board members from three to five years to support the board's ability to engage with the strategic planning cycle. The amendments will modernise and streamline the governance arrangements for the ARBV to ensure it is equipped to respond to the challenges of a reforming building environment.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (10:39): I move:

That this debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 22 March.**

### **Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medically Supervised Injecting Centre) Bill 2023**

#### *Statement of compatibility*

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS** (Dandenong – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (10:40): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medically Supervised Injecting Centre) Bill 2023.

**Opening paragraphs**

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

In my opinion, the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medically Supervised Injecting Centre) Bill 2023 (Bill), as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter.

I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

**Overview**

The Bill makes various amendments to the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981* (the Act) including amendments which:

- a. provide for a licensed medically supervised injecting centre to operate on an ongoing basis by providing that a medically supervised injecting centre licence may be renewed more than once.
- b. provide that more than one medically supervised injecting centre licence may be issued but that there must not be more than one such licence in force at a time.
- c. provide for the commencement of a new medically supervised injecting centre following revocation of an existing medically supervised injecting centre licence.
- d. provide for the transfer of a medically supervised injecting centre licence.
- e. make changes in relation to the roles of supervisors and director of the licensed medically supervised injecting centre.
- f. provide for further review in relation to the licenced medically supervised injecting centre.
- g. allow the Secretary to delegate certain powers in relation to the internal management protocols.
- h. make further provision regarding how planning schemes and planning amendments operate in relation to the medically supervised injecting centre.
- i. make further provision in relation to the procedures for suspending and reinstating a medically supervised injecting centre licence.
- j. minor and technical changes.

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

The human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are the right to life (section 9), the right to privacy and reputation (section 13), the right to a fair hearing (section 24), and the right not to be punished more than once (section 26).

**Right to life**

Section 9 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to life and has the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of life. The right to life is one of the most fundamental of all human rights. It is concerned with both the protection and preservation of life.

Under international human rights law, the right in section 9 of the Charter includes an obligation on the state to refrain from conduct that results in the arbitrary deprivation of life, as well as a positive duty to introduce appropriate safeguards to minimise the risk of loss of life.

The Bill extends an existing legislative scheme that enables drug users to attend a medically supervised injecting centre in order to self-administer certain prohibited drugs or substances.

The injection of prohibited drugs or substances presents dangers to the person self-administering those substances in that way. Accordingly, the scheme has the capacity to engage the right to life.

The object of the scheme previously established under the Act and which is further amended by the Bill is not to encourage or condone the use of prohibited substances but rather is one of harm minimisation.

The State's obligation to respect a person's right to life includes a positive duty to properly and openly investigate health risks that may arise because of drug addiction and to take positive steps to protect the lives of those vulnerable persons who are affected. Thus ultimately minimising the harms that may be caused or associated with this health issue within the community.

Clause 7 of the Bill provides for an amendment to the Act that would allow the trial period of any licensed medically supervised injecting centre to be extended by the Secretary for 4 years after the day previously

specified in the licence as the day until which the licence will remain force unless sooner surrendered, or, revoked and for such a licence to be able to be renewed more than once.

The extension of the trial of the medically supervised injecting centre promotes and protects the right to life in a number of respects.

Firstly, the Bill continues to take positive steps to reduce the number of deaths caused by drug overdose and otherwise continues to improve access to drug treatment, health and welfare services. In early 2020, an independent panel chaired by Professor Margaret Hamilton evaluated the trial of the medically supervised injecting centre and recommended that the trial be extended so that more Victorians have access to the life saving services provided by this facility.

Secondly, the Bill protects and promotes the right to life of other members of the community. In particular, the medically supervised injecting centre continues to reduce the risks to emergency services workers and community members arising from the use of illicit drugs, particularly in public places.

Thirdly, the Bill also promotes the right to life of drug users and other members of the community by ensuring that drug users continue to be referred to services for bloodborne diseases and needle and syringe exchange programs. This includes but is not limited to HIV infection and hepatitis C.

#### ***Privacy and reputation***

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. Privacy is a broad concept and includes privacy of information about a person and protection against interference in relation to a person's workplace environment.

Section 13(b) provides that a person also has the right not to have his or her reputation unlawfully attacked. An interference will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought.

The following clauses in the Bill engage the right to privacy.

#### ***Review***

Clause 29 of the Bill inserts proposed new section 55PA which requires the minister to conduct a review and authorises the minister to access, collect, use and disclose any data or information to complete the review.

The powers set out in this section are subject to the protections in the health privacy principles in the *Health Records Act 2001* and otherwise the information privacy principles in the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*. Further the purpose of the minister accessing, collecting, using and/or disclosing any data is for the purpose of the review.

#### ***Conditions of a medically supervised injecting centre***

Clause 13 of the Bill will enable the Secretary to direct a licensee to enter into an agreement or deed under new section 55EA(5).

This provision may engage the right to privacy by compelling a person to take certain actions where they hold a medically supervised injecting centre licence.

While the exercise of the power to direct a licensee to enter into an agreement or deed might interfere with individual autonomy in a working environment, any such interference will be lawful and not arbitrary.

The power to direct the licensee to enter into an agreement or deed is targeted to those conditions that are necessary to ensure compliance with the aims of the Bill, that is, to ensure that the operation of the medically supervised injecting centre is as far as practicable not interrupted and to further the purpose of protecting the lives of those affected by drug addiction, and, to minimising related harms.

Accordingly, I consider that the above provisions in relation to the review and conditions of a medically supervised injecting centre are compatible with the right to privacy in section 13 of the Charter.

#### ***Right to a fair hearing***

Section 24(1) of the Charter provides, amongst other things, that a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the charge or proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing.

#### ***Transitional obligations and transfer of a licence***

Clause 13 of the Act inserts new section 55EA and new section 55EB.

Section 55EA provides that agreements or deeds may be entered into between the Secretary and a person who holds, or proposes, to hold a medically supervised injecting centre licence (responsible person). A responsible

person may as part of this agreement or deed be subject to transitional obligations the aim of which is to ensure the operation of the medically supervised injecting centre licence is as far as practicable not interrupted.

Section 55EB provides for a penalty for breach of the transitional obligations or termination of the relevant agreement or deed. Specifically, if an agreement under section 55EA includes a penalty provision that does not seek to impose a penalty which exceeds 100 penalty units, then, in relation to a breach constituted by a failure to comply with a transitional obligation or for termination of the agreement or deed a person is liable to pay as a debt due to the State the amount required to be paid by the provision despite anything to the contrary in a rule of or principle at common law.

Clause 22 of the Bill inserts new section 55JA which contains new provisions that require a licensee to apply to the Secretary for transfer of a licence.

This section requires that a medically supervised injecting centre licence must not be transferred unless the proposed transferee consents to the transfer and the Secretary has approved internal management protocols for the proposed transferee. A proposed transferee under this section is voluntarily applying for a licence under a scheme which vulnerable members of the community will rely on and where it is a requirement that they be able to ensure that the operation of the medically supervised injecting centre is as far as practicable not interrupted.

The purpose of this provision is to ensure the integrity of the licensing scheme associated with the medically supervised injecting centre is not compromised and that it furthers the purpose of protecting the lives of those affected by drug addiction, and, to minimising related harms.

While case law has interpreted ‘civil proceeding’ in section 24 of the Charter broadly, it does not extend to the kind of agreements or administrative decision-making that will be undertaken by the Secretary pursuant to these provisions (in that the Secretary is unlikely to be considered a ‘tribunal’ for the purpose of this right). To the extent that it is relevant, I otherwise consider that new sections 55EA and 55EB would be otherwise be consistent with the right to a fair hearing, as the Bill provides for clear, accessible, reasonable and proportionate criteria for entering into agreements, deeds and for the determination of applications of a transfer of a licence.

Accordingly, I consider that the above provisions in relation to the transfer of a licence are compatible with the right to fair hearing under section 24 of the Charter.

***Right to not be tried or punished more than once***

**Penalty for breach of transitional obligation or termination of agreement or deed**

Clause 13 of the Bill inserts section 55EB into the Act.

As noted above, section 55EB provides for penalty provisions in agreements or deeds made pursuant to those provisions and which do not exceed 100 penalty units. The introduction of penalty provisions in the context of agreements or deed contemplated by section 55EB is relevant to consider as part of this right.

The imposition of civil penalties, however framed, will generally not engage the right under section 26 of the Charter, unless the penalty is in the nature of a punishment. The new provisions are identified as penalty provisions and introduce a penalty for breach of an agreement or deed which does not exceed 100 penalty units. This provision is largely protective in nature, with the aim of ensuring the integrity of the licensing scheme. The provision aims to ensure that operation of the medically supervised injecting centre is as far as practicable not interrupted and to ensure that it furthers the purpose of protecting the lives of those affected by drug addiction, and, to minimise related harms.

Having regard to this purpose, the penalty arising out of a breach a transitional obligation or termination of an agreement or the deed is protective in that it serves the purpose of ensuring those who depend on the medically supervised injecting centre continue to have access to this service. Moreover, these penalties apply to persons who have elected to provide a service which vulnerable people will rely on, and therefore such penalties could be viewed as protective rather than punitive in nature.

While a penalty of 100 penalty units for a breach a transitional obligation or termination of an agreement or deed might be significant for a natural person, the penalty relates to a person operating a facility that vulnerable people will rely on and which is required to continue to be in operation during any transfer of a licence. Additionally, breaches have the potential to directly cause, or indirectly contribute to, significant and irreversible harm or death to those who rely on the medically supervised injecting centre.

Therefore, given this, I consider the penalty appropriate and not disproportionate given the central role that a responsible person will play in the scheme. Finally, no sanction of imprisonment attaches to failure to pay a penalty relating to a breach a transitional obligation or termination of an agreement or deed. This provision is largely protective in nature, with the aim of ensuring the integrity of the licensing scheme and to ensure that operation of the medically supervised injecting centre is as far as practicable not interrupted.

Accordingly, I conclude that the penalty described in this provision is civil in nature and thus does not engage this Charter right.

I consider that the bill is compatible with the Charter because, to the extent that some provisions may limit human rights, those limitations are reasonable and demonstrably justified.

Are the relevant Charter rights actually limited by the Bill?

The Bill does not limit any rights protected by the Charter.

The Bill has the capacity to, but does not engage, the right to life (section 9), right to a fair hearing (section 24) and right to not be tried or punished more than once (section 26). These matters arise by reference to the extension of the MSIC trial, and, broadly because of the operation of the transfer provisions related to a medically supervised injecting centre licence which aims to ensure that the operation of the medically supervised injecting centre is as far as practicable not interrupted.

The Bill engages the right to privacy because:

- a. Clause 29 inserts proposed section 55PA which requires the minister to conduct a review and authorises the minister to access, collect, use and disclose any data or information to complete the review.
- b. Clause 13 of the Bill will enable the Secretary to direct a licensee to enter into an agreement or deed under new section 55EA(5).

Whilst the right to privacy is engaged it is not limited by the Bill because the identified clauses are neither unlawful or arbitrary.

Here any access, collection, use and/or disclosure of any data will be:

- a. authorised by the Act, subject to existing protections under the health privacy principles in the *Health Records Act 2001* and otherwise the information privacy principles in the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*;
- b. only used for the specific purpose of the review contemplated by section 55PA.

Further, any direction to enter into an agreement or deed will only apply to a licensee and is only to ensure the operation of the medically supervised injecting centre is as far as practicable not interrupted and to further the purpose of protecting the lives of those affected by drug addiction, and, to minimising related harms.

Accordingly, any restrictions imposed by the Bill that engage the right to privacy are lawful and not arbitrary.

Is any limit on relevant rights by the Bill reasonable and justified under section 7(2)?

Not applicable.

Guidance re use of jurisprudence and previous SOC practice

Not applicable.

**The Hon. Gabrielle Williams MP**  
**Minister for Mental Health**

### *Second reading*

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS** (Dandenong – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (10:40): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

### **Incorporated speech as follows:**

In November 2017, an important Bill was presented to introduce the first trial of a medically supervised injecting room in this state's history.

In the intervening years, the services provided by North Richmond Community Health have delivered enormous benefit to Victorians impacted by the adverse effects of injecting drugs. Today, more than 63 Victorians are still with us because of this life-saving service.

Every single life lost to drugs is a terrible tragedy, for the families and friends affected, and for the wider community. The Government recognises the impact of drug harms on the Victorian community, and we've worked tirelessly since coming to office to prevent and reduce these harms.

The medically supervised injecting centre is one of the many harm reduction approaches to addressing drug use implemented by this government. This is because we know that health-led policies deliver greater positive social and economic outcomes compared to criminal justice approaches.

The key aim of Victoria's medically supervised injecting centre is to facilitate a safer setting for injecting as well as referrals of those people who use drugs, who experience significant barriers to accessing treatment, support and other services. The first supervised injecting facility opened in Switzerland in the 1980s and there are now more than 100 facilities worldwide. Most recently, the Australian Capital Territory has expressed its commitment to join Victoria and New South Wales in providing these critical services that saves lives and sometimes, change them as well.

In June 2020, an independent panel led by Professor Margaret Hamilton handed down its review of the operations at the North Richmond MSIR over its first eighteen months. In addition to saving at least 21 lives, the Panel also found that the MSIR in North Richmond had safely managed 3,200 overdoses over 119,000 visits.

Professor Hamilton's review recommended the trial in North Richmond be extended for an additional three years. The Victorian Government accepted all 14 recommendations from this first independent review.

In late 2020, a new independent review panel was appointed, led by Mr John Ryan to undertake a further review of the North Richmond MSIR. The Panel handed down its final report, known as the Ryan review, on 21 February 2023. The review made ten recommendations, based on consultation with local community, health and drug reform experts, international evidence, and data from the North Richmond MSIR trial.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Review Panel for their work in preparing this report, and for contributing their expertise to a piece of work that offers an invaluable evidence-based roadmap. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the North Richmond community, the health workers and experts, as well as the clients, who all shared their thoughts and experiences which enriched this report.

Similarly to Professor Hamilton's review, the review found that the MSIR has succeeded in its central objective: saving lives.

Since the trial's commencement, the MSIR has safely managed almost 6000 overdoses with zero fatalities, taking pressure off local hospitals and reducing ambulance call outs. The service also connected clients to essential services, like general health and housing support. I commend North Richmond Community Health and the dedicated healthcare workers at the MSIR for leading these incredible outcomes and continuing to provide unwavering support and care to the MSIR clients. The MSIR is an incredibly complex service to deliver, as it seeks not only to prevent overdose deaths, but also engage and connect individuals, who have experienced significant stigma, trauma and shame due to their drug consumption, in support services.

The panel has recommended the Government make several changes to further improve the service including more integrated security measures and expanding targeted care for vulnerable groups with complex needs, including women and Aboriginal clients to ensure they can access the support they need.

One of the most significant recommendations is to make the North Richmond service ongoing, with an expanded service model that ensures greater access to support services like housing and mental health. By ensuring the MSIR can deliver more integrated health and social services, Government is responding in a manner that is consistent with the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and better meeting the long-term needs of both MSIR clients and the broader North Richmond community.

The introduction of this Bill reflects the government's commitment to reduce drug harms in North Richmond. The Bill enables implementation of key recommendations of the two independent reviews of the trial, including:

- establishing the MSIR in North Richmond as an ongoing service.
- removal of limitations to the service's model of care, improve service delivery efficiency, responsiveness, and governance.

In addition to addressing these recommendations, the Bill also supports a more efficient process for modifications to MSIR operators' internal management protocols once they have been approved by the Secretary of the Department of Health. This is crucial given the need for all health services across Victoria to adapt to COVID safe practices without compromising client access.

The Bill includes new capacity to transfer or reissue a MSIR licence to a new provider to maintain service continuity in the event an MSIR operator is subject to profound organisational change or is unable, or unfit to continue to operate the MSIR.

Based on the Ryan review strong evidence for the MSIR being a critical lifesaving service, the Bill acquits the review panel's recommendation to make the North Richmond MSIR ongoing. In the coming months, the Department of Health will commence the recommissioning process recommended by the review, to identify a service provider that has capacity to deliver an enhanced service model, facilitated by a workforce with

expertise in complex care coordination, that will better meet the full range of MSIR client needs. To support the recommissioning, the Bill allows for the Secretary to the Department of Health to extend an existing service licence. This will enable service continuity during the recommissioning of the North Richmond MSIR to identify the best service provider to deliver the enhanced model of care.

Our work will also have a strong focus on improving safety and amenity in the surrounding area. The review panel heard from residents and business owners that the challenges created by the long-standing local drug market are ongoing and made locals feel unsafe. Improving safety and amenity in North Richmond continues to be a high priority for this government and we'll work closely with local residents, businesses, emergency services and health and social services to improve this.

We are delivering a comprehensive assertive outreach program that will increase the presence of outreach workers in the community to engage people who are currently not accessing the MSIR. The service will also proactively patrol for discarded needles, promote safe and appropriate needle disposal and support residents and business owners to address some of the challenges caused by the drug market and drug litter.

We are also improving our governance of the MSIR by increasing cross-government collaboration and oversight of key projects in the precinct, including safety and security.

The Government remains unwavering in its work to reduce drug harms in the North Richmond community – ensuring fewer Victorians mourn the unnecessary death of a loved one and Victorians struggling with addiction, get access to the support they need to live a better life.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (10:41): I move:

That this debate also be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 22 March.**

### *Motions*

#### **International Women's Day**

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (10:41): I move:

That this house notes that today is International Women's Day and –

- (1) this year marks 100 years since women won the right to stand for election to the Victorian Parliament;
- (2) for many years First Nations women did not have the same political rights as other Victorians.

I am very pleased to be able to stand and discuss this motion on such an important day in Victoria, International Women's Day. Can I acknowledge the Wurundjeri people as the traditional owners of the land on which I am speaking and acknowledge the incredible leadership and advocacy of Wurundjeri women but also their staunch determination to continue their custodianship of this country in the face of destructive colonisation and patriarchy. In particular I want to acknowledge Wurundjeri women ancestors like Annie Borate, William Barak's sister, and present leaders of the Djirri Djirri dancers and Sue-Anne Hunter, a commissioner of the Yoorrook Justice Commission. Much of the progress we have made as a society is due to the advocacy and work of Victorian Aboriginal women.

This year we recognise the 100th anniversary of women winning the right to stand for Victorian Parliament, quite a significant day. I am proud today, on International Women's Day, we are celebrating how far we have come in the Victorian Parliament. Women now make up 48 per cent of parliamentarians across both houses of Parliament, and today in the third term of the Andrews government and after decades of affirmative action and quotas we are proud to have reached an equal gender representation: 54 per cent of the Labor caucus are women and 64 per cent of ministries are held by women in our cabinet.

Since we came to government we have demonstrated an unwavering commitment to improving gender equality in Victoria. Our vision is for a fair, inclusive and equal Victoria for all women. The level and skill of women leadership in our Parliament and Labor caucus has resulted in some extraordinary nation-leading reforms for women in this state and across the country. A massive

\$9 billion investment over the next decade will see savings for families and support for women to return to the workforce or return to more hours in the workforce through reforms to early education and child care. This initiative will make kinder free for every Victorian family and deliver a new era of universal pre-prep for four-year-olds across the state. Economically, this will deliver up to 13,000-plus extra women back into the workforce over the next decade while boosting the state's economy by about \$4.8 billion each year up until 2032 – extraordinary investment with extraordinary outcomes. We are also providing free pads and tampons to up to 700 public sites, including public hospitals, courts, TAFES, public libraries, train stations and major cultural institutions. We know that these are not luxury products, they are a necessity, and women deserve the dignity of access to these products in public places.

We are also completely changing the way women's health is treated in our state, creating 20 comprehensive women's health clinics across Victoria to act as one-stop shops for women needing treatment or advice on issues from contraception to pelvic pain. I thank the Minister for Health for her leadership in this area, and the Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Health as well, for their ongoing commitment and work in rolling this out.

It is also why we established a gender responsive budgeting unit to consider the gendered impact of government decisions across the entire budget. We are currently the only jurisdiction that has such a unit out of any state or territory, and the 2022–23 state budget was the first time a gender lens was used on a budget. I am thankful for the leadership of the late Fiona Richardson in championing this and also the implementation of this work by the fantastic former Minister for Women, Gabrielle Williams, the member for Dandenong.

This Victorian government established and has responded to an inquiry into economic equity for Victorian women. It has committed to, as one of the outcomes, a \$3 million fund to industries in both manufacturing and energy to help women enter, and most importantly stay in, male-dominated sectors. This is on top of so much work that has come before it to ensure women can participate and excel in non-traditional fields. We already have women in construction and women in transport strategies and the Alice Anderson Fund to support women's startups. All of them are having a huge effect on breaking down barriers and getting more women into non-traditional, male-dominated industries.

In an Australian first, we will begin work to restrict the use of non-disclosure agreements, commonly known as NDAs, in workplace harassment cases in Victoria. They are often misused to silence victim-survivors, protect employers' reputations, avoid liability and hide serial offending. It is one thing to promote the reporting of sexual harassment, it is another thing to hide it, and we want to make sure that those perpetrators learn from their mistakes, that they are re-educated and taken to task for their actions. I thank the Attorney-General in the other place for all her work in this area.

We have supported women in leadership through funding numerous leadership programs such as the Joan Kirner Emerging Leaders Program and the new women of colour executive leadership program, which has two streams: the private sector and, I am happy to announce, a program specifically for those in the public sector. I am looking forward to seeing the recruitment of some fantastic women into both of those women-of-colour leadership programs. We also have the ECHO First Nations Women's Leadership Program, a program written by First Nations women for First Nations women, the women's board leadership program and of course our fantastic Victorian honour roll. Many of these boards, leadership roles and courses will have a focus on First Nations women and multicultural women. We have achieved gender parity on paid government boards, increasing the percentage of women to 55 per cent, which is up from 39 per cent in March 2015.

We have launched the groundbreaking Victorian women's public art program, which is addressing the under-representation of women and their achievements in public art across Victoria. An investment of \$1 million will support six art projects celebrating women's achievements. I was very pleased to join the Minister for Tourism, Sports and Major Events this morning to unveil a statue, funded in the sports portfolio, of Sharelle McMahon, Victoria's fantastic international champion netballer who has gold

beside her name and many world cups as well. It was awesome to be there to see her statue unveiled in a celebration that was well overdue.

We established the ministerial task force on workplace sexual harassment to develop reforms that will prevent, support and better respond to sexual harassment in Victoria's workplaces. The government has accepted 12 recommendations in full, two in part and seven in principle, which will lead to long-lasting reforms but, most importantly, put the issues of sexual harassment and sexual abuse in our workplaces fair and square as a health and safety issue in our workplaces with responsibility under WorkCover's coverage.

We have established Respect Victoria, the family violence prevention agency that is delivering on all 227 recommendations of the royal commission, and the work of Respect Victoria has included the fantastic Respect Women: 'Call It Out' (Respect Is) advertising campaign that you may have seen on our TVs and heard on our radios, which encourages Victorians to call out sexual harassment and disrespect to women in family circles, in community and in public places. It is why we have enshrined gender equality in law with the Gender Equality Act 2020, to address issues like the gender pay gap, women's leadership in the workplace and sexual harassment in the public sector.

We are the only jurisdiction in Australia to have such legislation; gender equality is so front and centre of this government's work. Through this Gender Equality Act, 300 public sector organisations have been measured and have been put under the microscope around their progress on gender equality within their organisations, and they include our government entities, our government departments, local government and universities. These organisations must also consider not just where they are at on measuring the gender pay gap, women's leadership and rates and reporting of sexual harassment, these organisations also need to consider an action plan – how they address their gender bias in their own programs, their own services, which they deliver, but most importantly towards their own staff – which will lead to better outcomes for all Victorians. I am so pleased that already the work of the Gender Equality Act has produced around 320 gender equity action plans, which really draws a line in the sand and says that our organisations now have a forward plan that will be checked in on in the next two years to see how progress has been made around women's equality. This is a first in Australia and something I am extremely proud of – that this government has been so committed to it.

We have also made a lot of reforms in education and very substantial steps forward. One of the public sector organisations that has a gender equity plan is the Department of Education, and as Minister for Women and Minister for Education I take the responsibility to advance gender equality within our own schools workforce very seriously. With around 100,000 staff the Department of Education is the biggest employer in Victoria and almost three-quarters of the education workforce are women. Our teachers, our teachers aides, business managers, building managers and personnel, administration and support services are overwhelmingly women. But we will always keep on working towards gender equality because in our education system men occupy predominantly more high-paying roles such as technical specialists, assistant principals, principals – leadership roles. The Department of Education's gender equality action plan aims to change that as well as close the gender pay gap.

These two portfolios also come together in the Andrews government's aspirations for the education that students get in our schools. Since 2016 the Victorian government has invested over \$82 million in the Respectful Relationships initiative. Respectful Relationships supports Victorian schools and early childhood settings to model, respect and promote positive attitudes and behaviours, and I can tell you, Deputy Speaker, I have seen it in action at our local schools as I have travelled around the state, from preps right through to year 10s and year 11s. Over 1950 Victorian government, Catholic and independent schools are signed on to the Respectful Relationships whole-of-school approach. This also includes not only engaging our students in Respectful Relationships but providing opportunities for parents and the broader community to have the conversation about respectful relationships and what that means.

Our investment in the education system is also supporting young girls to achieve their aspirations, whether it is through statewide Head Start school-based apprenticeships or access to tech schools or access to STEM education, all through the transformational new One VCE. We are all supporting girls to crack the code – this year’s theme from the UN for International Women’s Day – and to make sure that girls, as they grow into women, reach their full potential. I am proud to be the Minister for Education, knowing that I can fill the shoes of some incredible Labor women who have led this portfolio before me. In particular I want to acknowledge Caroline Hogg, Joan Kirner, Mary Delahunty, Lynne Kosky and Bronwyn Pike.

Whilst we celebrate how far we have come, I also acknowledge that First Nations women have historically not shared the same political rights here in Victoria and across the nation as non-Aboriginal women and to this day still face many barriers to equality. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women across Victoria are leading, growing and nurturing the oldest civilisation on the planet. Aboriginal women are still the matriarchs of their community. We know that the consequences of past colonisation have meant that First Nations girls and women have often had their voices silenced. This includes by the discriminatory use of voting laws to not allow Aboriginal women to vote in Victoria, which were in place likely until 1924 for state Parliament and 1962 for federal Parliament – not that long ago. In the 1950s under the constitutions of Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia, Aboriginal men had the same rights to vote as other British subjects over the age of 21. The Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902 specifically denied federal voting rights to every ‘Aboriginal native’ of Australia, Asia, Africa and the islands of the Pacific except New Zealand who at the time of the act did not already have the right to vote in state elections. This did not include Aboriginal men in Victorian state elections, who continued to hold their rights. Aboriginal women continued to not have the right to vote.

In 1908 women were given the right to vote in Victorian elections, although they remained unable to stand for election until this right was won in 1924. The Commonwealth Electoral Act 1962 gave all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the option to enrol in federal elections, although enrolment was not compulsory. It was not until some 20 years later, in 1984, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were legislatively and politically equal to other Australians under the Commonwealth Electoral Legislation Amendment Act 1983. This act made enrolling to vote at federal elections compulsory for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Lidia Thorpe was the first Aboriginal woman in the Victorian Parliament, in 2017, and I am very happy to acknowledge Sheena Watt in the other place, a member for Northern Metro, who has done an awesome job in representing Aboriginal Victorians, full stop, but particularly Aboriginal women. We need to elevate and prioritise their voices as they exercise self-determination as their political birthright as Aboriginal women. We know that due to the longstanding protests and advocacy of Aboriginal women, much has been achieved; however, we know there is so much more to be done. The Yoorrook Justice Commission has been tasked with listening to the voices of Aboriginal people and also hearing about the particular impacts that colonisation has had on women through historic policies and ongoing injustices.

Whether it is truth or treaty, Aboriginal women are leading the dedication to ambitious reforms in the lives of Aboriginal communities. The Yoorrook Justice Commission is led by the amazing Professor Eleanor Bourke AM, who is a Wergaia and Wamba Wamba elder. Aunty Eleanor has spent her life dedicated to fighting for political rights for her community, whether it is through the 2005 Wotjobaluk native title case, her work as an academic or her work leading in executive roles across the country and across government. It is because of women like Aunty Eleanor that the rights of Aboriginal women have been won and will continue to be advanced in such a profound way through truth-telling.

Treaty offers the opportunity for Aboriginal women to engage in political levels through the First Peoples’ Assembly in a way that has not occurred since colonisation. The First Peoples’ Assembly provides an opportunity for Aboriginal women to advocate for their communities in a self-determined way to reach outcomes. We have already seen with the creation of the stolen generations redress

scheme, the Yoorrook Justice Commission and the Treaty Authority that Aboriginal women are taking up leadership roles at every angle. The assembly is co-chaired by incredible Aboriginal woman Auntie Geraldine Atkinson, a Bangerang and Wirudjeri woman who has worked tirelessly for and with communities, especially in education, over decades and continues deadly work leading the assembly.

These are some of the things this government is doing to make our state more equal for everyone. I look forward in the future to tabling and discussing in this place a new gender equality action plan and strategy for this state that is inclusive, that is intersectional and that targets all age groups because we know women are not a homogenous group. We have very diverse backgrounds. We come with very different values and needs. And we want to make sure that women of all ages are captured and represented in that plan, in that strategy and in the action.

We know there is so much work that still needs to be done, and we are up for the job of doing it, making sure that this state is truly representative and democratic and ensuring that we continue to lead the way in gender equality, diversity and inclusion. We all know you cannot be what you cannot see. We need to ensure the girls of today are empowered to be the women of tomorrow regardless of the colour of their skin, their religious beliefs, their cultural upbringing or their financial situation. It is a future we want to see here in Victoria, a future I think is worth aspiring to.

Can I wish all of the women here in the chamber a happy International Women's Day and thank you for everything that you have done in representing your communities and women in your communities.

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (11:01): Happy International Women's Day to you, Acting Speaker Addison, as well as to members in the Parliament, particularly all of those women, obviously. I am very pleased to rise to speak on the motion that notes today is of course International Women's Day and that this year marks 100 years since women won the right to stand for election to the Victorian Parliament. It is quite an achievement. And for many years First Nations women did not have the same political rights as other Victorians. There have always been trailblazing women, and despite that there is still more that we need to do. That is why International Women's Day still is important on the calendar. Women's rights have moved so far, but there are still many areas that need to be addressed.

I come from a very strong line of independent women on my mother's side. My mother and my grandmother ran their own businesses, had their own bank accounts. My parents never had joint bank accounts. I do not have a joint bank account. I am in control of my own finances because I think it is exceptionally important. And when I look at my maternal grandmother, who really paved the way I think for so many people in our family to look up to and to see that this is what you can do, she was in the business of diamonds and buying and selling pubs – I believe she was engaged several times, which I have. She also was involved in hotels for a very long time, and they were traditionally male-dominated.

But I grew up with having the farm, and on the weekends we would all go into the hotel for the weekend, where Mum and her brother ran that business and her mother had previously – and they had pubs all over country Victoria. I saw how hard they worked. I saw how much they respected other women for what they had done and the work that they were achieving, and they did it with just a grain of salt. So I have certainly picked up these traits, as has my daughter, to make sure that we are absolutely independent.

I believe financial independence is so important because I see so many times when women end up in a situation of divorce and they have not had their own money. More often than not now these are people who are older than me, who often did not ever work and would only have had joint bank accounts. We see for this reason homelessness in this sector, people who are really struggling who have not struggled before but they find themselves in absolute hardship. I just cannot stress enough the need for people to make sure as best they can that they have their own money, whether that means squirrelling money aside along the way or not.

There have been some extraordinary contributions in all areas of the workforce and women have forged their way in typically male-dominated environments, and although changes have been made

there is still a long way to go. Now, we have had some battles and we have had the suffrage movement to get women to have the vote, and we know today it is 100 years this year since women were able to stand for Parliament. We had situations – it seems not that long ago – that when women got married they had to leave their jobs. I know people that worked for banks and for the public sector, and when they got married they had to leave. I think teaching might have been separate. But this happened and it was not that long ago, because a woman's place was not in the workplace; a woman's place was in the home. So we have had those battles.

We had the membership battles for equal rights with the changes to the Equal Opportunity Act. We saw the white line at Flemington, which I had experienced as a young woman – I was not able to cross that line – and in fact I had an experience also with the person I was with at the time when we were at university. He was a member of the Victoria Racing Club, and we went to the races, to one of the big events, and were questioned because we were young and were in the members stand. That was the time. One of the members had questioned why we were there, and there was that white line. Also the Melbourne Cricket Club had to make a lot of changes and convert the ladies cards to guest cards, which you could also convert to women's memberships, which I was a lucky recipient of.

But this is one of the most important battles that we have had, and I think all of us in this place would agree – I am quoting from an article in the *Age* from 1925, and the headline is 'A woman drinking in an open bar? Outrageous!' Gosh, haven't we moved! This was very contentious at the time. It was a story in the *Age*, and we are just short of 98 years from the date of that story. This was the case at the time. In Melbourne the week before the article was published:

... plans for a new hotel in the metropolitan area were submitted to the Licensing Court, and one of the members of the bench drew attention to a room marked "Ladies Parlor." The court, he said, was decidedly opposed to ladies parlors.

Certainly at the pub that I spent a lot of time in when I was growing up, the Commercial Railway Hotel in Yea, which is now the Peppercorn, there was the ladies lounge, and I do know some of my aunts and their friends would spend time in the ladies lounge. By the time I got to university things had changed a little bit, but I do recall my mother saying to me, 'Oh my gosh, there's this new woman in town and she drinks in the front bar.' Mum was quite outraged at that, and I said, 'Mum, I go to a lot of pubs in Melbourne and I drink in the front bar.' She said, 'Really?' I said, 'Yes, and I also drink pots.' That was a bit of a change for Mum.

**Roma Britnell** interjected.

**Cindy McLEISH:** Yes, and now it is pints. Things have certainly moved, but women were not welcome in the pubs. It was okay to run pubs, but you had to be in the ladies lounge, and now we have really moved a long way. These are battles that we have had to have on the way.

There are going to be more battles that we continue to have. I notice with different multicultural groups as they assimilate into Australian society the battles that different generations have, but also with the male-female battles, with the role of the woman in the house. It is difficult for these women in instances of family violence, because they do not have the knowledge that we have grown up with, knowing about being an independent person and being able to stand up for your own rights. So there are lots of battles that are still going to be had.

One of the battles – and the Minister for Women mentioned that as well – which is one of the important battles, is that of the gender pay gap. Australia's national gender pay gap is 13.3 per cent. That means for every dollar on average that men earn, women earn 87 cents. That is \$253.50 less than men each week, and over the course of a year that adds up to \$13,182. Victoria's gender pay gap is actually down from 14.4 per cent to 13.4 per cent, according to the data. What is interesting about the pay gap is that there are a lot of professions where when you go in women's pay and men's pay are equal. A job is advertised at a particular level, often, in the public service, or it is advertised at a bandwidth, and surprisingly – and it should not be the case – men go in and negotiate the higher end of that bandwidth, while the women, if they move into that bandwidth, will take the lower end. This is something that we

need to be wary of, and we need men to understand that often – and I have seen many examples when I have interviewed people – men blow their own horn a lot better than women. Women are much more reasonable in their belief about what they are capable of. They look at a job description and think, ‘I can do this, I can do that; I’ve done this, I’ve done that. Gosh, I haven’t really got that experience.’ Men go, ‘Oh, yeah. I can still do that.’ Women do not because we look at it with integrity. We have to look at how we do this, how we present ourselves, so that women get further into leadership roles.

On leadership, what happens with many women is they leave the workforce to have children, and that is a great thing. Being a stay-at-home mum is something that I absolutely greatly enjoyed, but it is when you come back into the workforce. Typically if people are only in two or three days, they do not end up in leadership positions. But if they end up in a role four days a week, they are in the mix for that leadership role. If we get more women at four days a week, we can get more women into leadership roles, and this will help break down some of that gender pay gap.

That is not easy, and it is not easy for a number of reasons. A lot of those women need to have child care, and child care is a real issue at the minute, particularly in country Victoria. There are not enough spaces. There are not enough houses. We see women get offered good jobs in country towns and they cannot find anywhere to live, or if they can find somewhere to live, they have not got the child care to support them. It is easy to talk about the gender pay gap, but we have to unpack what is there, what it means, how it is perpetuated and what can be done. I had meetings with Sue Morphet, who would be known to many in this place, and she was very big on the fact that you need these support systems to help women get to that job 3½ to four days a week so they are in contention for leadership roles. That is something that is particularly important. We need men to understand and we need men to acknowledge this and support women. The awareness is so important, but we need them to speak up as well. I cannot tell you how important that is.

The pay gap and women taking time out of the workforce ends up impacting superannuation. A recent KPMG report highlighted that in the years approaching retirement age the gender superannuation gap can be anywhere between 22 and 35 per cent. More and more women are hooked into superannuation now because of its compulsory nature, but the pay gap impacts your superannuation. The median superannuation balance for men aged 60 to 64 years is \$204,107, whereas for women in the same age group it is \$146,900, a gap of 28 per cent. For the pre-retirement years of 50 to 59 the gender gap there is 33 per cent, and in the peak earning years of 45 to 49 the gap is 35 per cent. Hopefully some of this will filter through, but we really have to address the issues that are holding some of the women back from participating in the workforce but participating so that they can maximise their talents. Individuals with low superannuation balances are more likely to rely on the age pension in retirement, and as at December 2020, 55 per cent of those collecting the full pension were women. When you have a look at that 55, it means 45 per cent of men were not. This is something that we need to be very mindful of as women attack the workforce.

I want to talk about some other areas. Small businesses make up 98 per cent of businesses in Victoria. According to the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman between 2019 and 2021, 38 per cent of small businesses in Australia were owned by women, and owning a small business is really difficult and challenging. Not only is your money on the line and you are the one that has to do the bulk of the work, but you may not get the opportunity to put as much into super depending on that business. It is really important that we look at supporting small businesses so that all small businesses thrive and so that women are not forced out of small businesses.

I had a wonderful experience a couple of years ago when I was at a camp at Marysville for children from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular suburbs. There were a number of people from the south-east and from the western suburbs, and I was talking to a couple of young African girls who were in years 11 and 12 about what they wanted to do after school. They talked about going to university, and then one of them said to me, ‘I really want to own my own business.’ I said, ‘Good on you.’ The other one said, ‘I’d like to own my own small business too.’ I thought, ‘This is terrific that we have young women who are happy to go and work towards being able to have their own business.’ Whether they

start off in other careers and have a good understanding of finances, whatever that may be, they need to be supported to go into their own business.

Women on boards: female roles continue to grow across companies, with women now representing 35.7 per cent of positions on ASX 200 boards, and that is up from 29.7 per cent in 2019. So the message is getting through that we need to have this diversity, because women have a different way of looking at things than men and you need to get that diversity, not just of backgrounds and experiences but of gender – it is an important thing to have on boards. Many organisations already have equal women on boards. I am a director of Golf Victoria and we have equal representation of men and women and equal representation from country and metropolitan areas, which works really quite well, and a number of the women on the board are very happy to be outspoken and have their views heard.

Sadly though, I think, Australian women only hold 15 per cent of chair positions, so males hold 85 per cent. And women hold just 6 per cent of CEO roles in the ASX 200. We have had some amazing leaders in business over the years. We have had Gail Kelly as CEO of Westpac. I remember hearing her talk. She was talking about the challenges of her role and being a working mum. At that stage her triplets were three, and everyone thought, ‘Oh, my gosh, you have an incredible job in South Africa with one of the credit card companies, and you had triplets.’ And she had them all at different schools so they could all have their own identity. She did say that one time she was having a phone conference and she got to work and pulled into the driveway and one of the kids said, ‘Mum, you forgot about me’, and she had to turn around and take that child to school. We have Katie Lahey and we have got Sue Morphet, who I mentioned earlier and who was with Pacific Brands way back. We have quite a number of really talented women – we have a female Lord Mayor of Melbourne at the moment – but there is obviously still more to do in that C-suite.

I want to turn to STEM, because the theme of International Women’s Day is ‘Cracking the code’, which is about bold, transformative ideas, inclusive technologies and accessible education and recognising the role it can play in combating discrimination and marginalisation of women globally. Innovation is a driver of change, and by embracing new technologies and championing the unique skills and knowledge of women in science, technology, mathematics and engineering, which is STEM – and I am very pleased that it does not have an ‘A’ in it, because I am a very strong believer that STEM is STEM and we do not need arts in there, because this is about making sure that science gets its run forward, because it has had the issues – we want to then use that to accelerate progress towards a gender-equal future. This is really important.

One of my absolute heroes in life is Katherine Johnson – you may know of her – the American mathematician who had a wonderful career at NASA and was involved at the highest level with her calculations and what she could do. Not only was she a woman working at NASA in that time, but she was a woman of colour. There were not even toilets close to where she worked. She broke down incredible barriers and she I think is just the most inspiring woman that I know of.

Women currently make up 36 per cent of enrolments in university STEM courses. I know certainly when I was at university there was only one female in the engineering course, and now 11.2 per cent of engineers working in Australia are women. I know quite a number of engineers – all of them are hockey players, as it just happens to be – and certainly the number of women enrolling in university STEM courses has increased by 24 per cent between 2015 and 2020. They make up 27 per cent of the workforce across all STEM industries, but just 23 per cent of senior management and 8 per cent of CEOs in STEM-qualified industries are women.

This is something again that we really need to do further work on here, and on average women still earn 18 per cent less than men across all STEM industries. I go to so many speech nights, and I see the girls that are among the high achievers. We need to make sure that they have the opportunities to go to university and to work in male-dominated areas if they choose, and I think that is really important.

We have a lot of women in construction. I went to the National Association of Women in Construction awards a couple of weeks ago, and they want to achieve the goal of 25 per cent participation in construction by 2025. At the moment, according to the ABS stats from 2022, 13 per cent of the construction industry are female; 11 per cent, though, are in managerial or professional services and administration, with only 2 per cent in the trades. I know women have a choice. They can do this or not. But we need to make sure that those opportunities are open for them. Not only do those opportunities need to be open but the workplaces need to be comfortable for them. We do not have to have 50 per cent of women working in a mine, but if they are there they should have more than just female-friendly toilets. We want to make sure that that environment is welcoming so if they want to participate in those areas they can participate in those areas. In 2022 a survey by the National Association of Women in Construction found that 81 per cent of participants strongly agreed or agreed that the role of women in construction was changing for the better and 73 per cent strongly agreed or agreed that they felt respected and valued as much as their colleagues. So 73 per cent is not bad, but it is not great, because they need to be respected and valued by all their colleagues. There is still work to do there. It was exciting at that awards lunch to see some of the work that people had been doing. We know Susan Alberti, who is well known to many of us, took over the running of a construction company at a young age when her husband died and she was left with, 'What will I do now?' That is really an amazing story.

We have had some wonderful leaders of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, and I want to mention just a couple that have been very active in my area. Aunty Dot Peters, the late Aunty Dot, was a remarkable woman, and she certainly fought for equality for women in her area, being a strong matriarch, but also to have any Aboriginal person who went to war officially acknowledged. Before 2006 that was not the case, and I know Andrew, her son, is doing quite a lot of work now to help that out. Lois Peeler at Worawa college – I know that the 59th Parliament actually went out to Worawa to see some of the work that is being done and to have a program working with them. Aunty Lois is a fabulous role model, and she has done some terrific things with the girls that are at this boarding school in Healesville. A lot of people do not know that there is an Aboriginal boarding school in Healesville. The majority of the girls there have come from around the country, and all of them have had some sort of mental or physical trauma. They have seen things that we would never have seen, and one of the key aims for those girls is to go back to their mobs, to the towns where they had grown up, to show what can be achieved by women and to try and change and influence some of the behaviours there. Not all of them like to do that, because for some of them Worawa is the safest place they have ever been, which is a worry in itself. But Lois is doing a terrific job there.

We have lots of the Taungurung – the Moates and the Franklins are really quite active as well – and the Wandins and the Wurundjeri. There is a lot of work that is being done with Aboriginal culture, trying to make sure that it continues to live and thrive so the young women and even young men in those areas have great opportunities and are not disadvantaged, because we know that the gap in those areas on those measures is well off being closed.

In my own electorate I have a number of very influential and successful women. Three of the four CEOs of the local government areas in my electorate are women: Livia Bonazzi at Murrindindi shire, Tammi Rose at Yarra Ranges and Kirsten Alexander, not so recently appointed, at Mansfield. These are all very capable and talented women, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to work with them, because not only do I enjoy their company but I enjoy what they have to offer and how they have met the challenges that they have in their areas, particularly in Murrindindi and Mansfield, which are small local government areas and are really behind the eight ball.

We have got some remarkable businesswomen. In Mansfield, Ros Ritchie from Ros Ritchie Wines is a great leader. Gill Belle is the co-owner of the Mansfield Regional Produce Store with her husband Dean. They also have the Delatite Hotel, but they get into all sorts of community activities and run very successful businesses. Then we have got somebody like Alli Walker, who is the founder and

owner-operator of the Mansfield Farmers Market and Walker Events. Alli is always having a crack at something to make Mansfield a better place.

In Murrindindi someone similar is Sam Hicks, who was instrumental in driving the development of the indoor heated swimming pool, a pop-up pool, and she did a great job. It is really difficult at the moment because they cannot get swim teachers, and it is really impacting on the work that they can do. She was heavily involved in the renewal of Fawcett Hall. She has been Murrindindi Citizen of the Year. She is an absolute mover and shaker.

Young Emily Noonan has been founder and owner of Soapie Goatie since 2012. Emily is young. She started that when she was 12. Emily goes to all the markets to sell her produce. That is not too dissimilar to Orianna Edmonds, who is the founder and CEO of Naturally Goat in St Andrews. She also has a goat soap and goat products business. Orianna started the business at St Andrews in Nillumbik when she was 15, and it is now in its eighth year. There are some remarkable young women doing some remarkable things.

I had a look in the Yarra Ranges. Maureen Halit and Kate Baselier have been instrumental with the Millgrove Residents Action Group, making that community better for such a long time. I look at the hours that Maureen and Kate put in, and Maureen for such a long time ran the newsagency in Millgrove and on top of the newsagency she had her own business. She was working really hard to make the community a better place. She ropes everybody into Clean Up Australia activities. She retired from the newsagency, and she is now helping her son-in-law run his accounting business because he cannot get workers. Maureen is trying to retire, but she just cannot help herself because she is so active in the community and is just such a remarkable and wonderful person.

There were some terrific women I had the opportunity of meeting last night through the Multicultural Alliance of Women against Family Violence. They are a relatively new organisation, but there are women there who work behind the scenes with their diverse communities, who really want to protect the women who are victims and survivors of family violence and to know what to do and how to do it. They are really trying to make a difference, because we know there is too much violence perpetrated against women. There is violence against men, but the vast majority is perpetrated against women, and this needs to change. It is the responsibility of all of us to speak up when we see different types of violence. In migrant communities it is harder for them, when they have come from quite a different culture, to understand and to learn what opportunities there are. Their children as they grow up will be finding things completely different.

Finally, I just do want to give a plug to some of the amazing sportswomen that we have in Australia. Sam Kerr is just remarkable. If she is not on every young Indian athlete's bedroom wall as a role model for that community, I would just be so surprised. She has been remarkable for Australia – she is from WA – but also now with what she is doing at Chelsea, and I look forward to seeing her play back here shortly. Meg Lanning, Melbourne born and bred, captain of the Australian cricket team, has just signed another three-year deal with the Stars. Meg has been remarkable. At school she broke that barrier of being in the First XI cricket team at Carey. That is a pretty remarkable thing to do, and she had the backbone and the technique and the backing of everybody. Meg has been truly remarkable.

Jamie Kah – what an amazing jockey; Ash Barty. Trailblazers I have mentioned before like Judy Dalton, who was one of the nine women along with Billie Jean King and the Australian Kerry Melville Reid in breaking away from the tour of tennis to create what we have now as the women's tour. Sheila Laxon, one of my former constituents, formerly of Seymour, is a 2001 Melbourne Cup winner as the trainer of Ethereal. She was remarkable. We have had Gai Waterhouse breaking barriers there for years and also Michelle Payne. There are so many wonderful people that are representing Australia in sports and doing such a great job. Annabel Sutherland – I think everybody should be watching out for her as a young cricketer. She is doing pretty well with the bat and the ball, and Annabel is really consolidating herself at a young age within the national team. I wish Annabel the best. I am certainly

watching her career. She is not quite my favourite cricketer yet. She has got a bit to knock off Beth Mooney, but she is certainly on the way to doing so.

With that, I wish everybody a happy International Women's Day, noting that we have got a lot to celebrate and we have made a lot of progress but there is still lots that we need to do, and men need to be listening and supporting.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (11:31): It is a pleasure to rise on this International Women's Day to talk about the issues that still confront women here in our state. I have been listening to the member for Eildon and I am reflecting on this debate and how it will underline some of the key ideological differences between the Liberal Party and ourselves when it comes to issues related to feminism, because while I celebrate the achievements of individual women also, including the many that were named by the member for Eildon, I understand that the issues that women face in our nation are as a result of structural inequalities, and we need to actually work to change the system so that it can support women whatever their background to achieve their life's ambitions and goals. It is only when we think collectively that we can do that.

I had the great pleasure of starting the morning out at Northern Health with the member for Northcote, the Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Health. Northern hospital serves one of the most multicultural and diverse communities in our state, and it was great to be at a breakfast with many of the workers from that health service. We were talking to two midwives who, with a very small grant, are working to co-design abortion care services for women from multicultural backgrounds. Now this is what International Women's Day is about: International Women's Day is about ensuring that basic health care is available for women whatever their background and of course understanding also that women have very different experiences and backgrounds and that we need to respect those and ensure that the health care services that are being delivered to women are done so in a way that is culturally safe, especially when it comes to sexual and reproductive healthcare choices.

Our government unashamedly supports the rights of women to access sexual and reproductive health care, including both medical termination of pregnancy and surgical termination of pregnancy. Our government is unequivocal on this matter, and on International Women's Day I want to make that point that the same cannot be said for those on the other side of the house.

One of the things about International Women's Day this year is that we are recognising 100 years since women were first able to be elected to this house. But let us make sure we understand the caveats there, because this is not all women, this is not universal suffrage. Aboriginal women were and continue to be treated quite differently in our community, and we as a government remain committed to giving voice to Aboriginal women. We remain committed to justice, to truth and to treaty. And we know that when it comes to the health outcomes for Aboriginal women, we know when it comes to representation outcomes for Aboriginal women, there is still so much more to do.

We do celebrate, on our side of politics, the fact that 54 per cent of our caucus are now women and that 64 per cent of our cabinet are now women. Now, I do not care about those figures other than what they deliver; that is what is important. I am not interested in women being in Parliament for their own sake. What I am interested in is women coming to this house with purpose, and that is what women on this side of the house do. We come to this place with purpose, and we are able to deliver for the girls and women of this state in areas that are nation leading.

We went to the election with a health package that addressed the real needs of girls and women across their life course. Last term we made pads and tampons freely accessible in schools, working to decrease period stigma. We have committed to expanding sexual and reproductive health clinics right across Victoria. We have already got 11 open, seven of those in rural and regional Victoria, with nine more to come. We are going to establish 20 women's health clinics right across Victoria because for too long the issues and health concerns that women have have not been taken seriously, be that period

or pelvic pain, the pain of endometriosis and the treatment for endometriosis or access to long-acting reversible contraception – it has just not been available. Access to termination of pregnancy is not as freely available as it should be, and as Minister for Health I stand in this place proud to declare that I will do more to make sure that women have access and choice and control of their own bodies.

And of course menopause – you would not have heard menopause mentioned in this place, possibly not even until today, I do not know. But let me tell you, I have just come off a morning tea with my constituents, a virtual morning tea with women in my electorate, talking about the issues that matter to them and the fact that the symptoms of menopause can be quite debilitating and it is very difficult to access appropriate care and support. What we have to do and where we have to work together is to ensure that we normalise women's health concerns so that women can shed themselves of the shame that still attaches to our bodies.

I want also to talk about our commitment to establishing a women's health research institute. Why is this so important? Because of menstruation, because of our fertility, our bodies have been seen as too changeable to be reliable subjects for research, for the building of a body of evidence. Because of our menstrual cycles we have been seen as other, and men have been the ones who get the drugs tested on them, the ones who are researched and so on. As more research is done, as more women enter the fields of medical research with a real interest in understanding our bodies better, what we are discovering is that there are many common diseases where women will present with quite different symptoms. Women are not able to access the care that they need and deserve because our healthcare system does not have the knowledge to be able to deliver that care and service.

I want to make another point, if I may. The Liberals like to talk about how Lady Millie Peacock was the first woman elected to this house. Let me just make the point that she came in on a by-election after her husband, who held the seat for 40-odd years, died. She gave one speech, and she said that Parliament was no place for a woman. I mentioned this in my inaugural speech, and this has been reflecting on inaugural speeches, but I talked about Fanny Brownbill, who was the first woman Labor member elected into this place, and she came with a purpose. She knew why she wanted to get into Parliament. Let me tell you why she wanted to get into Parliament – because prams were not allowed on public transport, and that meant that women were chained to their homes. She came in because she was sick of not being listened to by the men that ran our public transport system. She came in with purpose.

I want to celebrate my sisters in this place who come here with purpose. We are change makers. We recognise the structural inequalities that exist not just in health care but in the jobs market, where we have worked to ensure that women are getting more and better opportunities to get secure and high-paying jobs. We understand that we have one of the most gendered workforces in the world, and we want to ensure that women and girls grow up in an environment where they have that choice and it is not a choice constrained by stereotypes.

So there is very serious work to be done, but only this government will deliver. I am very proud of our comprehensive women's health package, and I want to give those on the other side a challenge: stand up for women's right to choose – access to termination of pregnancy when and where they need it.

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (11:41): It is with great pride that I rise today to speak on International Women's Day as a member of the National Party, the parliamentary party in this building with the highest percentage of women in its ranks, a feat achieved without quotas –

**A member** interjected.

**Annabelle CLEELAND**: Let us not talk women down on International Women's Day – without parachuting anyone into seats, purely through the votes of our grassroots members and on the merits of strong regional women who seek to come to this place to make a difference for their communities.

Our party has not only significantly grown since the last election, we have also added some fierce and determined women who I am lucky to call friends: the member for Shepparton, the member for

Mildura and our new member for Northern Victoria in the other place Gaele Broad. Alongside the current member for Lowan and Deputy Leader of the Nationals and our amazing member for Eastern Victoria in the other place Melina Bath, these inspiring women make up the majority of our party. The Victorian division of the federal National Party also boasts a 50–50 female–male composition through the member for Mallee and another female National in a leadership position, Bridget McKenzie, the leader of the Nationals in the Senate.

What is most significant to me is not just that the National Party is so representative of Victoria in terms of gender composition; more importantly the women in our party have experience in such a diverse range of careers. The six women in our party room have backgrounds in agriculture, health care, finance, journalism, local government, private sector business, education and politics. These are women who came to this place with fresh perspectives and new ideas from the community, for the community – life experience that is gained not through a lifetime of union or political work but through a lifetime of community advocacy and strong connections to the people who call their electorates home.

Our party has had a female voice in the deputy leadership since 2014. I note the member for Eildon and Louise Asher, a previous member for Brighton, both served in leadership roles within the Liberal Party for a significant period of the 21st century. I also congratulate the member for Bendigo East on the other side of the chamber, who as a regional MP and a minister is no doubt incredibly busy, without the added work of the deputy leadership of the Labor Party. It was pleasing to see the Labor Party last year finally appoint a woman to the deputy leadership after nearly 30 years of absence.

On this day it would be remiss of me not to mention the incredible contribution of my predecessor Steph Ryan. Steph served as Deputy Leader of the Nationals for eight years and was a passionate advocate for our region. There is no doubt I would not be standing here in this chamber without her example, her support and the incredible pathway she has forged for so many regional women. She is my friend, mentor and inspiration and someone who contributed so much to public life, the National Party and the people of Euroa. I know I speak for my colleagues when I say we have all learned so much from her and wish her all the very best in her life outside of politics.

Right across the electorate of Euroa we have passionate women showing the way and leading by example, from mayors in Mitchell, Strathbogie and Benalla to local health service CEOs to incredible principals. For people in our region there are a multitude of female roles that embody the very best of regional Victoria. In the recent Australia Day awards we saw people like Anne Douglas recognised as the Strathbogie Citizen of the Year for her tireless work in the Avenel community and Denni Bathman recognised as Greater Shepparton Young Citizen of the Year, a young lady with an incredibly bright future and a passion for serving the Murchison community. Regional Victoria is not a place where people are judged by their characteristics. Rather, they are judged on merit and by their capabilities. We are seeing women right across our region forging new pathways, and I know across Euroa the phrase that ‘You can’t be it if you can’t see it’ is falling away, with so many female leaders across every sector.

For me personally I am grateful every day for the women in my life. My mum, who gives her love unconditionally and calls us multiple times a day, has been the matriarch of our family and raised a posse of daughters with various passions and interests. My sisters Alex, Prudence and Clementine – four sisters in the one household is not the easiest proposition and it certainly came with challenges. What a privilege to be inspired by three strong, independent women determined to make a positive difference in this world, all the while raising 10 children between us. You have all forged your own paths and I love you all. Also a special shout-out to my dad, who attempted to have a son four times before he resolved that his role in this life was to be a girl dad, and he is an original feminist. To my beautiful, untameable, adventure-seeking daughter Quinn, you beat your own drum and make everyone around you dance to your rhythm. You are strong, capable and beautiful inside and out. Today and every day I want you to know how much I love and adore you.

I stand here today in this place knowing regional MPs face an extra burden. This is something we know to be true. The incredible levels of travel and time away from home simply cannot be understood

by our city counterparts. Disappointingly, unlike our federal Parliament there are no childcare options available for Victorian parliamentarians. This places incredible strain on working parents and in particular the regional mothers in this place. We should not have to make a decision between representing our communities and being apart from our children every second week. We should not have to choose between this role and being a mother. I urge the Parliament to consider the needs of regional MPs and create an environment in which we can contribute to debates with passion while maintaining the important regularity of family life. While this place may not always have been the most accessible, modern and inclusive environment in previous generations, we are in a new era with women representing such large areas of the state. I thank the Leader of the Nationals for his hard work in supporting female representation in the National Party and the wonderful, kind, caring and selfless men who now compose the minority of the National Party.

While today is a great day to acknowledge the contributions of women across the world and in public service in this place, I hope I speak on behalf of all women here when I say that we are not here because of our gender. We are here because we have a burning passion for the people we come here to represent and we have proven we are the right people to be in this position. Our success as a Parliament will not be defined by the gender composition of these chambers but by the way in which we make our regions and our state a better place to live. I am not here as a woman; I am here to represent my community and fight for change. I am proud to do so in a modern National Party, and I look forward to doing so alongside the powerful women of regional Victoria. To all the women here in this place and across the entire state: happy International Women's Day.

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (11:49): Happy International Women's Day to all my female colleagues in the house. So far we have heard some pretty important contributions from the Minister for Health and the Minister for Women. I am extremely proud to be part of a government where we know that Victoria is leading the nation when it comes to gender equality, to be part of government where 64 per cent of cabinet are women and 54 per cent of our Labor caucus are women – strong women and those who really advocate for and support their local communities. We are very much committed to improving outcomes for women from all walks of life. Our government has a bold agenda when it comes to women's health and we are leading the nation on this.

We have invested \$600 million to increase access to specific women's health services in Victoria. In my electorate we built the Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital, the home of the first neonatal intensive care unit in the west. We are making sure that women receive the best care closer to home, not only when it comes to our hospitals but also we have built the women's prevention and recovery centre, which was opened to women and families in my electorate just last year and provides access to mental health support and care for women from diverse backgrounds in the west. In my electorate we will be building a brand new women's health clinic at Sunshine Hospital, which I am really looking forward to, and this is part of our \$120 million commitment for women's health clinics. This really is a game changer for Victoria, making sure that we have these health clinics spread across Victoria to help women at all stages of life to access vital health care.

When it comes to supporting women in small business, as the Minister for Small Business on International Women's Day I am pleased to celebrate women-led small businesses across Victoria. As I said previously, there are over 720,000 small businesses, and 38 per cent of small business owners are women. We have numerous programs that support small businesses and in particular women owners through our Ready for Growth program, which has supported close to 130 women owned and operated businesses to access new markets and grow and create those job opportunities. We are also providing the Partners in Wellbeing program, which has given 1500 women across Victoria, and also their staff, access to wellbeing coaches, financial counsellors and business advisers.

As many people know, I am the first female Muslim MP to be elected to Parliament, and I wonder 100 years ago what eyebrows would have been raised. But I am really proud of that, and I hope that I am paving the way for many to follow. I was advised at a veterans round table last Friday that I am

also the first woman Minister for Veterans for this state. I am extremely proud of that too and look forward to the work that we do in that space.

What I am really passionate about – and it is something that our government announced last year – is our \$3 million investment to help stamp out discrimination and racism in Victoria. We know what this is about. We know that this is really targeting and supporting our multicultural and multifaith communities. Whether your surname might be perceived differently to others, whether you wear a hijab, whether you are a woman of faith or colour or whether you come from a non-English-speaking background or multicultural background really should not matter. We want to make sure that all opportunities are available and, most importantly, that these sorts of incidents are heard and considered and we take the appropriate steps to stamp them out.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank the amazing and awesome women in my local community who do a fantastic job every single day. They go over and above in support, whether it is our mothers, grandmothers, sisters, daughters, nieces or friends. I want to make a special shout-out to my own mum. I am absolutely blessed. She has been my absolute inspiration. She is strong, passionate and caring, arriving in this country with nothing more than a suitcase, with no English, and making her way through. The support that she has given me and my siblings has been – I just do not know what I would do without the support of my mother.

I would like to acknowledge Lidija Nezvovski, Cr Cúc Lam, Candan Ahmet, Ravneet Mundi, Beata Calleri, Elizabeth Dziedzic, Josephine Cassar, Maria Formosa, Emine Orhan, Sanela Makki and so many other women leaders across the west who are doing a tremendous job supporting one another in their own forums and in their own space. Whether it is through connecting, networking or actually accessing information – crucial information as well – in their forums, they are able to really support other women in their communities, and most of them come from a non-English-speaking background. I do want to make the point that I have heard the statement ‘Multiculturals don’t know what they want.’ They actually do know what they want. Multicultural communities, non-English-speaking background communities, actually do know what they want. But it is about prioritising, it is about opportunity and it is about accessing those opportunities, and most times it is very difficult and challenging. I believe there is still much more work to be done, and no matter what setting you are in, we need to advocate for women. I have got to say, sometimes I have had some very strong men that have supported me in my journey – and I want to thank men that support women throughout their journey – and they have been really integral for me and my journey to this place and of course my 20 years in the public sphere.

I think, as I said, we need to continue on supporting women, particularly young girls. Kids need our support. They need to know that they can smash the ceiling; they need to know that they can reach the stars and dream big. And I do want to say this on the record: you do need to wrap yourself around people who support you along your journey. When it is up and down you need to be patient and determined. And really importantly, do not take no in whatever space you are in. Whether it is a school or a workplace – in whatever setting – never take no as an answer. Do not allow yourself to be put down by others and continue to be determined, because your path will be one that, in Victoria, has opportunities that are so great.

I hope that I have made the path easier for my own niece and for all the many young girls and women that will come after me knowing that we have achieved this and that they can achieve this as well, whether it is in the boardrooms or whether it is at executive or corporate levels or at any levels of government. Be patient, work hard and be strong. I know that dreaming big, you can actually achieve it. There will be many others that follow through, and there is so much more that needs to be done. Acknowledging the contribution of women across this chamber today, I want to thank women that are not mentioned in this place from the north-west, south-east, regional and across Victoria for all the work that you do. Happy International Women’s Day, and may we continue to see many others follow our footsteps.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (11:58): Today I rise on International Women's Day, and I want to begin by acknowledging the important work that women do right around the state of Victoria and right around the world. I find this day an opportunity to celebrate our whole community, to thank the women who have done so much before me and to thank the men who have supported the women and who acknowledge and understand the importance of a society that we work towards, where equality is what we are actually striving for. I am a woman who believes in equality. I feel equal – I am equal to everyone – but I am different, and that is what I think we should always celebrate, the fact that I am a woman and I am different to the men but we are equal. That is how I have always seen it, and that is how I would portray it to my young daughter and to young women, who I hope I can be a role model for, because standing in this place 100 years after women were given the opportunity, as rightfully we should have been, to stand in this place is a significant achievement.

I want to pay tribute to all the women of South-West Coast – women and all community members in fact who contribute so much to what makes our part of the world so good. Teachers like Clare Monk, who I meet with at West Warrnambool, or Jo Shelton, a principal from Portland, or Mandy Jones, the Woolsthorpe principal – where my children were educated – right across our region are making the places in South-West Coast better places to educate our children.

I want to acknowledge the businesswomen like Angie Paspaliaris, who is a dentist and a business owner and a local government representative. Women like Angie are taking our community on – and she is young and has not long started her family. You know, that is something I think we should always acknowledge. It is difficult. You do find it harder when you have got children, especially when they are young.

There are women like Jodi Fry, a business owner herself in the transport industry and a journalist, keeping the voice of regional Victoria alive. She is a very outspoken and brave woman. Britt England is a tireless volunteer for the Portland hockey community so that the kids in Portland can actually participate in hockey and have venues to play on. Women like that have put so much in to make sure children right across the region have access to games like hockey.

Wendy McFarlane is a young woman I met last week at the Heywood Pony Club who is working so hard to make sure that they have a place they can call home as a club and putting herself at the forefront and organising – along with her committee, I am sure – and being a spokeswoman. So many women. Young Gracie Drummond, who I met last year, is helping Portland recover from the COVID event, putting night markets forward as an idea and driving that so that the business community can enjoy the Christmas opportunities that come from doing something like that. Well done.

But today I am also going to be welcoming a couple of young women into the Parliament to have lunch with them and celebrate International Women's Day: Maddy McConnell and Kathryn Barkla launched We've Got You, a foundation to support families experiencing the loss of a child from conception through to age 16. Both these women came to see me last year. They both lost their children, their infants, and they are doing so much to help other women and their families – the spouse, the husband, as well – to go through that horrible experience with support. They have done an incredible job and will be very welcome today because I want to acknowledge the good work they do.

There are young girls like Alexandra Richardson – she is not a kid anymore, she is probably in her 30s, but I watched her grow up. She started her own business in Port Fairy and runs the Oak and Anchor restaurant. I really admire young people who are having a great opportunity at having a go at life and being role models themselves.

I met Carol Logan last week in Portland, an older lady who told me about the story of her husband, who has had diabetes for nearly 60 years, and how important the health service is to her and her husband and how she will be an advocate and has been an advocate to make sure Portland maintains the health services they need for that community, doing it all off her own back, just wanting to be a strong local advocate and doing a fantastic job.

There are so many women. Mary Irwin from Portland has been advocating for the Portland gymnastics centre to be built so the children there can continue that activity in an environment that is more suitable than they have currently got. Nicole Dwyer is a really hardworking advocate for Port Fairy netballers. There are very successful teams in the Port Fairy netball community as well. Mellissa Lynch works with neurodivergent children and is a strong advocate to make sure children are safe in our schools. Her experience is of children who have been unable to be kept in a safe environment despite all the good work that the principals and the teachers are doing. Because of the lack of support they are getting some of these children end up being significantly hurt in the school environment. Some of those stories that Mellissa talks to me about are more than disturbing. So I am very, very impressed with Mellissa's advocacy.

Emma Mahony is a strong advocate in our community for women's health and wellbeing. You know, it is something we need to put at front of mind, our health and wellbeing. Making sure we have got women like Emma doing that, I do really admire. Kim Kavanagh is a woman who has been the Business and Professional Women Geelong president for many years. I am sure Kim, as she keeps saying, would like to hand it over, but she is doing such an incredible job to make sure our businesswomen feel supported and have an environment in which they can come together and share the challenges and opportunities as I think it really does support them.

Sarah, Emma and Julie Holcombe, tireless fundraisers for palliative care services; Doreen Symes, the president of Promoting Portland; and the other businesswomen of the Portland community who come together and who I met with last year, all the work you all do really does progress our communities, and it does go unspoken. I am not highlighting them as the only people who do things, because there are people who pick up the neighbour and take them to their doctor's appointment and they are all contributing.

I look back at how far we have come. When I was younger there were not female ambulance officers in Warrnambool and now there are. There are far more female police officers than there ever were before. We are seeing many more women in agriculture than we did before. In the dairy industry women have always played a significant role, but people like Shirley Harlock and Anne Adams have been trailblazers on boards. I came along after them and was able to chair a board having just had a child and bring that child into that environment. Hopefully with these role models we are putting an environment forward that does embrace and encourage younger women.

It is challenging. That child that I just referred to is my youngest. With today being International Women's Day, I acknowledge the young women of today. She is working with the AFL for probably around 30 hours a week and studying full time at university doing her degree. It is role modelling for people like my young daughter, who I will welcome into the Parliament at 5:30 after she finishes work. We will have dinner together to celebrate International Women's Day. As a working mother, it is not always easy. Your kids sometimes resent the fact that you are not there as much as you should be or could be, but having that role model I think is very important. That is the conversation that I had with her this morning about financial independence and the challenges that women have. She said, 'Mum, but I admire what you are doing, because it gives me a good foundation for understanding what I need to do to set myself up.'

Happy International Women's Day. Keep up, everyone, your good work. Thank you to the gentlemen who support me, surround me, and I acknowledge the work you do supporting women. That is why we have got the equality that we have, because of the respect I have here from my colleagues.

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham) (12:07): Like our previous speakers, I wish everyone a happy International Women's Day, and may every day be International Women's Day. This morning we started International Women's Day in a really lovely way. It was down at Rod Laver Arena with the Minister for Women, as well as the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, unveiling the statue of Sharelle McMahon.

We have only a few statues of women in this city. I think there are five sportswomen that have been represented, including Sharelle McMahon. It is important for us have physical manifestations of women in front of us, to have young girls, women and older women see that women are respected and depicted. It has taken us a while to get to number five, and I look forward to number six, which is another netballer, coming soon. It has taken us time to get here, and I am glad that we have, because to be able to represent a woman of Sharelle McMahon's talent, ability and dedication to her sport is important. We have statues of male sportspeople everywhere. We have statues of dogs, we have statues of racehorses, yet we have only nine statues of women in our city, or 10 today. It is shameful, colleagues. It is absolutely shameful.

Sharelle McMahon is an absolute netball legend. She has had a career spanning 25 years as both a player and coach, and she has achieved so much. She was a part of Melbourne Phoenix and then she was a player with Melbourne Vixens, playing over 200 games. She has played for the Australian Diamonds. She has been a part of Commonwealth Games gold winning teams. She has been a part of world championship winning teams. She is an absolutely fantastic player, and there are so many women who are fantastic at what they do who do not get recognised for that. There are so many women who achieve a lot in our community who are not recognised, who are in fact sometimes pushed to the side so that a bloke can get the limelight and the woman is not recognised at all.

I will give you a bit of a silly example, but I will give you an example nonetheless, and that is the game of Monopoly. A woman invented Monopoly. It was called the Landlord's Game. She was an American woman. She invented it because she wanted to have a crack at the male ubercapitalists who were, at the turn of the 20th century, exploiting everyone and making a lot of money. It is ironic and sad that she was pushed to the side, the game was turned into Monopoly and became the game that we all know and play now. But her message was a bit missed. It is ironic that Monopoly was taken over by a bloke who made a lot of money selling it to the board game manufacturer and off it went.

**A member** interjected.

**Vicki WARD:** Absolutely, member for Geelong: what's new?

It is just one little story, but it is a story nonetheless that really shows how many women have been sidelined despite their amazing achievements, despite their discoveries within science, within technology – the women who have developed code going back decades. We have all seen the movie where the woman plots the path for the moon landing. Nobody knew about these women at NASA who were doing this incredible mathematical computation, who were doing this amazing stuff, who were completely invisible to us. They were women of colour who were completely invisible to us until someone made a film about it and then we learned. It is important that we do learn and that we continue to remember and see our histories. But for a movie to have to be the thing that tells us this is a bit sad.

On International Women's Day it is wonderful to see in Queen's Hall that we have more women depicted visually there. I particularly want to call out Pauline Toner, who represented my community. She was the first woman, Labor woman, to represent my community at a local government level, the first woman to become mayor, the first woman to represent my community in state government and the first woman to become a cabinet minister in this state. It is quite gobsmacking that it took that long. She was elected in 1977 and became a minister in the early 1980s. It took so long for that to happen. It is amazing to think that it has only been 100 years that women have been allowed to try to be in this place. We could vote and win a national vote, but we could not be in this place until 100 years ago. It does my head in to think how many women – how many brains, how many contributions – have been held back and how different our city and our state could have been had women's voices been encouraged and been allowed to be here.

I want to thank my party. I want to thank the Labor Party for the tremendous work it has done around gender equality and for the support that it continues to give and has given women for decades to have

their voices heard. I am thankful to be a part of a party that wants to see women empowered and wants to see a community that reflects respect and empowerment towards women.

I also want to talk about Vida Goldstein. I find it amazing that we do not have a depiction of her, this woman who did so much work, who sadly was unsuccessful in her runs for Parliament but who did so much work to really be someone that other women could aspire to be, who could see that there was an opportunity to be a political activist, that there was an opportunity to strive for political power, to be a part of the decision-making process. This woman worked incredibly hard. While it is terrific that there is a seat – it is a pun; there is a memorial to her in Portland that is a seat, because she campaigned so hard to get one – in recognition of Vida Goldstein, but there is not an image of her. It helps for us to see ourselves, to be able to see other women out there, to walk past a woman and think, ‘That woman has done something. That woman is being recognised. That woman is being celebrated.’ There are so many statues to dead white men who were not huge contributors to society; they just happened to be someone with a lot of money at the time. To be able to have more women depicted in our community across our state is really important. I am grateful for the work that the Victorian government is doing, and the City of Melbourne, in encouraging and supporting artists to depict more women in our communities.

The motion put forward by the Minister for Women also talks about ‘for many years First Nations women did not have the same political rights as other Victorians’. This is absolutely shameful – it is horrible – and I am so glad that we are continuing to talk about this and that we are wanting to recognise and face our history, that we are not wanting to pretend that this history did not exist, that there was not a disenfranchisement. I look forward to more women’s stories being a part of the Voice movement that we will see this year, as well as the voices of the women who I know are speaking now through the treaty process that we are undertaking as a state government.

I want to talk about Auntie Pam Pedersen, who is a wonderful Yorta Yorta woman who lived in my community for many years and has – for me, unfortunately; for her, I know she loves it – moved back to Shepparton, which is her home. But we do miss her in my community. Her mother Lady Gladys Nicholls has one of the few statues of women in our city, and her arm is linked to that of her husband Sir Doug Nicholls, the pastor and humanitarian who worked hard to support the Aboriginal community including with the Aboriginal Advancement League. Lady Nicholls also worked hard to support the community around her, including those who were struggling. She was also an activist for the rights of women, and in the 1970s Lady Nicholls was appointed the Victorian state president of the National Aboriginal and Islander Women’s Council and was secretary of that national body.

Auntie Pam is someone who has absolutely kept her family’s sense of social justice and activism, of compassion and caring, going. She is a small woman who is an absolute powerhouse of energy and compassion and love. She continues to make an important contribution to our community across Victoria, whether it is in youth justice, whether it is for breast cancer survivors or whether it is for the benefits of exercise and being physically healthy. She will turn up and encourage anybody with this amazing smile that she has, the sparkles in her eyes so you just want to hug her, where you just want to be around her and get that beautiful energy she has got. She has a huge heart. She cares for everyone. She is so generous with her time, and this includes all of her volunteer work.

Auntie Pam’s is just one story of a woman who is doing amazing work that often goes under the radar, where she is supporting people, where she is walking with people, where she is encouraging them and helping them in their lives. So many women do this, and it is often not recognised. That is a tragedy. It is a tragedy that these stories do not get to be publicly told. We will all have women in our families who have done amazing things, like my nanna, who raised three girls on her own and did nothing but look out for and care for other people – an amazing woman. These are micro stories, but they are important stories. There are so many women who have done so much in this community whose stories deserve to be told and deserve to be celebrated, and I am glad we are celebrating International Women’s Day, but I want to celebrate these women every day.

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (12:17): I am delighted to be able to join this motion today to celebrate International Women's Day. For me, as I reflect on the importance of this day, one of the most significant in the calendar of important things we celebrate during the year, it is about opportunity and security – opportunity and security for all. I do think it is fair to say that we still have a long way to go. We have made enormous strides in the cause of equality for all and more security for all, particularly the vulnerable. In many cases they are women and children, but we have a long way to go.

It is interesting as you reflect on the history particularly of the last century and the first two decades of this century that we have made significant strides. If you look in the area of electoral laws, the universal franchise, it took far too long, but we eventually achieved equality of franchise and the ability of people to nominate, stand and be elected to parliaments across our country. But it took a long time, and there was for many decades a great deal of resistance to that. If you look at another area of the law, equality of opportunity and antidiscrimination, it took far too long for the statute books to protect the ability of women in particular – and others, but principally women – to access the opportunities that were available to men. It was only in the 1970s that our equal opportunity laws reflected gender equality, and eventually they would go on to reflect equality in the areas of maternity leave and things like that, which are important if you are to extend opportunity to all.

In the criminal law it has been an area where I think it is clear to say, particularly in that jurisdiction, that women have not enjoyed the protections that, say, men have. Under governments of different political persuasions there have been reforms over the last two decades in particular, particularly in the face of domestic violence and sexual abuse, to protect women in particular but also children as well who have faced difficulties in bringing claims to the courts and seeking justice for wrongs done to them. It is only in recent years that we have amended our evidence acts to make sure that it is easier for victims of sexual and domestic violence to come forward. It has been very difficult for claimants, for victims, to come to the courts and pursue claims. I know from my work in various parts of my career in the justice system that it is not always easy for women to come forward who have faced serious incidents of violence or sexual abuse, and we have more to go on that front.

Those legal changes have been important, but I want to spend a little bit of time today just talking about the importance of cultural change. We can change the laws – and that is perhaps an easier aspect of the task, to amend our laws – but it is about changing culture. In the area of domestic and family violence I still think we have got a long way to go to change the culture. Yes, efforts in good faith have been taken to deal with the scourge of family violence. But we know from the statistics that are coming out that many women and children still face domestic and family violence in Victoria, and those figures are stubbornly high. That is because we still need cultural change across sport, the arts – right across our culture we still in many ways emphasise a subtext of violence in how we treat domestic and family violence, so we have got more to do on the cultural front.

Access in the workplace is another area where culturally we still have more progress to make. If you look at what has held particularly women back in the workforce, I think we have had outdated attitudes to the idea of remote leadership, particularly with young women who are coming through, let us say, a corporate employer on a trajectory of promotion but want to have kids. For far too long many employers have seen that as incompatible with that female employee being able to continue on that trajectory. For many women I know, having worked in many aspects of corporate Australia advising clients on modernising their employment practices, having kids has been a roadblock to their career, and it should not be.

In a strange way COVID actually brought all of this into focus, because for the first time employers were able to, if you like, allow employees to operate remotely. I have always believed that one of the biggest hindrances to female employees being able to achieve positions of leadership in organisations has been this outdated attitude, so the idea is that you can allow, accommodate and even promote the idea of remote leadership to allow those women who want to take time out – for whatever reason, but in many cases it is to have kids. Employers need to modernise their attitudes and not be, if you

like, deterred by the idea that a really talented employee who wants to take time out should be able to continue. So we have got a way to go on that. If you look at the ASX companies, how many of those companies are predominantly populated with female members on their boards? We still have a long way to go, so those attitudinal and cultural changes are still necessary.

I do want to just spend a bit of time acknowledging some of the outstanding women in the electorate of Hawthorn and around Boroondara who do terrific work, and on a day like this it is important to recognise them. I would like to acknowledge Amanda Donohoe, who is the CEO of Servants Community Housing. It is a charitable organisation in Boroondara, predominantly in Kew and Hawthorn, and Servants Community Housing provides urgent accommodation for people who have fallen on hard times. They come from everywhere. There are people who have had fine careers and even been economically secure with no financial insecurity to affect them but fall on hard times for whatever reason it might be. Amanda is a trailblazer. She has staff who, like her, are totally dedicated to the people they are looking after, and they have in the last few years expanded their operations to provide accommodation for women fleeing family violence – an outstanding leader in our community.

I also want to mention Jane Stewart, someone with a corporate background who a few years ago decided that there was something more to do outside of her work, so she founded It's the Little Things Community. This is an organisation that has gone from nowhere and in a hurry to providing over 10,000 meals as of late last year from a standing start, providing meals for people who have fallen on hard economic times. Jane did not have to do that. She has built a fantastic team of dynamic volunteers who are out there providing meals for people who cannot otherwise put food on the table – an outstanding leader in our community.

I would also like to acknowledge the mayor of Boroondara. Felicity Sinfield is a member of Victoria Police, a mother of children and yet also able to be an outstanding mayor of Boroondara and a long-term councillor in the area. I was at an International Women's Day function today at the Hawthorn Arts Centre that Felicity hosted – an outstanding community leader who is able to demonstrate that she can be a fantastic role model for young women who want to get involved in public office.

The final person in the community I did want to recognise is Jan Dimmick. Jan may be known to some people in this house. She is, if you like, someone who has been in Boroondara for decades. She is 95 years old, still going strong, the chair of the Boroondara Australia Day committee and committed to volunteer work across a range of things, from taking tours at the MCG to working with local charities and also attending every citizenship ceremony that she can at that advanced age to welcome new members of the Australian family. Jan, like the other outstanding individuals I have mentioned, is someone we can all look up to – not just young women but all of us, men included.

I cannot finish today's address without acknowledging the influence of my wife Betty and my three daughters on me and how important it is for all men to realise that we have had opportunities, particularly in our generation, that did not come so easily to those who were before us or even women who grew up with us. And some of those things I spoke about at the start – the importance of cultural change, which has to underpin all of the legislative changes that we have made – remain important. So I acknowledge Betty and my daughters and also my fantastic mum and my own sisters. Thank you, and I join with everybody in this house in wishing everybody a happy International Women's Day.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (12:27): I am very happy to rise today and speak on this wonderful International Women's Day, noting that Victoria is leading the nation in gender equality. Of course that is not by accident and it has been an extraordinary amount of work over many, many years to get to where we are today, noting there is so much more to do.

I did just want to pick up on a couple of points, because yes, I agree, today we do not want to be sledging other women. And yet some sledges were made. I heard some inferences about how some women gained their seats on this side of the fence, querying things such as merit; inferences about quota; and putting down people who might have worked in unions as if somehow this is a bad thing.

We know nurses, we know teachers, we know ambos, we know meteorologists and others belong to unions, so I found that quite extraordinary. I did think, ‘Why are we making sledges?’ Yes, let us not make sledges. Let us not make them. But they were made, so I just thought we needed to pick up on them, because let me tell you: every time you run out, put on the record player and replay ‘The quotas: mustn’t have quotas; we’re fantastic because we don’t have quotas; we’re better than you’ it is a gift to misogynists. It is a gift to them, because let me tell you: they do not like quotas. Why do they not like quotas? Because they work. They work. And let me tell you: the Andrews Labor government is leading the country by example. Decades of action, including affirmative action and quotas, has meant that 54 per cent of Labor Party members of Parliament are women. This extends to the cabinet, where 64 per cent of ministers are women. Okay – you get my point.

There are other inferences, and I think we have to take care in this as well. I am not here because of my gender, not here because of ‘characteristics’. I have got some characteristics, and they have led to me being here today – persistence, resilience. I have had a lot of education. I would like to think we are loyal – and I am not just talking about myself, fellow colleagues here too have such generosity. They work hard. These are characteristics, and I am pretty certain that members in the community can see this. They can see this with their own eyes. I actually have plenty of people in the community who are pretty glad to have a woman in Parliament. Yes, I am a woman. Oh, my goodness! How dare I, or how dare anyone in the community be happy that a woman has been elected to Parliament? It is inferred that you cannot do this job just because of your gender; you have to have many good – great – characteristics to be able to endure the role, don’t you, because it is hard work. People can see this, so we have to be careful about oversimplifying what gets us here and why we are here at this point in time. So I did feel the need to raise this.

Now, gender, that very important topic, has been a barrier to women getting in here, so we should celebrate the fact of people of female gender being able to be elected to Parliament, but that does not infer that women do not have merit when they are elected to Parliament, because we know there are so many wonderful Victorian women, actually women across the globe, who have many wonderful qualities, who are well educated and who can do so many great things for their community. There are plenty of women to fill a quota, let me tell you, who are aptly qualified to do so, and we can see evidence of this in both the state and federal parliaments. I hope my point has been made.

In any case, talking about the gender barriers that we have been able to surmount – and that is why we are here today – I am actually going to quote something from history, from the wonderful book *The Borough and its People: Port Melbourne*:

By a serious oversight, on the part of the Parliamentary draftsman, the Electoral Act of 1863 that granted the right to vote to ratepayers, failed to define them as *male ratepayers*, permitting women to register and actually vote in the general election of 1865. As the parliamentary website comments: *Shocked at such effrontery, and embarrassed by their oversight, Members of the Legislative Assembly hastily amended the offending clause early in 1865 by restricting the vote for parliamentary elections strictly to male ratepayers ... which was decidedly not a victory for women’s rights.*

Can we see how far we have come? Is this not wonderful? But we could see back then gender was a barrier, so I do not understand why there is such an issue about drawing attention to gender and about women being elected to Parliament, because there is a danger in this. You are sending a signal, and it is not only to people here, it is to the women out there: ‘Don’t push too far forward. Don’t be too assertive. Just hold yourself back a little bit, because someone might get uncomfortable.’ Well, it is because people have been made uncomfortable that we have got to where we are today, so I think we have to take great care in the signals that we send in the speeches that we deliver in this Parliament. I am just putting it out there.

A further point I want to make is with regard to the issue of characteristics such as resilience. Can I give you an example. On 19 occasions between 1889 and 1908, private members bills were introduced in the attempt to give women the vote, but the support was insufficient to get a bill through the ultraconservative Legislative Council. The Victorian suffrage society was founded in 1884 by a small

group of women, including Henrietta Dugdale and Isabella Goldstein – Vida Goldstein’s mother, fancy that. The great women’s suffrage petition of 1891 was drawn up by a number of suffrage organisations working together, including the suffrage society and the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. In the course of a few months they collected signatures from 28,000 women all over Victoria by doorknocking suburb by suburb and town by town, and just to note, in Port Melbourne 515 women signed. I just have to draw attention to that because obviously that is in the seat of Albert Park, and I am very proud of their efforts, because all of this incredible work has led us to the path where we are here today, so I think that has to be commended as well.

I certainly appreciate greatly the fact that we do have greater than parity in terms of the representation of women in our government, because you can feel the strength of your place in the Parliament. You know that your voice is actually genuinely being heard, and my colleagues can probably reflect on that. I do feel genuinely when I am talking to my male and female colleagues that we are genuinely heard, and I am not just saying that lightly. I can tell the difference from when I have experienced some other workplaces where there was not the same parity. Definitely when we are talking about that issue of culture, we can see that all the tremendous structural reforms that have been put in place are making a difference. I would like to think that – obviously this is one example, and I hope that we are leading the way; I believe we are – that will also then translate to the broader community.

For instance, when we are talking about great, important structural reforms – because it is one thing to talk about niceties but it is another thing to be able to implement change that makes a difference – as a result of the Gender Equality Act 2020, 300 public sector organisations measure progress on gender equality in their organisations and take action to reduce the gender pay gap and rates of sexual harassment. These organisations must also consider and address gender bias in their own programs and services, which will lead to better outcomes for all Victorians.

I am just zoning in on one example of many, many reforms that have been implemented in order to change the community in which we live, and that is the wonderful change whereby we will install 1500 free pad and tampon machines at up to 700 public sites, including public hospitals, courts, TAFEs, public libraries, train stations and major cultural institutions like the State Library Victoria and the Melbourne Museum. I think many women can reflect on their earlier years of life. If one deals with embarrassment, that is a great thing. It obviously is a great equaliser because it means everybody has fair and reasonable access to products that they absolutely need, but it also sends a really important signal that you are supported irrespective of your socio-economic background, that you will be supported by the community in which you live, that you are a female and you are supported just as well as the men. There are so many layers to these reforms when you look at all the various aspects of the changes that have been brought about through our government, and I am so very proud of them and very proud to be part of our government here today. Happy International Women’s Day.

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (12:37): It is a pleasure to rise and speak to the motion about International Women’s Day – and happy International Women’s Day to everyone in here today. As I was approaching contributors for this motion and organising the schedule as the Nationals Whip I approached our esteemed Leader of the Nationals and asked if he wished to contribute. And his reply, let *Hansard* reflect, was: ‘I don’t need to, it’s not our place. We know where we stand; we just do as we are told. You ladies say “Jump” and we say “How high?”’ I say, it is about time. He is in fact going to speak later on, along with a few of our other Nationals colleagues, including our member for Shepparton who has not yet spoken and will do so after lunch.

As I think about what International Women’s Day means, I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge just a few of the remarkable women from our region in the great north-west of this state. Siobhan Stagg, who is an international soprano, has been back in Australia recently – very recently in fact – as the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra soloist in residence. She was presented with the key to the City of Mildura; it is the place where she grew up. An internationally acclaimed soprano, educated in Mildura, grew up there and now lives in Berlin and travels the world – born and raised in Mildura. Kim O’Reilly, who I have had the pleasure of podcasting with, is a domestic violence survivor and

fierce advocate through her work with 'It's never ok' and she advocates for tougher laws for perpetrators. She is a warrior. When we talk about strength, particularly in women, there are few stronger than Kim.

Speaking of women warriors, Katrina Umback, after losing her husband far, far, far too young to a heart condition, is a fierce advocate for the Heart Foundation and working toward making sure that your postcode does not dictate whether you can get treatment for what kills more people in regional Victoria than anything else, and that is heart disease. She is also a passionate product of the Northern Mallee Leaders program.

I also want to acknowledge Dr Anne Webster. Not only is she our federal representative but she is also the founder of Zoe Support Australia. He is not in here at the moment, but the member for Mornington was on the board of Zoe Support. It is a not-for-profit, community-based organisation for young mums aged 13 to 25, because often teenage pregnancy and motherhood can be looked upon as a deficit.

Zoe Support is there to offer pre-birth support for young pregnant women and opportunities for parenting mothers to learn new skills and re-engage in education. It is an amazing organisation, and Dr Anne Webster is a remarkable woman. She is in Canberra right now as our federal representative.

Of course I do need to acknowledge a young lady who I am eternally proud of and who is just one of the reasons that I do what I do, and that is my stepdaughter Scarlett. I am going to try to hold together. She has just turned 14. Happy birthday, honey. She is navigating the start of her adolescence with a lot of sass but an equal amount of grace, and I just cannot wait to see where life takes her. She certainly puts her father back in his place from time to time and certainly helps me do the same, which is terrific.

**Peter Walsh:** I feel sorry for Luke.

**Jade BENHAM:** I do not. I also want to acknowledge the mums in my electorate who raise our future food producers and leaders each and every day. Being a stay-at-home mum is not for the faint of heart. I could not do it, but I absolutely commend those that do. We appreciate you.

In my very first contribution in this place I spoke about the strong line of women that I come from. My Italian grandmother emigrated out here to be with my grandfather, who she had only met in childhood in the 1950s. She could not cook, and I bring that up all the time because she could not cook, but she could work, and I am clearly descended from her, not being a fan of domestic duties. I would much rather be out in the field getting my hands dirty working.

My maternal grandmother, the daughter of a World War I hero, grew up on harsh Mallee land in the 1920s. She could cook. She was excellent at CWA sponges and scones – she did not pass that on to me, unfortunately – and she went on to become the first A-grade netball umpire in northern Victoria in the 1970s. Now, that is a feat in and of itself – to put in the work and to have to travel around in her orange Toyota Crown, which I am sure today would be a classic but I think is long gone at this stage.

Of course my own mother at just 26 years old was raising a baby alone – me – and running a grape block whilst Dad was off on a little holiday courtesy of Her Majesty. Since then she has been a driving force and exactly the reason I am the way I am. She went back to work in real estate when farming no longer fed the family, as it does from year to year. Then, after working hard, she bought her own small jewellery business, Kennedy's Showcase Jewellers in Swan Hill, which she still runs with passion and love each and every day. One day I hope that she actually slows down a bit to enjoy the fruits of her labour, but I think with golf at least a couple of times a week she is doing that in part already. She is part of the reason I am the way I am, but let us not forget the men that are part of our lives.

My dad, who could handle my mum and two very, very headstrong daughters – I do not know how he survived our adolescent years, but he did. My husband is the one who not only can handle me but actually creates a safe space for me away from the world, and I appreciate him every day. Our Leader of the Nationals and our colleagues on this side of the chamber, who probably do not even consciously do it, have created a safe space for us women, and it empowers us every day to contribute in this place

in an equal and positive way without even having to think about it – it is just the default. I appreciate you gentlemen every day, so thank you.

May we raise more strong women into the future and men who have respect for us so that it is not even a conversation about culture, about equality and about gender into the future, it is simply the default of a functional and equal society. That is all from me today. Happy International Women's Day.

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (12:44): I rise to join in the celebrations around the world today for International Women's Day. Happy IWD, everyone. For over 100 years International Women's Day has taken place on 8 March. Each year we come together and we celebrate the achievements of women around the world and empower women and girls to encourage action on issues of gender equality.

It is a day to focus on gender equality for girls and women in the areas of poverty, empowerment in leadership, personal and family safety and access to education. While International Women's Day celebrates inspirational contemporary and historical women, the day also aims to start conversations about gender equity. Here in Victoria it is an opportunity to reflect on and celebrate the fact it has been 100 years since women won the right to stand for election in the Victorian Parliament. Having a voice is powerful. It is a privilege, and so many people do not have it when they should. Some communities have been fighting for too long to have their voices heard, especially in Parliament. I am proud that there have been 108 women in the Victorian Legislative Assembly since its establishment in 1856. It is, however, unfortunate that we have only had one female Premier, and that was of course the inspirational Joan Kirner. Joan was a friend and a mentor to me. Joan was initially elected to the other place in 1982 before coming to the Assembly in 1984. Joan became our 42nd Premier in 1990. Despite discrimination and unjust treatment by the press, Joan always persevered and advocated for the women of this state. Now, she was actually faced with real misogynists, and one of the elements of that was a misogynistic cartoon of her in a polka dot dress, despite her never owning one. She took the high ground, holding a Spot on Joan concert and declaring the spot a symbol of courage. I think this quote from Joan sums up her courage in politics:

I've given a lot and I've copped a lot. But I believe I've got a role to play by insisting that women be judged by their contribution – not somebody's view of what they should be about.

After Joan's career in politics she continued in public life, devoting her time to many of her passions, including the EMILY's List organisation. For those of you that do not know EMILY's List, it is an organisation assisting progressive Labor women to get elected to Australian parliaments, and today I am proudly wearing an EMILY's List brooch. Joan played a very special part in my life and she is actually the reason why I got involved in politics. She was an inspiration to me and also to so many women.

Women have had the right to vote in Victoria since 1908, however have only had the right to stand as candidates for the Legislative Assembly since 1923. The first successful female candidate for the Legislative Assembly was elected in a by-election in 1933. Interestingly, she retired in 1935, stating – and I do disagree with this – that Parliament was no place for a woman. Interestingly, however, the first time a woman won a seat at a general election – in Nunawading – only happened in 1937. It was not until 1982 that Victoria saw its first female minister, who was Pauline Toner, and that was for the Labor Party.

I want to put on the record from all of the women in my electorate and across Victoria our thanks to that handful of women who in 1891 took to the streets with a petition to collect signatures from men and women acknowledging that women should vote on equal terms with men. Whilst 1908 is recognised as the year women won the right to vote here in Victoria, our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sisters had to wait until 1962 to gain the same right at both state and federal levels, and they are still waiting for their voice.

I know what it is like to be the only woman in a room full of men. During my time at the Rail, Tram and Bus Union alongside many other women we started the women's committee. This was back in

2010. We found this committee to be a way to support our sisters in male-dominated industries. I am proud to have advanced the cause of women in the union, being elected as the first female secretary of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union in 2014 and the first female national president in 2021, and I will always fight to make sure that women feel seen and are heard at work. One small win which we had at the Rail, Tram and Bus Union – it was small, but it made such a huge difference and had an everlasting impact on our members – was that we were the first blue-collar union in Australia to get paid domestic violence leave into every single one of our enterprise agreements. This did not just happen; we fought for it, and we fought bloody hard, but I and the other women and the feminists – some of the blokes – at the RTBU were proud of this achievement as it has helped hundreds of members, and that clause still remains in every single one of those enterprise agreements.

I am passionate about assisting domestic violence victims. No-one deserves to be a victim – no woman, no man, no child – nobody. However, so many children are living within homes marked by dangerous words and harmful physical abuse. While I am serving in this place I hope that I will have an opportunity to continue the long legacy of Labor women and men who have worked to prevent family violence and bring justice to women and children. The record \$3 billion investment made by the Andrews government was built on the shoulders of advocacy by feminists and women's organisations and by a number of brave women ministers such as Kay Setches, Joan Kirner, Candy Broad and the late Fiona Richardson. The most dangerous locations for family violence in Victoria are in the regions, but sadly the area around Melton in my electorate is also a significant hotspot. I will do anything to help women escape violence.

The west is full of culturally significant places for its people. Every day while I visit community groups and volunteer organisations I see many women and men working hard to ensure that they can better assist their communities. As one of the most culturally diverse electorates in the state, Kororoit is often the first place that people born overseas call home in Victoria. Our community is richly populated with new migrants from Asia, the subcontinent, Africa and Eastern Europe. People of all faiths and languages find peace and community in Kororoit, and often it is the women in each family who are the golden thread and the backbone. I have loved getting to know all of the cultural community clubs in the region. These clubs assist with transitioning families into Australian life and are essential to social cohesion and peaceful communities. On Monday, when I hosted the first Kororoit International Women's Day lunch, we had many women from these communities along.

We know that equality will only come with embedding change into our systems and our institutions. I am proud to be part of the Andrews Labor government, which is leading the nation on gender equality, especially here in Parliament. Last year out of the 56 seats won by the Labor Party in this chamber, 30 of them were won by women – that is 54 per cent. In the Legislative Council, eight out of the 15 seats won by Labor are held by women, making another 54 per cent, and trust me those women are bloody good. They did not just get there by quotas.

Last December, following our third consecutive victory at a state election, the Premier announced a ministry of 22 members, 14 of whom are women. Not only is the Labor Party and the government committed to ensuring that women have opportunities and success in being elected to Parliament but since we came to government we have demonstrated an unwavering commitment to improving outcomes for women in every setting and at every stage of life. It is why we enshrined gender equality in law with the Gender Equality Act 2020 to address issues like the gender pay gap and sexual harassment in the public sector. We are the only jurisdiction in Australia to have such powerful legislation. It is why we established the gender responsive budgeting unit to consider the gendered impact of government decisions across the entire budget process. We are currently the only jurisdiction to have such a unit.

The 2022–23 state budget was the first time that a gender lens was used on a budget, which saw approximately \$940 million in initiatives primarily aimed at improving outcomes for women. The Victorian government established and responded to the inquiry into economic equity for Victorian women and committed \$3 million to industry strategies in manufacturing and energy to help women

enter and stay in male-dominated sectors. We will deliver an ambitious overhaul of early childhood education and care with our Best Start, Best Life initiative, with a massive \$9 billion investment over the next decade to save families money and support women to return to the workforce. In an Australian first we will begin work to restrict the use of non-disclosure agreements for workplace sexual harassment cases in Victoria, which are often misused to silence victim-survivors, protect employer reputations and allow employers to avoid full liability. We have supported women, we continue to support women, and on that note, happy International Women's Day.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:54): Today the Parliament rises, as it should, to acknowledge and celebrate International Women's Day. It is a day that celebrates the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. As we think through the importance of the last 100 years and the importance of the motion and what we stand for today, we think about the equality movement and we think about social change and the way that social change happens in our society.

A number of speakers have eloquently spoken about that last hundred years, but I would like to make a few points in relation to the future and the way that we can progress and move forward and make social change in the future, because it is something that our Parliament should think through as to whether or not we as a Parliament are connected in the community in a way that brings through the social change that is needed in a timely way, brings through the changes in laws and brings through the changes in culture.

I would like to raise a few instances of women who have made those changes – for example, Cathy Freeman, who at the Commonwealth Games, in the victory lap of the 200-metre sprint, carried both the Australian and Aboriginal flags, in contrast to the Olympic committee's protocol. What an incredible moment of power we watched as she did that. Or there is Chanel Contos, who asked on Instagram whether anybody had been sexually assaulted and initially had 200 people reply 'yes'. She then started an online petition which saw 45,000 signatures, mostly from children. Her work went on to lead the nation in terms of consent-teaching in schools around Australia and reform of sexual assault reporting by police.

Or there is Tayla Harris, who posted a simple photo of herself at work kicking a football as a significant women's football team player and was harassed to the point of reconsidering whether or not she could even have social media accounts. She has spoken publicly about the effect of the behaviour on her mental health. She said at the time:

Here's a pic of me at work ... think about this before your derogatory comments, animals.

I think her words were words that so many of us felt, and we were as a community disgusted by what she experienced.

Or there is Grace Tame, who stood up and had Tasmania's Evidence Act 2001 changed following a court action. The abuser in her case had bragged about sexual assault crimes in relation to her – outrageous. She stood up, and after a long fight the law in Tasmania was changed. But there are even other instances – and I think we will see some of these social changes play out over coming years – like Jelena Dokic, who stood up recently in relation to body-shaming and the type of body-shaming she has received, again online, from anonymous, hidden people who hide their names.

As a Parliament we need to think about these women and say, 'This motion shouldn't just be about celebrating the past.' We as a Parliament need to reflect on the types of changes these women have pushed for and how we can do better to ensure that the changes we need to see happen. The pushes that are happening in the community from many strong, young women – we need to reflect on how we can see our laws changed and reformed, how we can see our culture as a community change and what we as members of this place can do to ensure that. Because we are not here as peers of the community, we are part of the community. What all of these women have shown us is that it took too long for them to achieve what they were pushing to achieve. Many of these changes happened, which is fantastic, but we should also reflect not only on the past but on what we can do as a Parliament and

as parliamentary representatives in the future to make sure that social change and equality happen more quickly.

**Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:01 pm.**

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

**The SPEAKER:** I acknowledge the Honourable Judy Maddigan in the gallery today.

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (14:01): My question is to the Minister for Trade and Investment. It has been reported today that the minister has secured a \$2.35 billion deal with Japan for a project that will use Victorian coal and carbon capture to generate clean hydrogen for export to Japan. Is the minister aware of any threats to this deal proceeding?

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (14:02): I thank the member for his question. Well, there are a few issues that will need to be worked through in regard to this particular proposal. Might I say firstly we are going through a process of due diligence with regard to the HESC project, and might I also say that as a government we remain committed to doing exactly what the Japanese are doing and what their Japanese industry partners are doing. We are going through commercial, technical and environmental feasibility studies. We are doing it. The Japanese are doing it. Why are they doing it? Because before you make investments of that consequence, you probably want to know that it technically works.

**John Pesutto** interjected.

**Tim PALLAS:** John, keep quiet.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of the Opposition will not call members by their names but by their correct titles, and the Treasurer is also advised the same.

**Tim PALLAS:** The Victorian government is a leader when it comes to climate action. We remain committed to working through all the opportunities in a sensible and considered way. We are doing that because we have got some of the world's most ambitious emissions targets while transitioning Victoria to a cleaner, cheaper renewable electricity state and also creating thousands of jobs. This is our commitment: jobs in the cities, jobs in the regions, a demonstration that climate action requires due process, due diligence, looking at the potential of the technologies available to us and working in cooperation with industry and other countries that see the potential for these technologies, but not getting too far ahead of ourselves. We are pleased to be working in partnership. As a government we are committed to working through these issues in a considered and effective way.

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (14:04): Given the minister's support for this project, will further investment in this hydrogen technology for local or export use be beneficial for Victoria?

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (14:04): I thank the member for his question. When it comes to hydrogen, this government has a hydrogen policy which it produced, and certainly the minister for energy and Minister for Climate Action has been a very clear and strong advocate. But from a government point of view we need to check, to do due diligence around these technologies. We need to make sure that they do not work in a way that is counterproductive to the objectives that we have on net zero emissions, and we will do that in a considered and effective way.

**Ministers statements: International Women's Day**

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (14:05): I rise to update the house that today is International Women's Day, and this year marks 100 years since Victorian women won the right to stand for this Parliament. Unfortunately it took another 10 years to get a woman elected. But decades of quotas and affirmative action mean that today 54 per cent of this side of the house, the Labor Party side, are women, and 64 per cent of the ministers around our cabinet table are women. In addition, 54 per cent of seats on government boards are now held by women thanks to our proactive women on boards policy. In Victoria equality is not negotiable, and we have delivered record funding to support gender equality, ensuring that women from all walks of life have access to the best opportunities right here.

For too long periods have been stigmatised and there have been too many women experiencing period poverty. We have already delivered the nation-leading reform of providing period products free in government schools, and now we are expanding this to install free pad and tampon machines at up to 700 locations across this state. This includes public hospitals, courts, train stations, TAFEs, public libraries and major cultural institutions.

Equal representation provides a better gender lens on policy, and we know quotas work and affirmative action works. I know that we can do better. This place can do better. It is a responsibility of all of us to do what we can to make sure this Parliament represents all people. We want to live in a fairer, more equal Victoria, where all women and girls can live safely without stigma and bias, and can be and do anything they aspire to.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Frankston!

**Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (14:07): My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. It has been reported today that Minister Pallas has secured a \$2.35 billion deal with Japan for a project that will use Victorian coal and carbon capture to generate clean hydrogen for export to Japan. Will the minister guarantee her support for this project?

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:08): I am absolutely delighted to answer this question. What I can guarantee the member is that this government will deliver on every single election commitment that we have made to reduce our emissions in this state by 75 to 80 per cent by 2035 and net zero by 2045. And everything that we do is about reducing our emissions, creating 59,000 jobs –

*Members interjecting.*

**Lily D'AMBROSIO:** And can I suggest that the honourable Leader of the Opposition stop his little whining and little niggling on the other side and start to actually be the grown-up –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Before I call the point of order, I would ask those at the table to cease interjecting across the table.

**James Newbury:** Speaker, I stood to take a point of order on relevance and to bring the minister back to the question, which was seeking to guarantee her support for the project, but I will also take a point of order for the language the minister just used and the way she spoke across the chamber – I found it quite objectionable.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On the point of order raised by –

**Jacinta Allan:** Which one?

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On the first point of order that was raised by the Manager of Opposition Business, can I make the point, Speaker, that the minister was being entirely relevant to the question. There was a very long – and one might say a rather pointless – preamble, but nonetheless, there was a long preamble which has given the minister plenty of room to expand on her answer, and I ask that you rule the first point of order out of order and that you remind the Manager of Opposition Business that points of order are not to be used in the way that he does to disrupt the business of the house.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I have mentioned in the house many times that points of order are to be succinct. The Manager of Opposition Business raised two points of order, which obviously is incorrect. The first point of order I rule out of order as the minister was being relevant. In relation to the second point of order there was so much toing and froing across the table I did not hear the language that was used.

**Lily D'AMBROSIO:** I conclude by simply saying every commitment that we have made we will achieve, regardless of what others might wish to do. Any project that comes to government for consideration – any project – there is a thorough process and judicious diligence. We do not pre-empt any of that. Whatever the conclusions might be, one thing is for sure: our commitment will create the 59,000 jobs and bring back the SEC, owning 100 per cent renewable energy for the SEC. That is exactly what we will deliver. We are actually decarbonising our energy system at the fastest rate right across the country, and we will not be deviated from that. We will deliver. We will create those thousands of jobs, bringing Victorians with us, making the right choices at the right time. That is exactly what we will deliver.

**David HODGETT (Croydon) (14:11):** The Australian Hydrogen Council has said this project is fundamental for Australia's energy transition. Given the Minister for Trade and Investment's support of this project, why won't the minister support further investment in this hydrogen technology for Victoria?

**Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:12):** Can I just say that the member's assertions are absolutely based on incorrect information, number one. That deals with that. The fact is I will not be taking any lectures from those opposite, who wouldn't know how to attract one investment dollar to this state. What they are good at is closing things down, whether they are schools, whether they are hospitals, whether they are selling off the energy system to their mates in the private sector and ripping billions of dollars of profits away from Victorians –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, I ask you to bring the minister back on relevance. This is not an opportunity to sledge the opposition.

**The SPEAKER:** I do ask the minister to come back to answering the question.

**Lily D'AMBROSIO:** The question was absolutely based on a wrong proposition. The fact remains that we will create 59,000 jobs in the new energy sector. We will deliver that; we are delivering that already, bringing back the SEC and creating 59,000 jobs for Victorians in new energy technologies. All of those have learned nothing on that side. They have learned nothing other than that privatisation of – *(Time expired)*

#### Ministers statements: women in Victoria's Big Build

**Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (14:13):** I am delighted to update the house on the tremendous contribution women right across the state are making to helping deliver the Andrews Labor government's Big Build. As colleagues around the state know, there are 165 projects in road and rail, big and small, that are supporting us building better transport connections and supporting that tremendously strong pipeline of workers on the construction sites and in the supply chain. This is the double benefit that we are driving through having a strong transport infrastructure

agenda. It is firstly about building better connections so people can get home to their families safer and sooner. We know particularly for women, who rely on public transport more often than men to get to work and to access services, having better transport connections is a great enabler of better equity in terms of their economic and social participation. Then of course there is that tremendous pipeline of the workforce that is supported through this program, a workforce that those opposite wanted to cut and block and stop. They did not want women or men working on our projects.

We take a very different approach. That is why just as we are removing 110 level crossings we are working hard to remove barriers to women coming and working on our construction sites. There is the building equity policy, a policy that has at its foundation making sure that there are mandates for the number of women who work on our projects.

Why have we done this? Quite simply, as the Minister for Women said, quotas work. Exhibit A, exhibit B – in terms of how quotas make a difference. Quotas make a real and fundamental difference in terms of how you can break down systemic cultural barriers to women's participation. We are doing it in construction, we are doing it in transport and we are doing it across so many different sectors of our community, and that is the leadership of the Andrews Labor government.

**Paul Edbrooke** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Frankston!

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Can I remind members that applause is not welcome in the chamber.

#### **Member conduct**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:16): My question is to the Assistant Treasurer. This morning in response to a media question about approvals that the Assistant Treasurer provided for three government bank accounts that were opened with the Commonwealth Bank, the Assistant Treasurer said, 'I will need to get back to you on that one. I don't think – yeah, I need to get back to you on that one.' Can the minister now inform Victorians of the answer?

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Government Services, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Consumer Affairs) (14:16): Three accounts were opened. They were administrative accounts opened on behalf of the Department of Treasury and Finance.

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:16): Can the minister confirm that he has only approved new government bank accounts with the Commonwealth Bank since the new banking and financial services state purchase contract has been in place?

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Government Services, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Consumer Affairs) (14:17): I have always acted appropriately. I have always declared my interests. I approved three administrative accounts on behalf of the Department of Treasury and Finance.

#### **Ministers statements: women's health**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (14:17): I rise today to update the house on the Andrews Labor government's commitment to the health of Victorian women. For too long women's health has not had the focus or attention that it deserves, and that is why this government is giving women's health the funding, the attention and the respect that it deserves. Victorian Labor has a proud record of Australian firsts in women's health, including funding a women's health heart clinic and creating a public IVF system. Critically, we have also rolled out 11 sexual and reproductive health hubs, of which seven are in rural and regional Victoria, with nine more to come. We have introduced safe access zones, and we have created the helpline 1800 My Options, improving access to advice, to contraception and

to medical and surgical termination of pregnancy here in Victoria, because abortion care is health care, and women deserve access to safe, affordable, judgement-free health care, no matter where they live. Just this morning I had the pleasure of attending a breakfast at Northern Health, where I met with two midwives who are leading research into co-designing safe access to abortion care for women from multicultural communities. Out at Northern Health they are also expanding their clinics, ensuring more women have access to safe termination of pregnancy, because this side of the house believes that women have the right to make decisions about their own bodies and their own health care.

But there is always more work to do when it comes to women's health. That is why we have committed to establishing 20 new comprehensive women's health clinics and doubling the number of laparoscopies that are available to treat endometriosis. To address gaps in medical research we are establishing a dedicated women's health research institute and conducting an inquiry into women's pain management. Under the Andrews Labor government we all know that gender equality is not negotiable.

### **Corio Bay gas import terminal**

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:19): My question is to the Minister for Planning. Sitting on the minister's desk at the moment is an application from Viva Energy to build a new gas terminal at Corio Bay. There has been huge community opposition to this project. Victoria cannot meet our emissions reduction targets if this new gas project is approved. Will the minister reject Viva's application for a new fossil gas project here in Victoria?

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:20): I thank the member for her question. This is my first question in this place, and I am delighted to be here as the Minister for Planning. We know that planning really just captures the hearts and minds of all communities. It impacts on the future livability of our state, of our communities. We heard some fantastic inaugural speeches in here that spoke about the need for good planning to develop and to foster healthy communities and support the wellbeing of those communities as well. When planning is done well, it does support those communities. When planning is done poorly, it can have a negative impact on those communities through their health and wellbeing. We on this side and in my department take a responsible approach to planning. Matters are considered on their merits, as is appropriate. Stakeholder views are taken into account.

In relation to the Viva Energy application, I can let the member know that a report from the independent inquiry and advisory committee has been received, and it has advised that there is not enough information to determine whether the project has an acceptable or an unacceptable level of environmental impact. I have been left with no choice, and I have sent letters to this effect – I have been left with no choice but to advise Viva that an additional environment effects statement will need to be prepared. The committee's report will be publicly released. It is then up to the proponent whether it wishes to embark on that further environment effects statement, and I will leave that entirely with the proponent in this case.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for South Barwon!

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:22): I thank the minister very much for her answer. The proposed project will either import fracked gas from other states or reimport gas from Victoria that was originally sent to Queensland for export. This obviously produces emissions all along the supply chain in the mining, the transport and the burning of the gas. The government does not actually have to take into account our emission reduction targets when deciding on the outcome of the project, because the project was proposed before the emission targets were set, but the minister does actually have the discretion to consider emission reduction targets if she chooses. Will the minister take into account Victoria's emission reduction targets in deciding ultimately if the project does go ahead or not?

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for South Barwon is warned again.

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:23): I thank the member for her supplementary question. I think the response to the main principal question has answered the matter adequately here. As I said, the advisory committee came back to say that there was insufficient information in this case to determine whether the project had an acceptable or an unacceptable level of environmental impact. In this case, I had no choice but to go back to Viva to say if you want to pursue and proceed with this project you will need to conduct a supplementary EES. There is nothing further we can add to that.

#### **Ministers statements: Victorian Youth Congress**

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (14:24): I rise today to update the house on the next generation of Victoria's leaders. As Minister for Youth, I am so proud of the work that we do to support young women. Just last week we appointed our new Victorian Youth Congress, and congratulations to all the new congress members, of which more than half are women, much like the Andrews Labor government's cabinet, which is 64 per cent women. Meeting with Yannee, a congress member, we talked about her experiences as a UN youth delegate and a pharmacy student working at Western Health in none other than the electorate of St Albans. I am confident that all members of the congress will make a positive contribution.

I am very proud to be part of a government giving young women a seat at the table on decisions that matter to them. The Andrews government's youth strategy, *Our Promise, Your Future*, will deliver better outcomes for young people on employment, civic participation, health and wellbeing and so much more. I look forward to working with the congress to create a diverse, equal and respectful future for young women here in Victoria. Happy International Women's Day to you all.

#### **Member conduct**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:25): My question is to the Assistant Treasurer. Under the Financial Management Act 1994 government departments are required to seek the Assistant Treasurer's approval to open and maintain bank accounts. How is it appropriate that the Assistant Treasurer continues to hold this role while he owns shares in the Commonwealth Bank?

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Government Services, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Consumer Affairs) (14:25): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. I have always acted appropriately. I have always declared my interests. I have acknowledged that I committed an error of judgement. I indicated that I would establish a blind trust. The blind trust has been established. My register of members interests entry has been updated and been provided to the Clerk of the Parliaments as of Friday afternoon. I am happy for that register to be made available.

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:26): It is now clear that the Assistant Treasurer signed off on government bank accounts with a bank that he owns shares in.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Members will be removed from the chamber without warning.

**John PESUTTO:** It is now clear that the Assistant Treasurer signed off on government bank accounts with a bank that he owns shares in – a direct conflict of interest. How can the minister continue to sit around the cabinet table?

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Members to my right will come to order.

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Government Services, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Consumer Affairs) (14:27): It probably sounded better this morning when you were practising in front of the mirror.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Through the Chair.

**Danny PEARSON:** I refer the Leader of the Opposition to my previous answer.

### **Ministers statements: women's health**

**Daniel ANDREWS** (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:27): I am very pleased to be able to rise to confirm for all members and all Victorians that on this International Women's Day and every day our Labor government hears Victorian women, believes Victorian women and supports Victorian women. That is why we were so very pleased to be re-elected for a third term in such comprehensive terms only a few months ago, so that we can get on and deliver \$5 million to support the creation of a women's health research institute to know and understand and gather up wisdom and knowledge and build the case for real improvements – dramatic improvements potentially – as well as valuing our female clinicians and female researchers who have dedicated without proper acknowledgement so much of their expertise and time over such a long period of time. They deserve this focus, and this work will change and indeed potentially save lives.

We are also pleased to be able to provide a \$3 million investment for an inquiry into women's pain management – not something that has ever happened before. So often women are not believed. So often women are essentially dismissed by different parts of our health system, whether it be in primary care or in hospital care. We want to put an end to that, to better understand it and then do something about it. We are also going to open up 20 new women's health clinics at public hospitals, because that is what women deserve – access to the best care in their local community. That is a profound investment in expanding access to those critical services.

There is \$64.8 million to see the number of surgeries for endometriosis and associated conditions doubled. That and so many other initiatives, as part of the most comprehensive women's health policy offering at any election in the history of this state – and I would say perhaps the country – was well supported by Victorian women. And do you know why? Because we invited women in to write that policy, women with lived experience, and they were presenting to a cabinet dominated by women in a government represented more than half by women on this International Women's Day.

### *Constituency questions*

#### **Murray Plains electorate**

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (14:30): (60) My constituency question is to the Minister for Community Sport, and it concerns a press release that the minister and the Labor candidate for Murray Plains put out during the election, where they promised \$185,000 to the Kerang Golf Club to do upgrades at that particular club. I ask the minister for any information as to when this grant will actually be made available to the Kerang Golf Club.

#### **Wendouree electorate**

**Juliana ADDISON** (Wendouree) (14:31): (61) My constituency question is for the Minister for Women on International Women's Day. Minister, how is the Andrews Labor government continuing to improve the lives of women and girls in Victoria? Since winning government in 2014 the Andrews Labor government has taken bold steps to address issues of gender equity in Victoria. The Andrews Labor government listens to the voices of Victorian women and acts. From increasing women's participation on public sector boards to providing free pads and tampons in public buildings, this is a government that is changing attitudes and moving the dial on gender equity. By removing barriers for women and girls we are enabling them to fully participate in every aspect of society. For far too long the critical health needs of women have not been addressed. That is why we are investing \$58 million to treat

endometriosis, pelvic pain, polycystic ovary syndrome, perimenopause and menopause. Victorian women can be confident that they will be supported by this government, who support women.

#### **Malvern electorate**

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (14:32): (62) My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and my question is: what assessment has been or will be made by the minister's department of the danger posed by the operation of the pedestrian crossing on Toorak Road adjacent to the sky rail and the Monash Freeway entrance? The Toorak Road level crossing removal had two flaws. One was the decision to use sky rail rather than a rail-under-road option. The second was that no pedestrian underpass or overpass was put in place. Instead, a grade-level pedestrian crossing was installed across Toorak Road. I have received many reports of vehicles travelling through this crossing against the red light, and while the government belatedly put up a sign nearby, it has not solved the problem. Many children use this crossing to access the nearby sporting fields that are north of Toorak Road. My real worry is that it is only a matter of time until a pedestrian is seriously injured or worse as a result of the poor design of this crossing, and that is why I ask the minister to advise what assessment has been or will be made of this crossing's danger.

#### **Northcote electorate**

**Kat THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (14:33): (63) I ask the Minister for Mental Health for information on how the Northcote mental health and wellbeing local will be delivered to cater for the unique needs of my community in the inner north. Every single one of us knows the impact of mental ill health either personally or through someone we know or love. Locally Northcote has a serious gap in mental health services, and too many residents and families have been falling through the gaps. That is why I have pushed for more local mental health services as part of our once-in-a-generation transformation of Victoria's mental health system. My community survey on improving local services received an enormous response, more than any survey I have ever conducted, and many shared personal stories. So it was an emotional moment last year when I was able to let locals know that our government will open a dedicated mental health service in Northcote. This is an opportunity to deliver life-changing, life-saving support that is accessible, tailored and close to home – an opportunity for our mental health system to truly be there for Northcote. I look forward to hearing more from the minister.

#### **Brighton electorate**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:34): (64) My constituency question is to the Premier, and I ask: can the Premier confirm when the state government will ensure that all students at Elwood Primary School have equal opportunities and access to school? Young children should not be treated differently because of a lack of state investment in certain schools. Elwood Primary School is a historic school that is at the heart of the Elwood community, but upgrades are needed and the school does not have a proper lift. The school only has an automatic stairwell chairlift that takes 20 minutes to move between two floors, and each time it does the school stairwell is blocked, students surround the stairs to watch the chair being lifted and the 20-minute ride cuts into half of any disabled child's 40-minute lesson. The department's advice has been to refuse the funding fix and suggest that all classes for a disabled child be moved to the ground floor. We should be doing better than that – a lot better than that – and I call on the Premier to intervene and ensure that all children have equal opportunities.

#### **Bellarine electorate**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (14:35): (65) My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Climate Action and Minister for the State Electricity Commission. Minister, with a new round of the state government's \$250 power saving bonus set to be opened to Victorians on 24 March, how many homes within the Bellarine electorate have received the bonus from previous rounds of this much-welcomed program? I do say much-welcomed program because I know in talking to constituents right across the Bellarine, they are angry at having to pay ever increasing energy bills – power bills – with many families feeling the financial pressures, especially the young and the elderly.

## CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

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Legislative Assembly

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Bellarine residents want to see emissions driven down and renewable energies increasing and, as such, strongly support the government initiatives like reviving the SEC, a \$3.75 million energy assistance program and the \$250 power saving bonus.

### **Brunswick electorate**

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (14:36): (66) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. An 82-year-old man was killed after being hit by a car on Melville Road at the Hope Street intersection on the boundary of my electorate last week. I do not know the exact circumstances of this accident, but traffic moves fast on Melville Road and I am concerned about speed and the risk to people who walk or ride. As well as lowering the speed limit on this road, there may be other ways of protecting vulnerable road users, like pedestrian priority lights, flashing signs reminding drivers to give way to pedestrians, mast arms to extend traffic lights and make them more apparent to drivers and yellow paint to make pedestrian crossings more visible. Measures like these would bring the intersections on Melville Road in line with other safer intersections in the Brunswick area. Will the minister review the circumstances that led to this death and act to protect pedestrians and riders on Melville Road in Brunswick West?

### **Lara electorate**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (14:36): (67) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I ask the minister for an update on the planned works at the Lara Six Ways intersection project. In recent years the township of Lara has experienced significant growth, and this has added pressure to local road infrastructure. I was incredibly proud to stand beside the former member for Lara the Honourable John Eren last year to announce a \$16 million investment into this intersection. In the next few years we will see a steady growth in population in Lara, and this will create pressure points in local road infrastructure. In many conversations with local residents I notice how important this road upgrade will be. So again I ask the Minister for Roads and Road Safety for an update on the planned works on the Lara Six Ways intersection project.

### **Kew electorate**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (14:37): (68) My question is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. Will the minister commit to funding the extension of tram route 48, providing a much-needed public transport connection for my constituents in Balwyn North? Balwyn North is home to more than 20,000 residents in the Kew electorate, many of whom are desperately seeking an easier, more accessible commute to work or school. At the election we recognised this vital piece of infrastructure needed to be built and committed to delivering an extension from Balwyn Road in Balwyn North through to Westfield Doncaster. This connection will form part of a high-capacity transit way integrating both trams and buses to enable faster, more frequent services and better connectivity for the residents of the Kew electorate. The 48 tram route extension will also support our amazing small businesses, like those traders at Greythorn shopping centre, by helping to increase foot traffic and encouraging residents to shop locally. I ask the minister to commit to this vital piece of infrastructure and extend the 48 tram route.

### **Kororoit electorate**

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (14:38): (69) My constituency question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. Can the minister update the house on how many households in my electorate of Kororoit have access to the \$250 power saving bonus and benefited from this government's program, which will keep the lights on and their bills down? I am constantly reminded that the cost of living is rising and making it harder for families to make ends meet. The Andrews Labor government's programs to reduce the cost of living, like the power saving bonus, are a great initiative to assist people to find a better deal on their energy bill, save them hundreds of dollars and make sure that money stays in their pockets. On behalf of my constituents at Kororoit, Minister, I

would like to thank you and the government for bringing back another round of the power saving bonus, which will be available from 24 March.

### *Motions*

#### **International Women's Day**

##### **Debate resumed.**

**Kat THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (14:39): It is with a great sense of pride and gratitude for the women who came before me in this place that I rise to speak in support of this motion, which marks 100 years since women won the right to stand for election to Victorian Parliament. I wish women right across Victoria a very happy International Women's Day today. Of course just over 100 years ago I would not have been welcome in Parliament House. As a young woman, a mum, a woman from a migrant background, standing to speak and be heard on issues of the day would have been unthinkable back then. Women had no political voice and few protections from harms or rights in the workplace, and for our First Nations women, they had no rights at all – a dark thing to remember. So I would like to begin by acknowledging the work of First Nations women across our state, their strong leadership, their advocacy, their work on the front lines of critical services, all instrumental in the charge towards equality, against gendered violence and for the self-determination of Aboriginal-led services.

We cannot address gender equality and health inequalities without addressing the compounding and disproportionate impact of discrimination that First Nations women continue to experience. It is only by acknowledging our collective history and past harms and listening deeply to the voices, stories and wisdom of First Nations women that we can move forward and achieve real change. I know that I stand on the shoulders of the strong, powerful women who came before me and who continue to surround me.

As others who have spoken on this motion have noted, decades of action, including affirmative action, have meant that 54 per cent of Labor members of Parliament are women. This extends to the cabinet, where 64 per cent of ministers are women. Labor women in this Parliament have led some of the bravest and boldest reforms in our state, things like workplace manslaughter legislation, voluntary assisted dying, the circular economy, free TAFE, wage theft legislation, medicinal cannabis, family violence reform and treaty. I cannot emphasise enough the tangible difference it makes to have women in government, in the caucus room, in the cabinet, in our departments, in councils, on our committees. Truly representative democracy inherently leads to better decisions. Over the last few years, with women in the room, we have seen some incredible progress: a Royal Commission into Family Violence, a nation-leading gender equality act, the introduction of gender-responsive budgeting, free kinder reforms, the inquiry into economic equity for Victorian women, affirmative consent models and Respectful Relationships programs, and gender parity on paid government boards.

But we know there is more work to do. The pandemic exposed persistent and pervasive structural inequalities and barriers that continue to impact women today. Women across the world were shaken by the *Roe v. Wade* decision in the US, and housing, economic security, wellbeing and physical safety continue to be real and deeply felt concerns for women across the country. But as I speak with women in my community and as I listen to the debate today, I am not discouraged by the road ahead; I am heartened to know that there are so many of us striving, fighting and working together to go further, push harder and achieve more.

As the Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Health, I am focused on bringing equity to our health system. Women and girls make up more than half our population, yet even after centuries of truly world-changing research and medical advancements, women's health continues to be impacted by gender bias, medical ignorance and an exclusion from medical research. A historical focus on males and research, taboos around sexual and reproductive health as well as pervasive gender bias have all contributed to a medical system that is not gender-inclusive, and it is hurting women. Too often women's symptoms are ignored, health issues are minimised or disregarded entirely. All it takes is a

quick scan of the hashtag #MedicalMisogyny on social media to see thousands of stories from women of sexism and ignorance impacting their care, and I would wager that every single Victorian woman would either have experienced or know someone personally with their own story of this.

This lived experience is supported in the research. We know that there are sex and gender differences in susceptibility to certain diseases, the way we respond to treatments and medications, as well as symptoms for general conditions, yet the male experience is still overwhelmingly cast as the default in everything from discovery research to treatment in emergency and the very diseases that we look at. As Dr Sarah White, the CEO of Jean Hailes, has noted:

We intuitively understand that small boys are not the same as men, but for some reason, we treat women as if they're small men.

Women are a staggering 75 per cent more likely to experience adverse reactions to prescription drugs than men, we are twice as likely to suffer from chronic pain conditions and we are more susceptible to Alzheimer's, autoimmune diseases and challenging conditions like rheumatoid arthritis and multiple sclerosis. Yet women's pain and symptoms of disease are more likely to be diagnosed as psycho-symptomatic or mental illness, harkening back to diagnoses of hysteria. Women are very familiar with having to strategise ahead of a visit to the doctor to try to make sure we are taken seriously, for fear that we will be told that we are overreacting or that we are making it up. We know that these disparities in treatment and health outcomes are only compounded for women facing intersectional barriers, like our First Nations women, the LGBTIQ community, women with a disability, women living in regional and rural Victoria and women from multicultural backgrounds.

Endometriosis is characteristic of how gender gaps in health care can play out for women. For those unfamiliar with the condition, it occurs when tissue similar to the lining of the uterus grows outside the womb, usually in the pelvis but it can migrate to other parts of the body. The condition can lead to inflammation and scarring and cause organs to stick together, causing intense pain, heavy bleeding, bloating, fatigue, anxiety and depression. Around one in nine women and girls will suffer from endometriosis by the time they are 40, but it still takes seven years on average for a woman to be diagnosed. The symptoms are brushed aside or misdiagnosed as mental health conditions or IBS, or women are told that they are normal. Endometriosis costs Australians about \$9.7 billion annually in lost productivity and direct health costs. At the individual level persistent pain is preventing women from fully participating in work, sport and daily life.

I remember the immediate and visceral reaction to the menopause speech in *Fleabag*, 'Women are born with pain built in.' So many felt that to be true. Periods, sex, Pap smears, IUD insertion, birth, breastfeeding, miscarriage, menopause – pain has been seen as part of the package. But just as we should not and do not accept the inevitability of the gender pay gap, we should not and must not accept the gender pain gap. To be clear, this is not about sexist doctors or uninterested researchers; rather, it is about a structural legacy that has created a system which is sex and gender blind, and it will take courage, leadership and critical structural change to address this. The status quo simply is not good enough.

It is why the Andrews Labor government is taking action to make sure that women's health gets the funding and focus that it deserves, and I was very happy to join the Minister for Health this morning at Northern Hospital, where we spoke with midwives and researchers who have used a small grant to co-design abortion care for women from multicultural backgrounds. At the last election Labor put forward our ambitious plan for improving women's health. Central to this plan is improving access to quality care, culturally appropriate care and close-to-home care. We will deliver 20 new women's health clinics and expand our existing sexual and reproductive health hub network to 20 sites. These new clinics will be one-stop shops for women needing treatment and advice on issues ranging from contraception to pelvic pain, polycystic ovary syndrome, endometriosis and menopause. To ensure culturally appropriate care and equity of access are built in from the start, we will also create a dedicated Aboriginal-led women's health clinic with our First Nations partners as well as a mobile clinic to reach rural and remote Victorians. We will also double the number of surgeries for endometriosis over the next four years and invest in more support for women living with chronic

conditions. We are supporting our health workforce with new scholarships. We will also lead a fundamental shift in medical research with a new women's health research institute.

We now have an opportunity to build a legacy in women's health, and we will continue to strive to make our health system more equitable for women and girls who live in Victoria. We will also do that by establishing an inquiry into women's pain management – an opportunity for women across Victoria to share their lived experience of this and to be heard. This is a truly exciting and humbling time, and I look forward to supporting it.

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (14:49): I rise to make a contribution on the motion that this house notes that today is International Women's Day, that this marks 100 years since women won the right to stand for election in the Victorian Parliament and that for many years First Nations women did not have the same political rights as other Victorians. In starting off, can I acknowledge two very proud First Nations women who have influenced me through my time in public life. First of all, Auntie Esther Kirby, who passed away last year and who was an absolute tower of strength in the Kerang community for not only her people but the whole community. Auntie Esther was someone I was really proud to work with over the journey on the things that she wanted to achieve for her community and that she did achieve in a lot of cases. The other one is Auntie Geraldine Atkinson, who is a co-chair of the First Peoples' Assembly, who I have had the pleasure to work with for a long time, even before she took on that role, and someone that has done a lot particularly around education for her communities as well. So it is great to see women like that that have served their communities.

Can I start off by properly acknowledging the woman that has had the most influence on my life. That is my mum, who turned 97 two weeks ago and is still going very, very well, even though she has some challenges at that age and every now and again when she is down pleads for God to come and get her because she is so dark on my father for dying so early on her. She is a great woman.

I wanted to spend a bit of time talking about the women in agriculture and the women in the National Party. We hear a lot about the gender balance between the different political parties. Can I say as part of the Nationals team I am very proud to say that we have more women in our party in this Parliament than we do men, and I think that is a credit to everyone who has put some work in over probably the last eight years to achieve that particular goal. People talk about quotas – and there were some remarks made that were very unfair about quotas by one of the previous speakers from the other side – but that was done without quotas. That was gone about by having a commitment to preselecting positive, powerful advocates for their community who could make a difference for their community.

I think that is the case with all the team that we have, whether it be the member for Mildura, who has a very proud history in small business and as a local government mayor, or whether it be the member for Shepparton, who was in small business for 30 years before she came into this place and was also a mayor, or whether it be the member for Euroa, who was the editor of a major rural newspaper paper, the *Stock & Land*, before she came into this place and brings a lot of experience to this place, or whether it be Gaelle Broad, who is another new member and has had a number of roles but most recently a senior role with the Rural Bank, a division of Bendigo Bank, delivering a program for agriculture programs on behalf of the federal government right across the nation.

They have joined Melina Bath in the other place, who has made outstanding contributions since she joined the Parliament, a small business owner also but a senior maths science teacher at some stage in her career, and our deputy leader, who has a medical science background and most recently before she joined Parliament was the CEO of a hospital. I think we have got a great group of women there who have made and are going to make an absolutely outstanding contribution on behalf of the communities that have sent them here but also on behalf of the whole state. As you watch those people develop their careers, it is a credit to all of them that they have put their hand up. There are challenges. We heard in the contributions that there are challenges about how you manage life, children and coming to Parliament. I think everyone is experiencing that, but they are all committed to doing a great job on behalf of their communities.

When it comes to agriculture, for people in regional Victoria and people in the farming industry it has always been a partnership between the husband and wife in farming businesses. I think there are some great examples that I want to talk about in my contribution where people have stepped outside the farm and actually made a real contribution to the agriculture sector. The first of those is Heather Mitchell OBE AM, who was president of the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) from 1986 to 1989. Heather and Joan Kirner are the two people that are credited with starting the Landcare movement in Australia. That had –

**Danny O'Brien** interjected.

**Peter WALSH:** Well, no. They are the two that started the Landcare movement. Success has many parents, failure is an orphan, and a lot of people take credit for the starting of Landcare, but if you go back and actually look at the true history the first Landcare group was at Winjallock, just south-west of St Arnaud, at Terry Simpson's property. Heather Mitchell and Joan Kirner as the environment minister at the time drove that, and it went national. People have taken credit for it going national, people have taken credit for it going international, but if it had never started it would not have happened. Heather was well before her time in a lot of the things that she did with the VFF, but I think her major milestone is being involved in the starting of the Landcare movement there.

Merna Curnow, a lady from Laanecoorie, who was involved in Australian Women in Agriculture, Partners in Grain and locally in Landcare, worked with me when I was the VFF president in running a group as to how we could get more women involved in agripolitics in this state. I thank Merna for all the work she has done over the years for her particular community.

I digress with a very small story. I at times make flippant comments. We were having a meeting about how we planned a function, a lunch, and I made the flippant comment, 'What's wrong with Vegemite sandwiches?' It came back to haunt me, because when I was guest speaker at Marcus Oldham College's annual leadership dinner, everyone else got rack of lamb and I got Vegemite sandwiches because three of the women doing that course had actually been at our working group about getting more women involved in agriculture. The principal of Marcus Oldham was absolutely horrified when the Vegemite sandwiches came out, but the joke was on me. But Merna has done a lot over the years, and I thank her for that.

Phyllis Vallance from Nandaly, who passed away a number of years ago, was an absolutely outstanding person. I can remember my colleague Barry Bishop saying that when he wanted an opinion about what was going on he would ring Jack Vallance and get one opinion, and he would ring Phyllis and get an equally strong opinion the other way, because she was such a power of strength there.

Going across to some of the other women in the VFF: Anne Adams and Shirley Harlock, who the member for South-West Coast spoke about earlier; Sarah Crooke from north-eastern Victoria; the member for South-West Coast in her own right, when she was involved with the dairy industry; and Gay Tripodi from Swan Hill, who was president of the horticulture group of the VFF and made her contribution as it went through. So a lot of women not only are partners in their farming businesses but have made the effort to step outside their farming businesses and make a real contribution to agriculture and make it what it is here in Victoria and Australia.

The last group I would like to acknowledge is some of the very strong community women leaders from the town of Rochester. As everyone in this house would know, Rochester got severely flooded back in October 2022. This followed on from the severe flooding they had back in January of 2011. There is a group there that have stepped up to the mark and shown real, true leadership through what has gone on in Rochester, and after the immediate response they are still working really, really hard on the recovery of Rochester as a community. As I have said to other people, the soul of Rochester has been bruised by this; a lot of people around Rochester are still hurting very much. Kate Ward is an outstanding leader in that community, and also Sharon Williams, Meagan Keating, Tracie Kyne, and Amanda Logie, who runs the neighbourhood house there – that group is the core group who came

together immediately after the flood and organised the food trucks to come in. They cleaned out the church hall, which was one of the buildings that did not flood too badly, and actually set up the recovery centre there before any of the departmental staff went into town. They made sure that there was someone there to help care for those that were still around but did not have a house, did not have the ability to cook food and did not have a whole range of things.

They did a great job in the immediate recovery, but they are still working flat-out there to make sure that the community comes back together again and actually starts to heal. Their real concern – and this is where the government has been helpful – is that a lot of people will not come back to Rochester, that it will not be the town that it was. Some of the people that I have spoken to said, ‘We went through this in 2011 and we fixed our houses. We are now 10 years older, and we have to fix our houses again. Is it actually worth doing this?’ So if you think about all the women that have done great things, it is those in communities like Rochester that do not get a lot of praise but make the effort to make their community better because they actually love living in those particular communities.

So on this International Women’s Day can I acknowledge all those people I have mentioned but also all the other women right across Victoria, right across Australia and right around the world who make such a positive contribution to our communities and our lives. They do a fantastic job.

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (14:59): I rise to address this motion on International Women’s Day. As noted by many others here, it is 100 years since non-Aboriginal women were first allowed the right to stand for Parliament in this state. It is 115 years since non-Indigenous women won the right to vote in 1908 in Victoria and 112 since their first votes were cast at a state election. Shamefully, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and men had to wait until 1962 to gain the same right at state and federal levels. They have only held the right to vote and stand for election for 61 years across our country. Victoria may have been the last state in Australia to give non-Indigenous women the right to vote, but we are leading the charge now when it comes to supporting all women irrespective of age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious belief or economic status.

Victoria under the Andrews Labor government is no longer the laggard but the leader of our nation when it comes to gender equality, and I am immensely proud to be part of this progressive government, which is closing the gender gap through policies that create real and tangible change. They say that you need to see it to be it. Victoria is the state where young women and girls can now easily envisage themselves in this place or in other positions of leadership. As a result of decades of affirmative action quotas, we have now arrived at a point where 54 per cent of Labor Party members of Parliament are women. The cabinet of the Andrews Labor government is made up of 64 per cent women – that is nearly two-thirds, and a staggering number. These numbers did not happen overnight and they did not happen without a concerted effort to give women a seat at the table.

Beyond this place we have supported women in leadership through funding numerous leadership programs such as the Joan Kirner Emerging Leaders Program, Women of Colour Executive Leadership Program, ECHO First Nations Women’s Leadership Program, Women’s Board Leadership Program and the Victorian Honour Roll of Women, with a focus on First Nations and multicultural women. The gender equality strategy *Safe and Strong* has demonstrated our commitment to improving gender equality in Victoria. We are steadfast in our desire to improve outcomes for women, no matter their age or stage of life. We know that equality will only come with embedding change into our systems and institutions. This is why we established the gender responsive budgeting unit, which considers the gendered impact of government decisions across the entire budget process. We are currently the only jurisdiction to have such a unit. The 2022–23 state budget was the first time a gender lens was used on a budget. Again, we are leaders, no longer laggards, in Victoria.

In another Australian first we will begin work to restrict the use of non-disclosure agreements, NDAs, for workplace sexual harassment cases in Victoria. These NDAs are often tools used to keep victim-survivors silenced, and who do they benefit? Unsurprisingly, some employers who seek to keep their reputations clean, avoid full liability and hide their serial offending with NDAs. All too often, though,

these agreements merely serve the interests of keeping those who should be held to account out of the public eye of scrutiny.

We have committed to investing \$23 million to provide free period products in public places, installing 1500 free pad and tampon machines at up to 700 public sites, including public hospitals, courts, TAFEs, public libraries, train stations and major cultural institutions like the State Library Victoria and the Melbourne Museum.

The initiatives we have made in the education system to ensure we address gender inequity are admirable. Since 2016 the Victorian government has invested \$82.1 million in the Respectful Relationships initiative. Respectful Relationships supports Victorian schools and early childhood settings to model respect and promote positive attitudes and behaviours. From our youngest learners to our school leavers, this program works to ensure that children grow up respecting one another and seeing past differences. Over 1950 Victorian government, Catholic and independent schools are signed on to the Respectful Relationships whole-school approach, a significant number indeed and one we should all be proud of. If we want to see an end to violence, in particular gendered violence, it starts with respectful relationships. These are but a few of the government's proud list of achievements when it comes women and closing the gender gap. It is a gap which has been all too wide in the past and is in desperate need of closing. There has been much done but there is still much more to do.

When it comes to the much to be done and more to do, I now turn to discussing some of the wonderful women of Monbulk and acknowledge their contributions to our community. There is not enough time to list them all here today, but there are a few I would like to highlight. Firstly, there is Belinda Young, who was the guest speaker today, founder of Mums of the Hills, about whom I spoke in this place only a few weeks ago. She gave an incredible address. It was impassioned, it was gracious, it was strong, it was true and it made many talk in that room today in Queen's Hall. Belinda is a woman connecting other women together, always with their wellbeing at the fore. She is there to raise other women up, never to put them down.

Janet Claringbold, one of my guests here today, is the CEO of Mountain District Learning Centre in Ferntree Gully. Janet is a tenacious and tireless woman in her pursuit of offering educational pathways for youth who have disconnected from mainstream schooling and for adults who are in need of increasing their literacy and numeracy skills. There are few in the area who do not know Janet and the remarkable work she does for her community, always with the wellbeing of others at the core of her work. Her advocacy for neighbourhood houses is longstanding. She is another woman seeking to improve the lives of others. Janet, thank you for your service.

Lynne Trensky is another woman, and the second guest I brought today, contributing her time and efforts to her community. Over the past 10 years, through her work on the Emerald Village committee and her role in the Eastern Dandenong Ranges Association, Lynne has given of herself in these non-profit organisations with a view to making her community a stronger, better place. She is a strong advocate for the eastern part of the Dandenong Ranges and the small businesses within the area, knowing the vital role they play within the community. Thank you, Lynne.

Tania Bevan, the CEO of Dandenong Ranges Emergency Relief Service, located in Belgrave, is another woman determined to work hard for those most in need, the vulnerable people in our community struggling to make ends meet. For 13 years Tania has worked tirelessly to support and care for those living without a home, enough food to feed themselves or their families or the means to pay the bills or buy much-needed medicine. Those with mental health needs and victim-survivors of family violence find support and care under Tania's watch at Dandenong Ranges Emergency Relief Service.

These are just a few of the women who work so hard to support the community of Monbulk. It is impossible to mention the countless women of the hills who work tirelessly to leave this place better than they found it, be it through voluntary roles or paid positions, but there are countless who do so across many fields, including education, health, food relief and community sport, to name a few.

Finally, I would like to pay my respects to a particular woman who has inspired my work to improve the lives of others: Thérèse Bryant, the first ever women's officer for a trade union in Australia, from the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association (SDA). Thérèse worked at the union for over 35 years and would have to be the most tenacious woman I know. She worked tirelessly to advance the rights of women at work through pursuing improvements in both industrial and anti-discrimination legislation. It is a long list; please bear with me.

Thérèse worked on the 1979 industrial court case for unpaid maternity leave and subsequently the achievement of unpaid paternity and adoption leave. She pursued the right for women to be able to wear slacks to work, which led to a successful industrial court case in 1979. Imagine that – not being able to wear slacks to work. She increased the participation of women at all levels of the union, including the introduction of women's officers and women's committees. She lobbied for and achieved increases in family assistance payments from the federal government. She helped with the introduction of legislation to make discrimination and sexual harassment illegal in this country. She worked on developing policies, educational materials and training in companies and unions regarding equal employment opportunities and sexual harassment. She worked on the introduction of compulsory superannuation, or company pension payments as they were then known; the introduction of paid family and carers leave and collective agreements in industrial legislation; the introduction of laws to make pregnancy discrimination at work illegal, as well as an increased focus on accommodating the needs of pregnant workers, including providing them with safe work; achieving the requirement for companies to consider family responsibilities when establishing or changing employee rosters in SDA enterprise agreements; the achievement of paid maternity leave for most working mothers paid by the government – Thérèse started her campaign two years after I was born; the introduction of legislation requiring employers to report on gender equality in the workplace; and raising awareness regarding domestic violence and its impact on members at work.

As part of her role as the national women's officer of the SDA, Thérèse oversaw the SDA national women's committee, which pursues issues important to women members and ensures that this results in continued change and improvements in the work that is undertaken on behalf of those members and the lives of working women more broadly. She was also involved in advancing the rights of women at work in the broader union movement, particularly in her role as chair of the ACTU women's committee, and she actively represented the union on various government working groups and committees and made numerous submissions to government inquiries and legislative committees. She continued her work beyond Australia's borders and represented the union at an international level as a member of both the world and Asia-Pacific region women's committees of Union Network International and its predecessor, known as FIET, for 16 years, including holding the position of vice president. Thérèse, thank you.

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (15:09): I rise to address this motion on International Women's Day. International Women's Day is a day when I reflect on the amazing and inspiring women who have led the way for a better future for other women.

I also thank all the wonderful women who have surrounded me with encouragement and support: my two beautiful daughters Emma and Olivia, who inspire me every day to create a better life for the women of our future and whom I continue to learn from; and my two sisters Kerry and Keeli, who cheer me on and are there for me through life. And today I think of my mum, who passed away three years ago and who would have loved to have seen me in this place. My girlfriends, my community, my mentors and my National Party sisters – all of you have shaped me in so many ways.

My close friend Aunty Faye Lynam is a local Yorta Yorta woman from the stolen generation. Her life story and truth-telling is deep and meaningful. Her unique story in history and want for a better future, not only for Aboriginal women but for all women and all of her broader community, is truly inspiring, but it is her kindness and her kind heart that I am so grateful for. Aunty Pam Pedersen is another Indigenous woman who inspires and influences me, as is Aunty Geraldine Atkinson. They are incredible women and leaders within our community.

Shara Lee is a local woman who also has an inspiring story. Shara was a homeless woman with two young children but has turned her life around. She shared her unique story of striving for a better life for herself and her children. Shara was supported by her community, but it was Shara that pushed through the challenges of life and worked incredibly hard to create opportunity and success. Shara has been progressing her career, working full time, and is a recent graduate from the Fairley Leadership program. It is women like Shara sharing her story that give other women hope and are a testament on breaking through the challenges and the barriers in life.

Another inspiring local woman is Ash Napolitano. Ash and her husband Mat lost their only child, son Hunter, who drowned in a dam. In the depths of their despair they were driven to make a difference for others and established a program that would provide children in need with critical swimming lessons and water safety education for a minimum of 12 months. In partnership with Kidsafe Victoria the program was launched in May 2021 with an aim to expand to other regional areas. I have spoken to some of the mothers whose children are participating in the program, and they said they would not have been able to put their children through swimming programs without that support. Ash is a truly inspiring woman and an amazing woman who is making such an incredible difference to so many people's lives.

I also acknowledge today my friend and mentor, former MP Jeanette Powell, who was the first elected woman in the National Party of Victoria and the only female member at the time. It is great to see how things have changed, with six female members out of the 11 current members. Let us hope that change continues with more women being elected to all levels of government and that can be led by example. I also acknowledge Pat Smith, the first woman CEO at the Greater Shepparton City Council, which was very historic for the time and a position previously only held by men – many, many years ago. Pat is a woman who continues to inspire me and others.

As a woman in leadership, I know the opportunity and power that I have to inspire and encourage other women. It does not have to be in politics, but living my best and fulfilling life and achieving my aspirations will hopefully encourage other women to strive and achieve their aspirations and to see that there are no limitations in life, just like Shara's story. Too often women underestimate or do not see their capabilities. I ran my own business for almost 30 years, with my clientele being 99 per cent women. I was fortunate to have an opportunity to help other women have success in life, whether it was starting a new career, owning their own businesses or their own personal development. Many of these women not only created their own success but they went on to inspire other women. That is something we should all aspire to do. However, I also saw firsthand the impact of domestic violence and the need to ensure women have the services provided and a support network around them.

It does not matter the age we are or our generational differences, we all have something to contribute. I have two very special friends. Daisy is 16 and we share many wonderful times together. Through Daisy, I see the youth of today – their challenges, their hopes and their opportunities. My 96-year-old friend Yvonne, who I only met due to circumstances during the pandemic, has so much to share with me: her wisdom, knowledge and life experiences. She is one of the most wonderful women I have ever met.

I also wish to acknowledge some of the men in my life: my husband Brendan, who has been such a powerful role model to my daughters and such a wonderful support to me – having a house full of women was not easy, and I must say, he handled the teenage years much better than me; my four brothers, who are wonderful men, of whom I am very proud; my male friends – my very closest friends Azem, Cammy and Sev, who are like family; and my five male National Party colleagues, who have shown me nothing but respect, support and encouragement. As the member for Mildura pointed out, they are now outnumbered.

I encourage all men to think about the impact they have on women in their lives and more broadly, whether it be professional or in their personal life. Any day of the year makes a perfect opportunity to support and celebrate women in our life; however, this global day recognises many women's

incredible achievements. It raises awareness and encourages advocacy for gender equality. Happy International Women's Day.

**Ella GEORGE (Lara) (15:15):** It is my honour to speak today on the International Women's Day motion. It is also an honour to do so as the first female to represent the district of Lara in the Legislative Assembly, especially given this year, as the motion notes, it has been 100 years since women won the right to stand for election to this Victorian Parliament. I am proud to be a part of a team where 54 per cent of Labor members of Parliament are women. The motion also notes that for many years First Nations women did not have the same political rights as other Victorians, and I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge two powerful Victorian leaders, member for Northern Metropolitan Sheena Watt and Senator Jana Stewart, who are paving the way for more First Nations women to enter politics. They set an inspiring example.

This government is not about platitudes or purple-frosted cupcakes at an annual morning tea. It is about real action, real change and public policy that supports women and girls. This government delivered the Royal Commission into Family Violence and has funded all 227 recommendations. This government enshrined gender equity in law with the Gender Equality Act 2020 to address issues like the gender pay gap and sexual harassment in the public sector. We are the only jurisdiction in Australia to have such powerful legislation. But there is more to do, and this government will get on with doing it, like investing \$23 million to provide free period products in public places and the \$9 million Best Start, Best Life initiative, overhauling early childhood education and making kinder free.

There have been some strong women within the labour movement that have helped pave the way for future generations of Labor women. Fanny Brownbill was the first female Labor member of Parliament, the member for Geelong for 10 years from 1938 to 1948. Fanny ran for Parliament in a by-election following the death of her husband, William, who had been the member for Geelong. During the by-election campaign the then federal Treasurer expressed doubt as to whether there was a place for women in politics. He went on to say:

If there is a place for women in politics ... it is probably in the Legislative Council or in the Senate, where things are quieter and the old gentlemen occasionally drowse into their beards. My advice is, however good a woman may be, to stick to a man for what has always been recognised in the past to be a man's job.

Fanny's response was sharp. She said:

I am perfectly confident that my sex can do most things just as well as men.

Fanny, I think that the 54 per cent of Labor MPs in the 60th Parliament of Victoria would agree with you, and so did the voters of Geelong. Fanny won her seat by more than 3000 votes against her male rival. Fanny was passionate about the welfare of women, children and the aged. In her first speech to this place Fanny said:

Honorable members will agree that a mother's life is, to a very great extent, one of sacrifice, particularly while her children are young.

She used her first speech to advocate for mothers, opposing a ban by the Victorian railways commissioners on prams on Victorian trains. Mothers continue to sacrifice for their families, and we will continue to stand by them, to listen to them and to shape our state to support them. Fanny helped establish Grace McKellar House in North Geelong. Then a nursing home, the Grace McKellar centre is expanding beyond aged care to support children's rehabilitation, new parents and their babies and people needing acute mental care. I think Fanny would be proud to see the modern McKellar Centre, a hub of community health care and support services for women and families.

Today Fanny's portrait hangs on the walls of Geelong Trades Hall, a powerful reminder of this trailblazing woman. I wonder what Fanny's experience sitting in this chamber was like. For five years from 1943 to 1948 she was the sole female member of Parliament, the only woman in this place. I wonder what that felt like. I think she must have been an incredibly brave woman. She said in this place:

Let us not forget that the children of to-day will be the citizens of to-morrow, and, shall I say, the power house of the future.

Fanny, I hope that the many, many, many Labor women here with me today are not just citizens of a better Victoria that you shaped but a powerhouse for our shared fight for equality.

In 1990 Joan Kirner became the first female Victorian Premier – a Labor Premier, another brave woman. An MP, a minister, a Deputy Premier and then Premier, Joan Kirner cut a path for all Labor women who followed behind her.

My personal journey to this place has also been guided by strong and dedicated Labor women. Two friends and mentors, Janice Munt and former Speaker Jenny Lindell, have both mentored many Labor women over many years, and they have been an inspiration to me. It was women like Fanny, Joan, Janice and Jenny whose bravery and spirit have paved the way for 54 per cent of Labor MPs in this Parliament.

Across the community of Geelong there are some truly inspirational women, women changing the conversation and empowering their friends and colleagues to keep pushing for equality. Corrina Eccles is one who comes to mind. Corrina is a proud Wadawurrung woman who works tirelessly in her community to share her culture and the stories of her ancestors. She works hard with the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation to oversee the cultural heritage of its lands and waters. She is a leader in teaching Wadawurrung language. Corrina is a passionate, strong and fierce advocate for her community and her culture. Just this morning at the Committee for Geelong's International Women's Day breakfast, the committee announced Corrina as the recipient of the Frank Costa Leadership Award. It is very well deserved, and I congratulate Corrina.

Kaylene Reeves, the co-director of Norlane Community Initiatives, is also one of the many hardworking women in my electorate. Norlane Community Initiatives focuses on bringing the community of the north together to problem-solve and create solutions to key problems faced. This has included delivering healthy meals to families that needed the help and creating common and safe spaces for the community to meet and grow together.

Lyn Morgan is another. Lyn joined the Northern Futures team in 2017 and is an incredible asset to the northern suburbs of Geelong. She guides the Northern Futures team in supporting countless local residents into career pathways and employment. Her work in the community has real, tangible outcomes for the people of the north. There are countless people who have been impacted in a positive way by the work of Lyn, and we are so lucky to have her.

All five neighbourhood houses in the Lara electorate are led by women: Heather O'Shannessy at the Anakie Community House, Vivian Fry at the Lara Community Centre, Esther Konings-Oakes at the Norlane Community Centre, Liz Bonner at the Cloverdale Community Centre, Jodie Flood at Rosewall community centre and Sally-Ann Muller at Vines Road Community Centre. These women go above and beyond for their communities, always putting the best interests of the community at the forefront of everything that they do. I and many, many others in the community appreciate their tireless efforts.

A final thankyou to all the female volunteers – whether it be at sporting clubs, neighbourhood houses, in our health services, at our local op shops or food relief centres – and in particular to those who support women's organisations and initiatives. Our state relies on the hard work of our volunteers, and I thank you for your work in making a positive impact in the lives of our communities and for women and children. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this today, and I commend the motion to the house.

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (15:23): It is a pleasure to rise and speak on this motion on International Women's Day. This International Women's Day let us be allies and advocates for gender equity. There is a role we all need to play to ensure an equitable society. Let us think of ways we can individually and collectively break down systemic barriers. We need to speak out and stand up against gender-based violence, discrimination and inequity. It is time for everyone to lead by example. It is a

time to step up and be part of the solution. If you see, hear or bear witness to inequality, say something. Gender equity is not a women's issue, it is a societal issue, of which everyone plays a key role and needs to be part of the solution. By educating themselves on these issues and challenges faced by women and other marginalised groups, men can also help break down the systemic barriers that contribute to gender inequality. We need to work together to create a more inclusive and equitable society. Gender equality affects everybody, including our children and our grandchildren, and it is time for everybody to challenge historical and societal inequality towards a better future for everyone.

This was a pledge that the National Council of Jewish Women put together, predominantly for men to be part of International Women's Day. I was pleased to take part in that pledge, and I want to commend Lisa Ezekiel and the National Council of Jewish Women of Australia, Victoria division, for being part of that campaign. I also want to put on record my thanks to Rabbi Rabin, who is the rabbi for Caulfield Shule; Jeremy Leibler; the president of the Zionist Federation of Australia; and Josh Burns, my federal colleague, who all took part in that pledge – and I am sure there were others as well. At the end of the day, if we are really going to move the dial, we have got to all be part of this solution, and we have got to call out inequality where we see it.

We have made huge advances when it comes to equality, and we can be very proud of the contributions that so many women have made. We have heard that today, with International Women's Day being celebrated at Parliament House. But we need to do more. We need to do more in boardrooms, in community organisations and in parliaments in every way we can to ensure that those opportunities for women are there. To do that we have got to be very conscious of that fact, and I know that when I first got involved in the pledge, working with many of the organisations in our community that support women, things that were not obvious to me were being called out pretty quickly in terms of what we need to be looking for. Even when you are putting together a speakers group and deciding who you put up for a speakers group, go out and look for positive role models. When you are having various lunch meetings and boardroom meetings and everything else, bring people from outside of your circle in and ensure there is that balance of men and women at the table. Even when you are setting many of these meetings make sure that they are friendly to both genders to ensure that we can get women to attend those meetings.

So we have got to look at our behaviour. We have got to look at changing our behaviour and making sure that women can participate. As I say, things are better – we run family-friendly hours in here – but we need to do more. We need to look at how the workplace operates and can operate in a more family-friendly manner as well. I support that, and I know that we have got a lot more work to do when it comes to that.

There are two women that I brought to the International Women's Day celebration today that I want to just make mention of: firstly, Philippa Caris, who is manager of the Glen Eira Adult Learning Centre. Philippa has been involved with the centre for 12 years and has over 30 years of experience in working with neighbourhood houses and the community sector both here and overseas. Philippa deals with new immigrants to Australia that come here and are dealing with language barriers and are looking at trying to build skills to get their first job. I have had the privilege of being able to see those students coming through the community house, and what a change and what an opportunity Philippa has been able to give many of those new immigrants to Australia. It is effectively an entree into future opportunities here, and I commend Philippa for what she has been able to do. It was great having Philippa come into Parliament. It was the first time that she has actually been to this Parliament, and it was wonderful for her to be able to share that experience with us today.

Lee-at-Jacobson is president of the Jewish Professional Women's Network. The Jewish Professional Women's Network is changing conversations around what Jewish women do and what they are. It is a forum that is career focused so women can share ideas and information, build professional networks, develop their professional capacity and skills, discuss topics and relevant issues and have fun. It has over 1000 active members across Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn, and they hold events during the year to shine a light on incredible women in the Jewish community and the professional contributions

they make. I think what they do is fantastic, because they are really ensuring that there is a support network and that women are able to develop their skills.

Lee-at mentioned to me that it was also her first time at Parliament today. She is now working for a large ASX-listed company and prior to that she was working in the advertising game. She was saying that certainly it is more family friendly in the organisation she works for currently – far more friendly – but it was a lot harder when you were working in the cut and thrust of the advertising world. It certainly was not family friendly when it came to the working hours there, and that was probably one of the reasons why she moved into the career that she now has. Great experience too – very, very different experiences for both Lee-at and Philippa today. And I know there are a number of wonderful women that have contributed so much that were in the Parliament of Victoria.

We have got to do more as a society. We have got to do more no matter what, no matter who you are, and I think we have got to do more as men, as I said at the beginning of this contribution today. We are very, very fortunate – and I am very fortunate – to have role models. Everyone – particularly us blokes – loves to talk about our mums, our wives and our children, and I especially want to mention my daughter Paige. We sat down and spoke about this at length. We tend to speak quite often about the challenges of being a young woman and having to face all kinds of issues – whether it be university, whether it be a new career or whether it be just social media – and it is really interesting to hear the perspective from a young woman's eyes as well. Paige was very happy to share on social media with me her thoughts about what it means to be a woman on International Women's Day. My wife Hayley – I do not know how she does it, managing her work-life balance and being involved in chairing a number of organisations – started in the women's division of United Israel Appeal and for the last five years-plus has been the president of UIA. I think she was the first woman to take up that role in Victoria. She certainly talks to me a lot about the challenges that are faced in community organisations but also in running a business as well.

But at the end of the day it is about just getting up. It is doing, having a go, being focused and being committed. As our member for Eildon, the Shadow Minister for Women, said today, it is about women celebrating women, which is really, really important, and women acknowledging themselves that they are doing such a wonderful job, because women quite often just get up and do. They do not complain, they just do it, and I think we need to provide that opportunity for women to be able to celebrate the wonderful achievements that they have all made. To everybody out there, to all of our fantastic and very special women, happy International Women's Day.

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (15:33): It is my honour to speak today on International Women's Day. Yesterday was 100 days since I was elected, and this year marks 100 years since women won the right to stand for election to a Victorian Parliament. There is a proud history of women's struggle to get into this place. Somebody bought my daughter a picture book which tells the story of Emmeline Pankhurst, a UK suffragette, and I thought, 'Oh.' My daughter is five and I do not think she is ready to learn about this yet. I do not want her to know that there is inequality in the world and that women are sometimes treated as less than equal. How can I expose that to my five-year-old? So when I read it to her I change the words. I make it up as I go along to match the pictures, and I basically take the guts out of the story, which is about women fighting for the right to vote. When is a young girl old enough to learn that the world does not always treat women as it should? And when will young girls never have to learn that because women are treated equally?

I reflected last night that perhaps in not reading the full true story to my daughter I was doing her a disservice, and I wondered if it was akin to those opposite opposing a motion to even discuss International Women's Day in this place. Many of my daughter's picture books follow the same pattern: a hero overcoming adversity. In not reading her the story, I have come to realise, I am not showing her the full role of women as heroes, heroes like Heather and Gnanes, who joined me here today as my guests for International Women's Day. Heather was an apprentice in this very place and painted much of the gold leaf that you see in various places around here, especially in the other place.

If you happened to bring a ladder to work and climbed up it, you would see where the apprentices and the painter-decorators of the 1970s wrote their names on the ledges above.

Gnanes was also here. Gnanes is a volunteer at the Mernda Community House, teaching women how to sew. I was so pleased this morning that in her excitement to come to Parliament House, this place of power, this morning she sewed me a small keepsake, with an inside lining fabric with pictures of women. I thought that was very touching and I was very happy to have them here with me today.

A personal hero who, unbeknownst to her, helped shape my life path is Jackie Huggins. A Bidjara and Birri Gubba Juru academic, author and activist, she would enter the lecture hall when I was at university, speak to us students and change our lives, our understanding of how the world works and how it should work. That was a long time ago. More recently she has served as the co-chair of the eminent panel advising the Queensland government on the process of truth-telling and treaties. It is not enough for some women to have a voice. All women must have a voice. And it is not enough that people who are the subject of policies and programs do not have a guiding say in them. That is why I support an Aboriginal Voice to Parliament.

Young women must have a voice too. I met Sophie at Whittlesea Secondary College, which I was visiting to discuss the \$11.7 million upgrade we are delivering to that fine school. Her principal had brought Sophie along to meet me because Sophie has a keen interest in politics. Sophie asked me, ‘What advice would you give to an aspiring politician?’ My answer was immediate: join the Labor Party. For if you are a female and if you want a seat in this place at the table of decision-making, any high school maths student could tell you that your odds are much better on this side of the chamber.

But in this chamber we are not focused on ourselves, we are focused on the women in Victoria. That is why the 2022–23 state budget invested approximately \$940 million in initiatives primarily aimed at improving outcomes for women. It is why the Victorian government established and has responded to the inquiry into economic equity for Victorian women and has committed \$3 million to industry strategies in manufacturing and energy to help women enter and stay in male-dominated sectors.

There are other spheres of influence for women besides politics. On Monday at the Bridge Inn Road upgrade I met Azize, a female apprentice who was working alongside her male and female colleagues to build the infrastructure that will make such a tangible improvement to the lives of so many in my electorate. We have seen that with free TAFE and with the support for apprentices in Victoria it has become easier for women to forge a career in male dominated sectors. As I said earlier, this year is 100 years since women won the right to stand for election in the Victorian Parliament. Why is it important that there are female representatives in Parliament? It is not just about somewhat abstract notions of fairness or the claims that women are more empathetic. It is about real change. A 2022 study in the *European Journal of Public Health* found that:

... greater female political representation is associated with lower geographical inequalities in infant mortality, smaller inequalities in ... health ... and fewer disability-adjusted life-years lost for women and men.

Better outcomes do not happen by accident. Female-strong governments introduce things like increased maternal and child health hours for new parents. We are investing \$69 million to help parents, when their babies are born, to have more access to free maternal and child health services, new early parenting services and additional support for multicultural and Aboriginal communities. It is to make those early weeks and months easier.

Female-strong governments also introduce policies like our \$71 million package to create 20 new women’s health clinics at public hospitals, a new statewide service and more sexual and reproductive health hubs across Victoria, as well as working with Aboriginal health organisations to deliver dedicated Aboriginal-led women’s health clinics. These will provide comprehensive care for Victorians experiencing pain, and women’s pain often goes undiagnosed; I think here of my niece, who each month suffers from debilitating pain, interrupting her schooling and her participation in

sport. I am looking forward to hearing more from the inquiry into women's pain management that is being established.

It is true that some people do not believe that women belong in Parliament. In fact I am often asked when I am out and about with community groups or here in this house, 'Who is looking after your daughters?' Well, the Labor government is looking after my daughters. As we speak my three-year-old daughter is in free three-year-old kinder, taking part in play-based learning, and my big girl is at a great local state school, with the latest school newsletter informing me that it is running the Respectful Relationships program. The Respectful Relationships program acquits a key recommendation of the Labor government's Royal Commission into Family Violence, helping schools promote respect, positive attitudes and behaviours in all aspects in their classrooms, their culture, their playground, the staffroom and more broadly in the school community. I am so glad that my daughter will benefit from that.

Purple and green are the colours of International Women's Day, as they were for the British suffragettes: purple representing justice and green representing hope. I wear green today for my daughters, to represent the hope I hold that they will be the heroes of their own stories. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on International Women's Day, and I thank all of my incredibly strong female colleagues for all the support, guidance and fantastic role modelling they have provided for myself and other new members of Parliament.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (15:43): It is a pleasure to rise today to speak on this motion and celebrate International Women's Day like all those who have spoken before me. Many in this place today have remarked on how important it is to celebrate women every day, and I certainly could not agree more with that sentiment. But more importantly I think it is incumbent upon all of us to make sure that we are empowering women every day and ensuring that equality of opportunity is at the heart of everything that we do in this place.

Over the past week I have had the privilege to speak at a number of International Women's Day events, one last Friday in this place in Queen's Hall for the Alliance of Girls' Schools and one this morning at Kew High School. This has been an incredible opportunity to meet with young female aspiring leaders whether that is in politics or the business community or the community sector and hear from them and hear their questions and concerns as they leave school over the coming years.

As I said, on Friday I was delighted to host, alongside the Shadow Minister for Health, Georgie Crozier in the other place, the Alliance of Girls' Schools, and we had over 25 schools from across Victoria attend the breakfast, which was a fantastic way to bring young women into this place and talk about the opportunities that there are for them to get involved in politics and to champion issues whatever they might be. We did remark on the fact that it is 100 years since we saw women first allowed to stand for here, and a few years later we saw women elected to this place. It was fantastic to hear from them the questions and the deep thinking they have given to this issue. It was very similar this morning at Kew High School. I must give a shout-out to the school captains Tash and Emily, who did a wonderful job moderating the conversation this morning and who spoke about the importance of why we need to continue to celebrate International Women's Day, why we need to still champion women's rights, particularly equality and equity for women in all parts of society.

Among the many questions they asked this morning was: do we need to do more to see women in politics? I think the answer to that question is: absolutely always. We always want to see more women in politics. Women represent over 50 per cent of the community, and we want to make sure that this place represents the community. So anything that I can do to make sure I can encourage those within the Liberal Party to put up their hands over the years ahead I will do.

I was very proud a number of years ago now when I was much younger to be awarded the Dame Elizabeth Couchman Scholarship by the Liberal Party and to go overseas to the United States and learn from what both the Democrats and the Republicans do to encourage more women into the Congress, into the Senate and into their state legislatures in the United States. These were learnings

that I was able to take back to the party here, and I will hopefully see these learnings implemented over the years ahead.

As I said, we have many impressive young women, whether that is in the Kew electorate or right across Victoria, but today I wanted to give a shout-out to some local women in the Kew community who work every day to make our community stronger. The member for Hawthorn and Leader of the Opposition spoke earlier and he mentioned a couple of these names, but I think it is only right that I take the opportunity to mention them again today, because they are selfless in what they give to society and they are stalwarts of our local community in a number of ways.

So to begin with, there is Amanda Donohoe from Servants Community Housing. As the member for Hawthorn said, Servants help people on low incomes find safe, affordable housing and a community that they can thrive in. They have four houses across Boroondara, two of which are in the Kew electorate, and they have over 100 residents at those houses that they support. Amanda is a tireless worker for these residents. She gives up her time, time and time again, to make sure that she is promoting their interests in the local community and their interests when she is meeting with representatives like me and my colleague the member for Hawthorn and other influential people in the political sphere and to see of course what she can do to expand Servants. As the member for Hawthorn said earlier, they have established a house that is for women who are victims of domestic violence, and this is a really important local community site that women can feel safe in and that they are able to take refuge in after these awful, awful incidents. So Amanda is one of our many, many powerful local women, and I wanted to mention her today.

In a similar vein, Reverend Natalie Dixon-Monu from Boroondara Community Outreach is one of the hardest workers I have ever met. She runs a community organisation based in Kew that provides support and emergency relief for those who are vulnerable in our community. She is consistently providing that food relief, that support, whether it is to those who might need assistance with Myki, might need access to government systems – she is there to help at all points.

A good friend and someone who is an inspiration as a local small business owner is Anna Salzano. Anna is the president of the Balwyn North traders association and works every day to try and boost the confidence of small businesses in the North Balwyn Village. She makes sure that there are always local activities happening and that she is advocating on their behalf, whether that is around safety concerns, the speed limit or looking at opportunities to increase the tenancy of North Balwyn Village.

There is Hanh Tran, from AVA Boroondara, the Australian Vietnamese Association's senior citizens club that is based in Boroondara. Hanh is consistently organising local events for the senior Vietnamese community in the local area, bringing them together for song and dance and most importantly for that sense of community that has been so important, particularly over the last few years. I know she went to great lengths during the pandemic to make sure that continued through Zoom and other means, which would not have been the easiest thing to do when you rely on song and dance.

And then, as the member for Hawthorn mentioned, there is Jane Stewart and Nia, who are part of the It's the Little Things Community, another local community group that gives back to the local community. Jane and her husband Grant started the organisation during COVID, whereby they wanted to provide food relief for people who needed it, especially during the pandemic.

It has grown remarkably quickly, now operating out of a commercial kitchen, and has provided tens of thousands of meals over the last few years to those in need in the local community. And Maddie Murdoch, who is the president of the Bellevue kinder, is working tirelessly at the moment to make sure that the local kinder can adapt to the reforms that are coming into place. Pennie Cornwell, the president of Kew Rotary, is always out there looking for opportunities to make sure that Rotary is giving back to the community, and I was delighted to attend their gala fundraiser dinner just recently. My good friend Vivienne Harkness runs Boroondara Stroke Support Group and organises the Sing for

Recovery choir to give victims of stroke and those who are recovering from stroke an opportunity to sing, come together and create that sense of community.

Finally, we have more than 32 schools in the electorate of Kew, and more than half of those principals are women – and incredibly powerful women at that. I obviously cannot mention them all today, but I have a few shout-outs: Davina Bate at Giant Steps, who does such important work for students with autism; Robyn Thompson at St Bridget's Primary, a wonderful local primary school in Balwyn North; and Josie Millard at Kew High School, who works very, very hard to make sure she is growing a very inclusive and outstanding local high school.

Just finally, I would like to speak about two people I brought into the Parliament today, Svetlana and Leza Solovei, who are refugees from Ukraine. They arrived in Australia about eight months ago after fleeing the war in Ukraine. They spent 10 days in a basement while shells fell, and they managed to escape to Poland and then were able to come out here to Australia. Leza, who is in grade 2 at Sacred Heart Primary School, just a couple of weeks ago, after only a few months at the primary school, was elected class captain. It is a very, very special story, and her mum of course is very, very proud. I had the privilege to present her school badge there last week, and to then bring her and her mum into this place today and to take the opportunity while we were on lunch break to bring her into this chamber and let her sit in the chamber. It was a very special moment for her and her mum. I hope that Leza can take away with her how important it is to see democracy in action, watching question time today, as she looks back to her family that is still in Ukraine, still fighting for democracy over there.

So as we mark International Women's Day, it is a great honour to speak on this motion, and I wish a happy International Women's Day to everyone.

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (15:53): I rise to speak on the motion:

That this house notes that today is International Women's Day and –

- (1) this year marks 100 years since women won the right to stand for election to the Victorian Parliament;
- (2) for many years First Nations women did not have the same political rights as other Victorians.

I would argue they did not have the same legislative rights, because even today they are politically disenfranchised. That is why I support the yes campaign to the Voice, and it is also a reason why our Andrews Labor government is working alongside Aboriginal Victorians to build the framework for treaty and establish the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

First, I give greetings and express my solidarity with women and the struggles of women across the globe, including of course my parliamentary colleagues, staff at Parliament and local women living and working in the Thomastown electorate. I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land, make special note of the contribution that First Nations women have made to this country and pay tribute to their strength, courage, compassion and ongoing struggle for justice.

International Women's Day has taken on many meanings over the years, and I think it is important for us to remember the values, the beliefs and the struggles from which it came. It was a time when women in large and loud numbers began demanding the right to have a voice, the right to vote and the right to decent working conditions and a living wage – a time of social upheaval. It was a time when women began to organise industrially, with strikes in the clothing and textile industry culminating in protests in the United States on 8 March, thus starting the International Women's Day. It is also a time that we should remember those before us that started this struggle and have given us what we have today. It is also a day to think about how far we have come and how much further we have to go.

International Women's Day is a truly multicultural and international celebration. Women in Victoria gained the right to vote in 1908, well before they had the right to stand as candidates in an election. As this motion notes, that was not until 1923, and then it was not until 1933 that a woman was successful in getting elected to this place. It is a lesson on how legislative change alone does not necessarily mean political equality. In Turkey, by comparison, although women achieved the right to vote later, in 1934,

18 women were elected into the national parliament the following year due to a program of affirmative action – something the Liberal Party could think and learn a thing or two about.

At this point I would like to be a bit indulgent and pay tribute to my grandmother Margarita Hermina Amelia Korf, who we called Peggy, although on her birth certificate it was not Amelia but put in as Alma. No doubt many Australians with migrant backgrounds have this experience where their names were misspelt on birth certificates or anglicised. I also pay tribute to her twin sister Wilhelmina Gina Katarina Korf, who we called Gina. They were born on 5 May 1917 – the year of the Russian Revolution they always said. Both Peggy and Gina worked every day of their lives to make the world a better place. They were active in their neighbourhoods, their unions, the peace movement and the Union of Australian Women. They believed that people, women, could change the world and make it better for themselves and for the generations to come, and they worked and strived for liberation and for humanity until they physically could not do it anymore. But most people would never have heard of them. Progressive movements need many people to drive change – not all can be leaders, but all are just as important. Peggy and Gina were not public speakers. They were not spokespeople of organisations or figureheads. They were everyday people – the doers, the grassroots activists – and they lived their convictions until the end of their lives.

Peggy and Gina's parents migrated from Germany to Australia just as the First World War broke out. Their father worked as a ships engineer. As the family lore goes, he jumped ship as it docked in Melbourne, not wanting to return to war-torn Germany. He did not apply for a visa, and he did not get one. He just stayed and got a job as a fitter and turner, working much of his time at the massive Vickers Ruwolt engineering works in Richmond, building large machinery such as road-making and ore-crushing equipment, brewing machinery and hydraulic presses for the Australian car industry. He was a staunch trade unionist and also a member of the Humanist Society. Their mother was originally a governess and a language teacher and later, I believe, started a small business like many new migrants; in her case, a fish and chip shop. But it did not last long because she gave too much away, they said, for free, especially during the Depression. They lived in Lennox Street, Richmond, until they moved to West Heidelberg, and while they spoke German at home, they did not celebrate their culture or pass it on to the following generations. This identity was suppressed due to the racism against Germans and intolerance of cultural diversity at the time.

First I pay tribute to Peggy, my grandmother, a strong trade unionist working in the clothing industry and a member of the Labor Party who spent many hours volunteering for the local MP Brian Howe. I remember as a young child going to his office to lick envelopes. She was an activist in the peace movement and the nuclear disarmament movement. She organised local women in her neighbourhood to sign petitions, attend protests and form local peace groups, going door to door to organise and persuade other women to get involved. She knew Zelda D'Aprano well and was involved in the women's equal pay movement of the time but kept in the background. Later she supported the Aboriginal land rights movement in the 1970s, and I remember her best friend had her foot crushed by a police horse at a rally. I remember as a small child going with her as she pasted up political posters on walls in the night, and I must have been old enough to read because I worried about the signs that said 'Posters prohibited'. But she always had time to explain what she was doing and why, and it was always a good reason. I also learned that she was often treated badly because of her beliefs. She was sacked from jobs, and her daughters were expelled from the RSL smocking classes after they discovered Peggy was active in the peace movement. But she never complained and she kept on going.

Next, my great-aunt Gina, an active member of the railways union, worked on the interstate buffet cars and later in the railway workers canteen. She was the first woman to march –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The time has come for me to interrupt business for the matter of public importance.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

*Matters of public importance***Government performance**

**The SPEAKER (16:01):** I have accepted a statement from the member for Sandringham proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That this house expresses deep concern at the rising cost-of-living pressures on Victorian families and the policy failures of the Andrews Labor government, including:

- (1) Melbourne being the most expensive city for public education in the country, with average costs spiking to more than \$102,000;
- (2) Victorians facing energy price increases of up to \$1000 over this year, with the government unable to detail when power prices will be reduced;
- (3) raiding Melbourne-based water authorities and the Transport Accident Commission and new threats of WorkSafe levy increases;
- (4) no clear repayment plan by the Premier or Treasurer to repay \$166 billion worth of state debt and tackle the annual interest bill of nearly \$4 billion;
- (5) increased land tax bills hitting mum-and-dad investors, and failing to advocate against federal Labor attacks to superannuation;
- (6) home ownership continuing to slip further out of reach following a shock drop in the number of new build approvals, ongoing rental price increases, roadblocks to new land supply, increased taxes pushing up the price for first home buyers and reduced borrowing capacity for Victorian home buyers;
- (7) no reduction to metropolitan public transport ticket prices, forcing more commuters onto the roads, adding to lengthy traffic congestion problems; and
- (8) a skills crisis, with no plan to address skills shortages or the risk to free TAFE after the Andrews Labor government cut \$55 million in funding from VET.

**Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (16:02):** I rise to lead the opposition's contribution on the matter of public importance today because I could not think of a more important thing that this Parliament should be discussing at the moment. I think it is sometimes easy for the political class to forget why they are here. We are not here for ourselves. We are here for those who sent us here. We are here to advocate for those people, to fight for those people, and at the moment there is great suffering around this state. We on this side of the house want every Victorian to thrive, not just to survive. Why? Because we believe in the inherent dignity, responsibility and potential of every single Victorian, no matter their stage in life; we believe we all have a responsibility to assist and protect those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged; we believe people should be free to pursue their goals, to create value for themselves and others and to be rewarded for their efforts; and we believe that free enterprise is the best pathway to achieving economic growth, wellbeing and prosperity.

But, sadly, things are getting harder, not easier, for Victorians, who despite their best efforts find themselves, frankly, pushing the proverbial up the hill with a fork, and the Labor government in this state's record debt, addiction to increased taxes and culture of waste are certainly not helping. For many Victorian families it is getting harder, not easier, to make ends meet. The rent or mortgage repayments are ever increasing. Putting food on the table and paying other bills are also getting increasingly difficult, and it seems like every other day another household bill has just gone up. Disposable income is drying up, and many households are tapping into their dwindling savings just to make ends meet.

The facts are deeply concerning and should be of concern to every member of this place. The latest NAB financial hardship survey, released on 3 March this year, revealed some shocking, shocking circumstances: 37 per cent of Victorians experienced financial hardship; 8 per cent of Victorians experienced being unable to pay rent on time, the highest rate in the nation; 20 per cent of Victorians experienced not having enough when they experienced an emergency in their household; 15 per cent of Victorians experienced not having enough for food and basic necessities; 13 per cent of Victorians experienced being unable to pay a bill; 12 per cent of Victorians experienced being unable to pay medical bills; and 21 per cent of Victorians struggled very much simply to make ends meet.

Now there are lots of assumptions made in politics, and I just want to clear up one of those. I was born at the Sandringham Hospital, and I grew up in Beaumaris in what some may see as a part of the affluent bayside. But my story is akin to those hardships that are being experienced by Victorians at the moment. My mother, a hardworking person, an immigrant to this country, would take baskets of ironing, she would clean houses and she would look after children to make ends meet in our household. She taught me hard work. She taught me the value of hard work. She has been an inspiration to me: a person who strives to do their very best to achieve what they have achieved in their own life. So I think, in the course of this debate, assumptions about those on this side of the chamber and the people we represent and those stereotypes are particularly unhelpful. It is through hard personal lived experience that I stand here and speak to you about the matters being experienced by Victorians today.

It is of great distress to me and to members on this side of the chamber that Melbourne is the most expensive city in which to send your kid to school. I know this, again, because my eldest daughter Abby just started primary school this year. In Melbourne alone the average cost to send a kid to school, per child, is more than \$102,000 – close to \$103,000. That is 17 per cent higher than the national metropolitan average for government schools, which sits at just over \$87,000. It is over \$13,000 more per child than in Sydney government schools. Despite Melbourne being the most expensive city in the country to educate a child, it is of great concern to this side of the chamber that the Andrews Labor government spends the least per student of any state in the nation. Data from the *Report on Government Services* shows that in 2020–21 Victoria only spent \$11,570 per student across all sectors. This is lower than New South Wales and Queensland and Western Australia as well. Why must every Victorian parent be forced to pay more than every other state to send their child to school, while the Andrews Labor government gets away with spending the least on every child for their education?

The back-to-school costs are ever-growing. We estimate that it costs an average of \$944 per child in 2023 to send a child to school. That is broken down over uniform costs, textbooks, transportation, school camps, school equipment, excursions and the costs just keep on rising, impacting Victorian families. State schools across the state are calling out for additional state government support to meet the shortfall in school budgets. As the member for Sandringham, every year I visit each of my schools, primary and secondary, across all three sectors and catch up with the principals. Something which they have expressed to me quite clearly following the agreement of the new teacher enterprise bargaining agreement last year is that the cost of actually putting on things like school camps is going up. So the Andrews Labor government agrees to the new teacher EBA, which costs a local primary school in this state more to run because of the circumstances of that EBA, but they do not top up the school budget in order to offset the cost of the new EBA. It is my view that the Andrews Labor government should do everything it can to enable every opportunity for Victorian children within Victoria's state primary and secondary schools, and if that means topping up budgets to give every child the opportunities that they deserve, they must consider doing just that.

On the matter of energy price increases, up to \$1000 over this year alone – the average cost of household gas bills will increase by around \$675, representing a 45 per cent increase. Households in Melbourne's eastern suburbs and Gippsland are faced with the steepest rise in energy bills with an increase of up to \$995. This is across households in Kilmore, Seymour, Violet Town, Nagambie, Wangaratta, Chiltern, Wodonga, the Latrobe Valley and Sale. But when asked in Parliament, Andrews government ministers could not give a date for when the rebooted SEC, which they are spending \$1 billion to set up, would actually have an effect on bringing down the cost of rising energy bills in this state. Victoria's transition to net zero carbon emissions must be affordable. We must not throw away Victoria's competitive edge without concern or care for the significant industry skills loss and economic repercussions that may very well come from doing that. Supporting the development of more gas will deliver cheaper bills to Victorians and ultimately mean a faster and more reliable path to a renewable transition. The uncertainty as to how exactly the SEC will work is of great concern to us as well. Will it in fact crowd out the urgently required private sector investment in renewables?

On the government's one-off power saving bonus of \$250, although welcomed and necessary, it is but a drop in the ocean when it comes to the increasing cost of electricity bills to Victorian families.

On the matter of the threat of an increasing WorkCover levy, which was highlighted in this place just yesterday, of course it is Victorian businesses who now have to pay the price for the action – or inaction in this case – of the Andrews Labor government. The current levy sits at about 1.2 per cent, and the Andrews Labor government received a report in December 2020 suggesting that to make the scheme viable it needed to increase it to 1.5 per cent, representing a 17 per cent increase. So the Andrews Labor government has known for some time that WorkCover is broken. I suggest to you that the reason why WorkCover is broken is because the Andrews Labor government broke it. We all know how this runs. In yesterday's *Age* Luke Hilakari, the secretary of the Victorian Trades Hall Council, the state's peak body for unions, said:

... it was time for businesses to pay higher premiums.

"We have some of the lowest contributions from businesses, as a percentage, of any state or territory. That's a major problem ...

We all know how this works – the tail wags the dog. The unions say 'Jump', the government says 'How high?' The fact is that every Victorian will be paying the price for the inaction of the Andrews Labor government. If – sorry, when – Victorian WorkCover premiums increase it will be Victorians who are paying the price of that. Compare that to the former coalition government between the years of 2010 and 2014. When we were last in government we cut the WorkCover premium not once, but twice. Not once, but twice, and in fact we actually drew down a dividend on the scheme to provide greater service provision for the Victorian people. That is our record when it comes to WorkCover in this state, and yes, I agree with Trades Hall Council: our premium is comparatively low to other states in the nation. But that is Victoria's competitive edge, and the risk that we have with increasing the WorkCover levy to 1.5 per cent is that that existing competitive edge will be lost.

There is no clear repayment plan for the state's debt: just under \$66 billion worth of state net debt at the moment with an annual interest bill of nearly \$4 billion, which of course increased yesterday on the back of the Reserve Bank's increase to interest rates. Net debt in Victoria is set to reach \$165.9 billion by 2025–26, the highest debt of any state in the nation – in fact more than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined. By 2025–26 the forecast interest repayment will be \$7.4 billion. I will tell you why this irritates me. This irritates me because that \$7.4 billion is paid to service a debt which the Andrews Labor government have no obvious plan to pay off – \$7.4 billion that could have been spent on service delivery in this state, to get more police into communities, to get more nurses into hospitals, to get more teachers into schools. This is the missed opportunity from having no obvious plan to repay our debt.

The Andrews Labor government is addicted to waste: the North East Link cost overruns, the West Gate Tunnel cost overruns, the Metro Tunnel cost overruns – more than \$30 billion in waste and cost blowouts under this government alone. And we do not know yet the impact of the government's Suburban Rail Loop promise, but if history is anything to go by, the only way is down.

Just finally, I think this is absolutely critical and perhaps the most important part of this matter of public importance: one of the biggest issues holding Victoria back from being the top state in the nation once again, is the skills crisis, with no plan from the Andrews Labor government to address the skills shortage. Victorian industries virtually across the board have been facing a labour shortage in the post-COVID era. Victoria is experiencing a skills crisis in areas like health, disability care, teaching, plumbing, mechanics and hospitality. We know that, by the government's figures alone, there will be a shortage of nearly 4000 skilled workers by 2025, with no obvious plan to fix it.

But there is an alternative. Victoria's alternative government, we the opposition here, believe that it is the private sector that creates wealth and prosperity in this nation, not the public sector. Labor want a tax, we want to increase opportunity. We want to attract investments. We want every Victorian to do

and to be their best, for them to thrive and not just survive. Every Victorian deserves better than what they are getting from the Andrews Labor government at the moment.

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (16:17): I am absolutely delighted to rise to speak on this matter of public importance. I would like to thank the member for Sandringham for raising this matter. The cost of living of course is a very important issue, and this gives us an opportunity to talk about the many, many things that this government has done to support Victorians. But before I go on, it would be remiss of me not to make comment, as a regional member, that I did find this MPI extraordinarily Melbourne-centric. I would remind the member for Sandringham that 25 per cent of Victorians live in the regions, and whilst we care about our folk in Melbourne, we are not impacted by Melbourne school costs and we are not affected by Melbourne Water or Metro travel. I just wanted to point that out. I mean, I can understand this lapse given that there are just as many people called David in the Liberal Party as there are regional MPs in the Liberal Party. So it is obvious that they are not really thinking about the regions when they are constructing things like this MPI.

But let us move on to the first point. It is heartwarming for me to see and hear such compassion coming from the other side for families that are sending their children off to school. The only great shame about that compassion is that it seems to be reserved for when they are in opposition. This opposition when they were last in government made some of the most appalling cuts to support for families from within the education system. I remember well when they cut the EMA, which is of course the education maintenance allowance. That was an incredibly important fund that schools used to support families with textbooks and school excursions. So to hear the member for Sandringham now tell us that this is a terrible thing – well, it was their lot that cut that EMA in the first place. But the one that really, really got to me was when they cut Free Fruit Friday. What kind of a grinch of a government saves \$40 per school to take away fresh fruit from students? That is literally – literally – taking food from the mouths of babes. Those are the kind of cuts that those on the other side made. Thank goodness we got in in 2014 and wasted no time in trying to address those appalling cuts. For example, in 2016 we set up the school breakfast club, and I know everyone on this side of the house is incredibly proud of that program. I volunteered for quite a few years and I saw what it did for those kids to get a breakfast, and this week we celebrated 30 million meals. Those on the other side would cut fresh fruit from schools, and we have delivered 30 million breakfasts.

But of course, as I say, they cut the education maintenance allowance so that there was no money for families for camps and excursions. What did we do? The Andrews Labor government got in and in 2015 we invested \$148 million towards the camps and excursions fund. But look, since then, on so many levels we have been supporting people at school. There is the affordable school uniforms program, the Smile Squad dental vans in schools, Doctors in Secondary Schools and the nurses in schools program. This government is investing in and supporting our schools while those on the other side save a measly 40 bucks by cutting fresh fruit for kids. It is an extraordinary difference.

But while we are on this, let us just have a little look at the wording on this MPI. It is the one that I really like. They are quoting this figure of about \$103,000. Does anyone know where they got that figure from? Well, it is pretty interesting. They got it from the Futurity Investment Group. What these people do is they market educational bonds.

**A member:** What?

**Michaela SETTLE:** Exactly. So as a marketing tool they put together some figures – really fiddled with some of those figures – and those on the other side are now basically using advertising slogans as fact. Well, it is going to break their hearts when they find out that Rob was not really a dentist.

But as if their record on cutting schools was not bad enough, we have got to have a look at what they have done in energy. Now, I love this one. Watch them all jump – privatisation. When Kennett privatised the SEC – off they go. Wind it up.

**A member** interjected.

**Michaela SETTLE:** It happened under Kennett, love. In their last time in government retail electricity prices increased by 34 per cent. Under the Liberal government between 2010 and 2014 it was 34 per cent. That was without pressures internationally; that was just good old mismanagement from the other side. But the one that really, really gets to me is that during their time in government disconnections doubled. We are talking about families who had no electricity or had no gas under that government. It is outrageous. This government, however, has got on with trying to deal with this problem straightaway.

I will just break out here. The member for Sandringham in his speech set this MPI up as caring about all Victorians, but I heard again and again and again references to supporting businesses and the competitive edge. What they are really trying to do is look after their mates in big business. When he was reflecting on renewables, my heart bled for the fact that he believes that business will suffer under the chasing of the renewable energy targets, and he wants us to frack. They love a bit of fracking on the other side.

*Members interjecting.*

**Michaela SETTLE:** Well, that is where gas comes from; it's from fracking.

On this side of the house we get on and try and find solutions. I think we can see from the most recent election that Victorians wholly and utterly support the reintroduction of the SEC. It drives them mad on the other side. They want private business; they do not think government should be involved. What does it do to people's lives, their constant harping on for privatisation? Under the SEC, with this government, we will not only be able to protect our environment and our climate through reaching our renewable targets but we will also be able to bring costs down, unlike their government, who saw them increase by 34 per cent. Look, he was pretty glib, the member for Sandringham, about the power saving bonus.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Berwick, member for Sandringham, you are not in your correct seats.

**Michaela SETTLE:** What makes me laugh about the power saving bonus is many of us on this side were really aware of printed material – DLs and so forth – that they put out to promote the power saving bonus in the last term. They were very happy to promote it.

**Vicki Ward** interjected.

**Michaela SETTLE:** Yes, it was extraordinary. They were happy to promote it indeed. So I just want people to think about what the power saving bonus does. The member for Sandringham was pretty glib about it and suggested that it really was a drop in the ocean. Can I remind you that that drop in that ocean was \$425 million worth of payments that went into Victorians' pockets. That ain't a drop in the ocean in my book. From 24 March we will be reopening it, so I look forward to all of your printed material supporting the power saving bonus.

For me, I am really happy to tell the house that on 11 and 12 April I am getting my bus out and I am going on a tour all through my electorate to help people with the power saving bonus. Anyone in this place will know how many people came to us for support, how many people needed and wanted that support, and we were there for them. So I am going to be travelling around my electorate on 11 and 12 April, but if you want to drop in on 29 March, I am going to be at the Bacchus Marsh library all day helping people with their power saving bonuses, because that is what we do on this side of the house.

On this side of the house we always have an eye on supporting our most vulnerable, so that is why we have the most generous energy concessions in the country. Concession card holders are eligible for a 17.5 per cent discount. I suspect that on the other side they would rather see we were discounting private business but, no, for us it is about making sure we have got discounts for the more vulnerable in our community.

It was interesting, because the member for Sandringham said really the most important moment for him in this MPI was around TAFE. I nearly fell off my pew. It is extraordinary. How can they hold their heads up high in public. Twenty-two campuses closed under that side the last time they were in government.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Eureka, through the Chair.

**Michaela SETTLE:** It is utterly, utterly extraordinary. Ask anyone who works in the TAFE sector; they associate those opposite with absolutely decimating TAFE. It was terrible to see.

It is something that is very close to my heart. Many of you know that I am a Federation TAFE alumnus. I was very proud to graduate from Federation TAFE. There was a big battle going on. I saw fantastic teachers lose their jobs under that lot because they completely underfunded TAFE. They want to talk about addressing skills shortages because of course all they really care about is their mates in business. So their concern here is around addressing skills shortages. Let us talk about addressing skills shortages. This government introduced the Victorian Skills Authority in 2021. This is an entire independent body which works with business, with your mates, and with the education sector to make sure that people are being trained in the skills that they need.

Free TAFE has been very deliberately and consciously targeted to make sure that we are addressing some of the biggest skills shortages. In Ballarat, I am delighted to say, Fed TAFE has extraordinary nursing and midwifery courses, and they have absolutely exploded, which is fantastic. They also do some wonderful early childcare courses. Now, this government is investing in health and in early childhood. You know what happens when we invest in it? We need more people to get out there and do it. So yes, there are skills shortages. What are we doing? We are addressing those skills shortages through Free TAFE. We create the jobs, we create the training unlike those on the other side who basically just cut TAFE. That was their favourite thing to do.

The other one in here which gave me a bit of a giggle was the business about the metro transport fares. From the end of this month anyone on the other side I would invite to come and visit me in Ballarat, because a return fare is going to be only \$9. Not only do those on the other side forget about regional Victoria, because there are so few of them, but they actually want to increase the disparity. Their proposal prior to the election was great for everyone in Melbourne, great for getting the train from Sandringham – not so great when you live in Ballarat, Geelong, Bendigo or further afield. So I am incredibly happy and proud about the regional transport cap that is going to be coming into effect. It is not just about commuters. It is about regional families being able to go to the footy and being able to enjoy all of the wonderful events that this government has managed to attract to Victoria. I am very much looking forward to that.

On International Women's Day it would be remiss of me not to mention one of the most fundamental and bold reforms, which is free kinder. We are talking today about the cost of living for families. That policy alone will save thousands upon thousands of dollars for families. But of course it also means that carers more generally, but often women, can get back into the workforce. In terms of addressing the cost of living I am not sure that there has been a bigger and bolder policy than free kinder, and I am going to be absolutely delighted to see the impact that it makes on so many families.

In conclusion, I am very proud of everything that this government has done to address the cost of living. We are very aware of the need to support Victorians. They like to harp on about our debt. But they forget that that was about supporting Victorians through COVID, and this government will continue to support Victorians. We are not here for big business and free enterprise. We are here for Victorians.

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (16:32): It is a pleasure to rise and make a contribution on this matter of public importance as submitted by the member for Sandringham, and I will just clear up one little error of many made by the member for Eureka: there are more Liberal rural MPs than there are now Davids in the Liberal Party, so we will just get that on the record. This house does express its deepest

concern at the rising cost-of-living pressures facing Victorian families and the policy failures of this government. The big issue here and where this government has had a massive fail is that we have massive state debt spiralling out of control and absolutely nothing at all to show for it. When you are facing debt levels, the worst that we have ever seen in the history of this state – in the history of this state – you actually want to see some other things getting better for the debt that you are incurring.

But what have we got? The cost of living is out of control. We have got a health crisis, with waiting lists that are absolutely disgraceful for people who need urgent care. We have a mental health crisis, where people in dire need cannot get an appointment. I have people in my electorate who are suicidal and are told they have got to wait three weeks for a bed. We have a public dental crisis, with a waiting list of well over 12 months and in many areas of rural and regional Victoria closer to 24 months. We have got a roads crisis, where our roads are falling to bits. Our transport and trucking companies and bus drivers are saying they are the worst they have ever seen – and so on and so on. But at the same time all this is happening our debt is spiralling out of control. We are showing nothing in services on the ground for the debt that we are incurring.

But I want to get back to cost-of-living pressures and what they are doing to individual and specific families. Due to cost-of-living pressures we have got more people living in cars, and while the government cannot directly control interest rates, there is much more that they can do to assist those that are struggling financially, sleeping rough, sleeping in their cars.

But whenever we raise housing affordability and homelessness as an issue, the answer we get is that the big build is underway. Well, the big build is going to deliver 12,000 homes. Our public housing waiting list is already just touching on 70,000 with half of those on the priority waiting list. That is not going to solve the problem. Five thousand of those homes have been built and 7000 are to come, but while they are being built the waiting list is getting greater because of the mismanagement of this government. The Big Housing Build is not the short- to medium-term answer that we need. It is cost-of-living pressures that are driving people to sleep rough, sleep in their cars and couch surf. So the question is: what is the government going to do about it? Are they going to put in place more rental assistance or more short-term accommodation for families? Are they going to look at more affordable housing? But we are hearing nothing about this sort of thing – nothing at all. And many of these people that are sleeping rough have jobs. I have got one gentleman sleeping in his car near the back of my office. He goes to work every day, but he cannot afford the cost-of-living expenses. He cannot afford the rentals and the child maintenance that he has to pay. He cannot afford it.

One thing this government can do is support those many agencies that are supporting these people in our community. I was at St Vincent last week and saw the great work that they have done, but they are struggling – their volunteers are stretched, their support from government is not to the level that it needs to be. And I can tell you: it is an issue now, but in eight weeks time or 10 weeks time we are going to be getting into winter. We will have the first frosts and then will really see these people who are suffering hardship going to another level, and we need to get more supports in place.

Victorians right across the length and breadth of this state are facing power bill increases of over \$1000 on their bills – \$1000 on their bills. When we raise that in this chamber the answer that we get is that we are putting out another round of the \$250 power saving bonus. That is good. That helps. But it is really insignificant when you are facing power bills of over \$1000. We have an energy crisis that needs to be fixed, and a \$250 power saving bonus will not fix it. If this government is going to just simply hang its hat on that bonus, we are in deep, deep, deep trouble. I had a look at *Hansard* this week, and in 2015 the minister for energy stood in this chamber and said:

Energy is an essential service for all Victorians. Without access to energy, Victorians cannot cook food for their children, wash clothes for their family and provide warmth to the elderly.

She added that this is why the Andrews government is ensuring positive outcomes. Now that was 2015. What do we think has happened with our power bills between 2015 and now? I would like to make a comparison between then and now. They have absolutely skyrocketed. Right through the

period in between, we have heard time and time again how this government is going to put downward pressure on energy costs and power bills. Again in 2018 we heard the minister say that they were going to 'cut the cost of energy for Victorian households and small businesses'. I mean, are we kidding? Where is that? Where is that? It has not happened. Ask a small business how their power bills have gone since the minister made that comment. In 2018 she said 'the boom in clean energy happening in our state' is 'ultimately benefiting through more affordable prices'. I mean, where do we get off just telling these untruths? Power bills have gone through the roof. This is a minister that has committed time and time again to lowering energy prices, lowering the cost of living, and has not delivered.

I want to talk about another emerging crisis, particularly in our rural areas, and that is in relation to firewood. We have thousands and thousands of householders heat their homes every winter with firewood, but this government has locked our harvesters out of the bush. It has limited firewood contractors from getting into the bush and firewood contractors from getting the residual timber from our timber mills. They are contacting my office saying they will not be able to supply firewood to their regular customers this winter. Now, when you make decisions like you have made in relation to the timber industry, you have got to give weight to these sorts of conditions. We all know the situations where we have members of our community sitting around, you know, with the blankets over their lap, because they cannot afford to turn the electric heater on.

I was talking to the member from Morwell earlier today, where he has a family that has taken a barbecue into their house to light the gas to warm their home because they cannot afford to turn the heater on. We have got people with the oven door open – I mean, how healthy is that? – huddling around to get warm. People going to bed at 4 and 5 in the afternoon because they cannot afford to turn the heater on with the power bill.

And what are we doing now? We are dropping access to firewood, and we are cutting off access to that cheap energy supply for people. We know what happens when there is a reduction in the availability of something – the price goes through the roof. It is something that desperately needs to be fixed. What I have outlined here is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the cost-of-living fiasco this government is overseeing.

Home ownership is slipping further from the grasp of many. We have got a situation where we are paying nearly \$4 billion in interest annually. What would that interest bill do to offset the cost-of-living expenses? But worst of all, no repayment plan. We are heading for a debt in excess of \$150 billion to \$160 billion with nothing to show for it on the ground. If you are reducing services from government, you want to see your government debt coming down. If your government debt is going up, you want to see some results on the ground that support and assist people. But we have got debt going up, a health crisis, a mental health crisis, a dental crisis, a roads crisis and everything else that is going on. They are heading down the wrong path in both directions.

What has left a lot of people really scratching their heads is how we are going to get out of this. No matter how those people on the other side of the chamber want to stand up and sugar-coat what they say and talk about these little positives and what we might have done eight or 10 years ago – deal with the here and now, and the crisis you are facing now. We have a massive, massive cost-of-living crisis in this state on so many fronts – we are heading into winter, it is going to get worse in the second half of this year with the forecast interest rate rises – it is only going to get worse. This government has got to come up with some real actions to solve these issues for Victorian families because they are doing it hard enough now. We do not want to see it getting any harder. This government simply must do better.

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (16:42): It is a pleasure to rise and speak on the member for Sandringham's matter of public importance this afternoon, and what a matter of public importance it is. It is funny that people have found their voice now on some of these issues. We heard earlier from the member for Sandringham that some people on that side of the chamber might have forgotten that they exist in a community, not just a political sphere. But I can tell you with 100 per cent certainty that no-one in this house has forgotten who they represent. These people, these MPs, most of whom were

in government when COVID hit, have done more for the community and stood up more in every facet of their community than any other MPs ever in Victoria's history. No-one on this side of the house has forgotten who they represent. My friend the member for Eureka's brilliant speech is a hard act to follow, I will say, but I will try and touch on some of the spitball approach to MPI details today.

First of all though, can I just say that I did hear some context around WorkCover and the Victorian Trades Hall Council's comments on that, and I would like to mention some commentary from the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which recognises that the current WorkCover system is not sustainable. The Victorian chamber suggests that while they do not want to see any additional cost to business, pragmatically they must ensure the scheme is viable. They also report that they are working in good faith with the government towards an outcome and have had several conversations with Minister Pearson to ensure that industry is heard and represented and that they can prosecute business's position. They also recognise that there have been no premium increases for a number of years. I think that gives a different side of the story, a very different side of the story, and is not just about, as the member for Sandringham might say, the tail wagging the dog, although we do listen to unions and we work very closely with workers because workers are the unions.

Happy International Women's Day, by the way, and we will circle back to that in a second, because there is a very peculiar point that is in this matter of public importance that I would like to raise later. But we have heard a little bit about the budget, and those opposite have zero – zero – economic credibility. These are the people that had to sell off their Liberal Party headquarters, let us not forget. It was also prior to the election that we saw their shadow minister stand up and be unable to tell us how much their election commitments cost. That is shameful, and it shows that there is zero economic credibility. On the other hand, we had 56 members returned to this house, and I think that demonstrates that Victorians know that there is an acceptable level of debt that was required to be written up on our books to make sure Victoria was safe, to make sure Victoria could keep on making progress and to protect the wellbeing of Victorians. The first step in that economic rebound is to grow the economy and grow jobs and create jobs, because we know that you cannot have a sustainable fiscal recovery without a sustainable economic recovery at the same time, and that rebound has been strong. That rebound has been very strong, and the budget demonstrates that the government is now delivering on steps two and three of that budget plan with a cash surplus forecast as well.

We have heard from those opposite – and I think again it takes a lot of guts to bring this up being a member of the opposition – that home ownership is hard. I sit here, and if you were not laughing you would cry. The people that told us that – actually, it was the member for Brighton that basically was trying to move on homeless people, and then we had the shadow minister in the other place saying that she would not want people who needed housing to live in certain areas because they might have the wrong shoes. It was a disgraceful comment and a disgraceful approach to housing, but right now in this chamber we are hearing about how this government is not doing it right. Do not worry about the Big Housing Build; do not worry about two weeks ago a \$50 million commitment over 10 electorates to housing – words are very easy. Words are very easy to say, but commitments are a lot harder.

The thing I did want to touch on were the few words in this MPI that talk about why this government will not advocate against the federal government's proposed superannuation changes. First, I mean, it is not a state decision. We all know that. But the number two reason would be that superannuation is not designed to be a tax-minimising investment or a wealth creation investment. It is a tool to make sure people can live comfortably in their retirement. But it is very poignant to raise this today because we need to ask ourselves, 'Who would this affect?' For anyone that has got \$3 million or over in super – 0.5 per cent of the Australian population – those people will have a correction, I guess you could say, or a tax, and they will pay it, of 30 per cent over \$3 million. The 99.5 per cent of Australians that do not have \$3 million and over will not be affected, but they will live in the comfort of knowing that those other people will be able to pay their fair share of taxes.

But it is not all about that lens, I guess. There is a gender lens to this too, and in the context of International Women's Day I think it just so happens that we are discussing – sorry, the opposition are

supporting – a tax break that disproportionately affects men. It supports men. This could even be seen as a bit of a gendered attack, with women still sadly earning much less than men and paying less super, of course, as well. I am sure – in fact I am dead sure – that the 80,000 people with more than \$3 million in their super accounts are mostly men. I know that those across the chamber aisle do not really realise that it is International Women's Day. In question time we did not have a question from a woman, for example. I find it absolutely crazy that we are sitting here, and we have got those opposite talking about tax breaks for people with over \$3 million in super. I can walk out those doors and almost bump into a homeless person on the street in Bourke Street, yet we have got people in this chamber bleating about someone who has got \$3 million in super and that they deserve a tax break. On a day that we celebrate women we have actually got people in this chamber speaking amazingly about the future and how we can achieve equality, how we can do things right that have not been done well in the past.

But we have got in this MPI I think an argument from those opposite. They are advocating for men to increase their wealth gap and in actual effect reinforce a structural inequality between genders that already exists. It is like trying to make the glass ceiling a bulletproof one. I am not sure those people on that side of the chamber have picked up on this yet.

But according to KPMG, for those aged 55 to 59 the gender super gap is 33 per cent, while in the peak earning years – so the accumulation years – 45 to 49, the gender gap is 35 per cent. Given super is closely linked to paid work and women earn 14 per cent less, the tax break that they are advocating for is going to affect who? It is actually going to affect women disproportionately to men. I think this MPI would have been a great opportunity for those opposite, on International Women's Day, to not just cry poor about things that they have suddenly found a conscience about but actually advocate for women and create an awareness of what we need to do to close the pay gap and the super gap for women. They have missed that opportunity. So let me take that opportunity. This data also tells us that the average balance of super for men is \$359,000 and for women is \$289,000, and that is about \$100,000 behind what is estimated to be something that you could comfortably retire on as well.

To be clear, we have got an opposition that on one hand in this MPI have been talking about how tough people are doing it, and on the other hand are saying, 'Let's advocate for the 0.5 per cent of people that have got \$3 million in super that they have accumulated.' Let us be really clear: how do you get to \$3 million in super? Well, on average, over 40 years you might have to pay \$27,500 per year in super contributions through your superannuation guarantee, and that is a hell of a lot of money. That wage might be \$250,000 and up. And again, when we talk of the gender pay gap, when we talk of the gender super gap, we are mostly talking about men who will gain from this tax not being put in place.

Now, whether we are in here talking about MPIs and waxing lyrical on MPIs – let us be honest; we are not legislating – or talking about more important things, it is always this side of the house that actually puts their money where their mouth is and makes legislation that helps Victorians.

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (16:52): I am very pleased to stand to speak on the matter of public importance (MPI) put forward by the member for Sandringham, and I too am deeply concerned at the rising cost-of-living pressures on Victorian families and so many policy failures by the Andrews Labor government. But I do want to begin by addressing something that the member for Eureka said, because she has her facts absolutely round the twist. It is good to be able to correct the record, because I know those on the other side believe if you say it often enough, it is true – but it is not true. Now, under Labor 73 licences for unconventional gas exploration have occurred and 23 have been approved for hydraulic fracturing operations – fracking – with no public consultation. So the only time fracking has occurred in Victoria is under a Labor government. The coalition has never, ever done that. Now, for those over there to carry on, to believe and to try and reshape the debate or reframe the debate –

**Michaela Settle** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Eureka! You had your turn.

**Cindy McLEISH:** – is mischievous. This is the fact. Every time that you mention this, I will be there to correct, to make sure that the new people on your side do not believe all the spin that they are fed by the existing members.

There is so much to talk about in this MPI, and I am going to actually start from the eighth point, about the skills crisis, because there is no plan to address the skills shortages, and it is such a risk to take, with what is going on. It is no secret Victorian industries virtually across the board have faced labour shortages post COVID. It does not matter what industry it is, that has been the case. Unemployment at the same time is at a 50-year low. But despite this, there is a real mismatch between the employers' needs and those of jobseekers, and I hear time and time again about the difficulty of getting people to work. A friend of mine said to me, 'Gosh, congratulate me; I've got a new job,' and I said, 'Oh, what's that?' And she said, 'At the age of 73 I'm now a cleaner in my business, because we can't get anybody to clean.' That was her and her husband, who had had an operation, and they had a staff member who left and they could not replace them. At that age they were having to increase the amount that they worked. The two of them had to do the work of three people.

We have got an absolute skills crisis, with the government's own data showing that we will face a shortage of nearly 400,000 workers by 2025 in critical industries like health, disability care and teaching, and trades like plumbing and mechanics. 2025 is not that far away; it is only a couple of years. The government's spin with its free TAFE rhetoric is not cutting it in the real world. Again I want to draw the house's attention to a flyer that I have from quite some time ago. It was pre 2010 and it was a message to the local MP, the member for Bendigo East.

**A member:** Who was that?

**Cindy McLEISH:** It was the member for Bendigo East, the Deputy Premier, and it reads:

You are PRICING TAFE OUT OF OUR REACH

Going to Bendigo TAFE used to be easy.

...

Well that's all changed.

Thanks to you, TAFE means

- High fees
- Abolished concessions
- Borrowing money
- Going into debt ...

Let us be clear that this is where things started to go bad in the TAFE sector. What the Labor government has done – you have to look in the details of the budget papers to find these things, but they are there; I am not making this up – is cut \$55 million from VET to pay for its free TAFE promises.

**A member:** How much?

**Cindy McLEISH:** \$55 million – it is robbing Peter to pay Paul. Pretty well that is how it is working. The most recent *Report on Government Services* revealed that they had slashed this \$55 million from VET in 2021. And do you know what? That was the biggest cut of any state or territory, and at that time the federal funding, which was through a Liberal government, had remained steady. The cuts in the skills sector were being made by the Labor government. The reality is that less has been invested in VET per person in Victoria than in any other state or territory, and the Parliamentary Budget Office post-election report reveals that there is certainly no new funding beyond next year to deliver free TAFE. So you have got to ask why the Andrews government has slashed nearly \$56 million all up from vocational education and training.

On that I am going to bring up an example that was brought to my attention the other day by the Mansfield Armchair Cinema. For some time they have offered a certificate III in business

management. They have kids come, school-aged children from year 9 to year 11 usually, who are involved in doing some on-the-job training outside of school hours. Their most recent invoice for the students is more than \$3000. These students, when they work, earn \$14.71 an hour, so they cannot pay this. Parents are having to find the money to do this, and it is really difficult. They mention that, with the cost of living being so high, families cannot do this. I think this does not make much sense, that you have got schoolkids earning a small amount having to fork out this amount. Agriculture and hospitality and other courses are free, but not this one, and I think there are a lot of issues around that.

Let us look at the raiding of many authorities. The government has raided or will raid over the forward estimates \$630 million from the city-based water authorities – Melbourne Water, Greater Western Water, South East Water and Yarra Valley Water. That means that they are going to be significantly limited in investing in vital water infrastructure, but it also means costs are going to go up, and who is going to have to pay for that? Families. It is going to be passed on to families. Rather than passing on the savings through the water authorities, what is happening is we have got this crisis and this money is going to prop up the flimsy budget that is absolutely riddled with debt and deficit.

We have got the TAC scheme that has been hammered by this government. In fact \$3 billion over the forward estimates – billion, not million – is being pulled out. It is being treated like a cash cow. It is extraordinary. It is an extra \$650 million on the previous year's budget that is being pulled out. I bet the CEO and the chair really did not have a lot of good things to say to the minister and to the government about that. I worry about the impact that that is going to have, the impact that \$3 billion being pulled out is going to have on the people that rely on this service. At the same time we have the road toll heading in the wrong direction. The TAC, through its own website, says:

The TAC, in consultation with Victoria Police, develops strategies to target the main causes of crashes that result in trauma, and encourage positive road-user attitudes and behaviour.

There is money dedicated to that. Well, I am suggesting that there is going to be a huge haircut to those activities. The police are not going to be able to do the work that they need to do. The TAC website brags that these are the sorts of things that the funding has allowed them to do. Increased roadside drug testing – it was going to, in 2021, conduct up to 150 tests per year. Now that is likely to be chopped. Helping with the purchase of speed detection equipment – bah bow, that will be cut too. Black spots that need to be fixed? It looks like they will be cut. Advertising campaigns to help with road safety? No, no cigar there. Telehealth funding for the clients that need it? Well, that is probably going to be cut. The community grants? I bet they have really gone down.

We have known also that WorkCover is in a very poor state and the government have only now seen, after all these years when alarm bells have been certainly ringing for the last four or five years, that things are not healthy at WorkSafe. They have received more than \$1 billion in emergency payments to help prop up the system. So now they are looking at cutting support for the injured workers and hitting businesses. The WorkCover premium has been kept at a particular rate, the average premium rate, at 1.272. That is the rate that was set by the Liberals in the 2014–15 budget, and it has remained steady at that rate that we lowered it to, but it looks as though it is going to be hiked because the government have to keep raiding.

As I said, the alarm bells should have been ringing but they have not been. This government has been asleep at the wheel, certainly with regard to the TAC and with WorkCover and WorkSafe. There have been a lot of stories around, and I think the government must have had their head in the sand about the culture that is happening there, about the debt. Instead, what is happening? They are going to slug the employers. What they have also done at the same time is look at cutting some of the services. So slugging the employers, cutting the services – the government are pulling out this tax fall. If you look at the transcript from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last year, the minister did not even know where in the budget papers the budget for WorkSafe was, and that is pretty appalling.

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (17:03): I rise to speak in response to the matter of public importance (MPI) that had been submitted by the member for Sandringham, but in doing so I would

like to acknowledge the contributions of my colleagues the member for Frankston and also the member for Eureka.

**Danny O'Brien** interjected.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Fantastic. It certainly is a wideranging MPI indeed that touches on a wide number of policy areas, including education, energy, the TAC, WorkSafe, the state's economy, housing, public transport, TAFE and so much more – all the things the Liberals are really good at being known for. In essence the MPI seeks to draw attention to the cost of living and the ongoing experience of Victorian families and households, but along with being fundamentally and extremely misleading in terms of the real action the Andrews Labor government has been taking to respond to all of these various and other challenges and opportunities, it is also an MPI with an extremely short memory that fails to acknowledge the absolute incompetence of the former Abbott–Turnbull–Morrison Liberal governments and the active role they played in fuelling many of the economic and policy challenges our nation is now confronting. It is also an MPI that totally overlooks the role that the previous Napthine, Baillieu and Kennett Liberal state governments played in totally neglecting and treating with absolute contempt the very policy issues that are specified in this MPI.

Frankly, this is a motion that has been written in an alternative reality. I actually feel like Marty McFly. In *Back to the Future Part II* he inadvertently flew his DeLorean into an alternative reality where Biff Tannen had suddenly found his moral compass by replacing the humble Hill Valley library with the Hill Valley casino, Biff's paradise casino, because of all the times we can vividly recall hearing from so many distinguished Liberals: Alan Stockdale when he announced record investments into expanding public education and building new schools all over the state, or Barnaby Joyce when he stood up to commit to renewable energy to combat climate change, or Jeff Kennett when he announced Victoria would be expanding the SEC to help keep profits on shore and keep energy prices down for Victorians, or the time Michaelia Cash flew down to Victoria to say that a Liberal government would be supporting workers through a better WorkSafe and a better WorkCover scheme.

Or there was the time Stuart Robert announced the Liberal government would help mums and dads with things like free kinder or free TAFE – robo what? Or there was the time Josh Frydenberg stood up to fight for an increase in compulsory superannuation to 12 per cent and to protect super for what it was actually designed to do – for retirement. Or how about the time Scott Morrison took a stand to fight for the NDIS or paid parental leave and to build more social and affordable housing for Victoria? Or what about the time the Liberal Minister for Women, Tony Abbott – true story – was in Melbourne for International Women's Day to announce major commitments around women's health and wellbeing, including the rollout of free tampons in schools? Or how about the time each of the Liberal Party prime ministers from New South Wales came down to Victoria?

**Cindy McLeish:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I know the member on his feet is particularly animated, but the MPI, although it is broad ranging, is about Victoria, not about the federal Parliament and attacking the federal Liberal government, and I ask you to bring the member back to the MPI that is before him.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** This has been a very wideranging debate and very detailed. If the member can come back to the MPI at hand and continue.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Thank you, Deputy Speaker. There is a lot to remember of what the Liberal Party has done to this state nationally and locally, so forgive me for referring to some notes to remind me of those failures – like the time when the Liberal prime ministers from New South Wales all came down to announce major commitments to the Suburban Rail Loop or to help us remove dangerous level crossings, or the time Joe Hockey as Treasurer stood with workers in the north-west to support the workers of Ford, Toyota and Holden to back manufacturing jobs in the north-west. Do you remember that? I remember.

*Members interjecting.*

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Yes. Or – talking about the state level – there was the time that Jeff Kennett actually stood in the northern suburbs to open more TAFEs and protect TAFEs. Or there was the time – last but not least – that Peter Dutton came down to Melbourne for dinner in the CBD and stood in solidarity with the African community and the multicultural communities to back in our multicultural communities. To be honest, Deputy Speaker, I do not know if it is just me –

**Cindy McLeish:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, you have counselled the member on his feet already and asked him to come back to matter before us, even though it is wideranging, and he has strayed very much again.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** There is quite a lot in this detailed matter of public importance. The member to continue. There is no point of order.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** To be honest, Deputy Speaker, I do not know if it is just me, but just like Marty McFly and the number of times – he lost count of the great things that Biff Tannen did for Hill Valley. I think this motion should just make like a tree and get out of here.

But the reality is that Liberals have never said or announced any of these things – that is the truth – and they never will; they will never change. In the context of that, let me now turn to the substance of this matter from the member for Sandringham. Firstly, it talks about public education and investment and the cost of public education. I am the proud product of our local public education system across the northern suburbs. In this respect, when the Liberals get up to talk about public education in my community it brings back a lot of memories for a lot of people, because when it comes to improving education and access to and affordability of education the first thing that any decent government should do is invest in, back in and expand good quality public education in local communities. That is why since 2014 Labor has been investing record amounts to make Victoria the Education State, whether it is through the affordable school uniforms program, the breakfast club program, covering VET course materials, free school camps, doctors in schools and so much more – all things to alleviate the cost of education. That is why also in my community we have invested a record \$150 million to upgrade every school across our community. Combined with our *Merri-bek North Education Plan*, these investments will help ensure local families continue to have good quality access to local education now and into the future. But in stark contrast, when the Liberals were in office under Jeff Kennett they closed at least 12 local public schools in my community and the northern suburbs in my electorate to subsidise your ‘Victoria – on the move’ agenda. Let me name those schools. They need to be named in this chamber: Oak Park High School, Hadfield High School, Coburg High School, Newlands High School, Hadfield Primary, Fawkner Technical School, Fawkner North Primary, Glenroy High School, Coburg Technical School, East Coburg Primary, Merlynston Primary and East Brunswick Primary School. These are all schools that were closed by the Liberal Party. And they want to stand in here and talk about investing in the cost of education. Give me a break! The very concerning thing as well is that it is not just the historical decisions by the Liberal Party, it is current decisions as well by the current Liberal Party. Before the last election they actually announced, with the member for Croydon, that they would commit to delivering a Merri-bek North education plan for my community. Really, when you look at the detail of it, in the Liberal tradition it would continue to undermine and compromise local educational opportunities and outcomes.

Firstly, the member for Croydon stood outside John Fawkner College with not one single dollar being committed by the Liberals for that school as they announced a ‘plan’, in inverted commas. It was a very low-key event because it was a very low-key and hollow announcement that had no real money attached. In stark contrast, Labor’s education plan was announced to the fanfare of the whole John Fawkner school community as Labor committed \$14.5 million to upgrading John Fawkner as part of the real education plan. Secondly –

**Cindy McLeish** interjected.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Well, the Greens supported your education plan. I am going to get to that in a second, actually.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Through the Chair!

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Secondly, the Liberals' education plan specifically excluded Coburg High School from being considered as part of future education planning and investment, an absolute disgrace. Furthermore, at the time of being announced the Liberals' education plan did not even include one single dollar towards any upgrades at Coburg High. In stark contrast, we made a \$17.8 million investment commitment to build a new science and tech hub. Thirdly, and most concerningly, had the Liberals won in November the Liberals' education plan, which was supported by the Greens – they supported it –

**A member** interjected.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** You supported the education plan for Merri-bek North that the Liberals put out, and I will get to that in a second –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Through the Chair.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** I will get to that in a second. They sought to review the very future and very existence of the only government girls secondary school in Melbourne's northern suburbs, Pascoe Vale Girls secondary school. Some of you may have heard my constituency question yesterday to the Minister for Education when I spoke about the leading role Pascoe Vale Girls has played in educating generations of young women from across the north since 1956. However, the Liberals' education plan sought to review the future of Pascoe Vale Girls and in essence consider taking away the only choice for families, particularly those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities from across the north, to send their daughters to the only government girls school in the north. As stated by the school council and parents of Pascoe Vale Girls College in their letter to the Minister for Education, to me and to the member for Broadmeadows in November 2022, they strongly supported Labor's education plan:

... we'd like to express our appreciation and gratitude for your support of our girls school.

...

With strong enrolment numbers, the College continues to be a safe place for girls from diverse backgrounds to excel and become confident, independent and successful future leaders.

We look forward to participating in the plan ... to get the best results for girls of Melbourne's North.

Today, on International Women's Day, I am proud to say the Andrews Labor government supports women's and girls' education; we support Pascoe Vale Girls College, and our education plan makes provision for that. It does not compromise its future. With only 10 seconds left on the clock, there are so many other things I could get through on this motion from the member for Sandringham. I would love an extension of time if I was given indulgence, but, you know.

**Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (17:13):** I am delighted to rise and make a contribution on the matter of public importance which was submitted by the member for Sandringham. I know the cost of living is affecting all of us. I know that people in the Ovens Valley are really hurting, and I sense all Victorians are really feeling the pinch as well. Yes, there have been interest rate hikes. There are multiple reasons why the cost of living is going up, but what is really hurting are the new taxes introduced and increased by the Andrews Labor government for Melbourne and also the cost shifting by the Andrews Labor government, this out-of-touch government.

Let me begin with interest rates. I will touch on that just briefly. That affects all Victorians. We know if you have got a mortgage it will certainly affect you as the interest rate goes up, but even if you are a renter, rental rates are directly connected and linked to real estate prices and also interest rates. It is a direct correlation, so we cannot just say home owners are the ones that are most affected. Also renters are affected, so that is starting the ball rolling and people are really feeling that pinch, but it is the other

costs of living that are really causing the concern. I want to focus on some of those living pressures that are a direct result of this state government.

As we know, the Premier of this state on the eve of the 2014 election stared down the barrel of the camera when he was asked, 'Do you promise Victorians here tonight that you will not increase taxes or introduce new taxes?'

**A member:** What did he say?

**Tim McCURDY:** He said, 'I make that promise to every single Victorian.' That turned out to be a big fat lie. How many taxes do you think –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! That word is unparliamentary.

**Tim McCURDY:** It might be unparliamentary, Deputy Speaker, but it is the truth. I understand what you are saying –

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I advise you not to use that word again.

**Tim McCURDY:** I just want to ask: how many taxes do you think have been introduced or increased? Is it 10? Is it 20? Is it 30? Forty-four new taxes and counting have been introduced since he stared down the barrel of that camera and said, 'I make that promise to every Victorian.' It is no wonder Victorians are feeling the pinch, because this government continuously raids the pockets of Victorian families and communities.

Let us look at education. It costs more to send a child to school in Victoria than any other state in Australia – so much for free public education. Families cannot sustain the increased cost of sending their children to public schools in communities like Wangaratta, Moyhu, Bright and Katamatite. Something has to give, and sadly we are seeing more and more families going without basic needs because the bills are just too high.

Water costs – I mean, a UN committee has stated that everyone has the right to accessible and affordable water. Well, not here in Victoria. We have seen that water authorities are just another revenue raiser for the Victorian government. Recently we caught the government out red-handed looting money from water authorities – \$630 million, to be exact. Melbourne Water, Greater Western Water and Yarra Valley Water were forced to pay their profits to the government to the tune of \$630 million, cleverly disguised as capital repatriations. This has been going on since 2015. Not to the same fiscal scale that it did last year, but these repatriations are being reinvested back into cost overflows and blowouts that this government has on their Big Build – or their big spend. The Treasurer and the Minister for Water have signed off on ripping millions of dollars out of water corporations when they are in desperate need of massive infrastructure investment. This money should have been reinvested into new technologies in these water authorities to make water cheaper and the water network more reliable and to make new ways for recycling water. Instead, as with all things, the government swung the axe through profitable agencies in order to prop up their waste and overruns, leaving the average Victorian worse off and with higher water bills.

Energy prices – many of the speakers in this house, particularly on this side, have spoken about energy prices. There are increases this year of up to \$1000 per household, and that is absolutely shameful. That does not include what has already gone up in the past and what will go up in the future. We are talking just this year. Like the member for East Gippsland, I regularly visit people in their homes. Older people, because it is quite chilly in northern Victoria in the winter months, cannot always get out. I visit them in their homes, and I cannot believe the amount of people who have got two rugs over their legs because they simply cannot afford to put the heater on. They sit there with rugs over their legs, and the house is absolutely freezing. I walk in with a jacket on, and I nearly need to put a hat on once I walk inside because it is so damn cold. Again this government has let down Victorians when it

comes to energy prices, particularly older Victorians, and they are paying a very heavy price. This is a direct result of pandering to those latte sippers in Fitzroy who want to green the universe today. They do not want to transition over time, they want to do it today. The Labor government relies on Greens preferences to get many of their candidates elected in Victoria, and that is why our pensioners cannot afford the heating in the wintertime, because Labor have done a deal with the Greens.

Let us look at finance. It is clear that the government has failed Victoria completely. They have dropped the ball on the financial future of this state, with debt sitting at levels not even the combined debt of New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania can match. The Andrews Labor government is running this state bust. They talk up their building credentials, yet one only needs to look at the overruns – \$30 billion in overruns and blowouts – and now they are greedily taxing struggling Victorians, selling off and privatising anything that is not bolted down and ripping profits from fiscally responsible government agencies. This government simply cannot manage money. We know that.

Infrastructure can be built without blowing the price out by double or triple. This government needs to rein in the flow of uncontrolled capital, most of which seems to benefit their union mates – not all Victorians. With no clear plan to repay the debt that does not involve privatising VicRoads, I am waiting to see what is going to get sold next.

Regional Victorians are left to suffer. We do not have the money to invest in schools like Yarrawonga or health services in Cobram and Bright and Wangaratta, nor do we have the money to give to our councils so that they can fix up our regional roads. Regional Victorians voted overwhelmingly in favour of the National and Liberal economic plan that would get us out of debt and deliver fair amounts of funding to the regions – 25 per cent of funding to regional areas. Instead we are left with a Labor government that has completely lost control of the budget and repayments and spruiks their regional spending credentials by investing in Geelong, Bendigo and Ballarat.

Let us not forget it was Joan Kirner who started privatising the SEC by selling off Loy Yang. And do you know why that was? It was because there was a decade of Labor under Cain and Kirner that drove Victoria broke. Much like the dying days of the Kirner government, Victoria's budget is heading to the wall. The government are being forced to privatise and sell in order to fund their irresponsible spending plans, with no clear plan or direction to change this outcome.

If the government were serious about housing and regional Victorians, they would be doing more. Instead the Andrews government is funnelling billions and billions of dollars into the Big Build in Melbourne, ignoring the near decade of neglect under this government. For a Premier who likes to talk up his country roots he seems to have a great deal of trouble finding where those roots are. Housing prices in regional Victoria are soaring, forcing many homebuyers either away from their communities or out of the market. Even the rental price in towns like Bright – beautiful Bright – has shot up by \$75 a week in the past month alone and almost 70 per cent in three years, costing prospective homebuyers almost \$10,000 extra in rent each year. In Yarrawonga, Wangaratta, Cobram, Myrtleford, and even in small towns like Mount Beauty, median house prices have doubled or even more, meaning buyers need bigger deposits and are paying larger mortgages and greater interest, or are unable to save the deposit because of the increased rent. Too often I am hearing stories of people who are being forced out of their rental and, despite having impeccable credentials and applying for and visiting dozens of rentals, they are forced to couch-surf at a friend's or family place or into crisis housing. This is happening far too often.

We need to do better by our regional communities and better by our youth. The only reason they are content to rent is because they have been fed a mistruth by the Premier and the government. They are so desperate and dejected that they cannot believe they will be able to own a home one day. They still believe in the great Australian dream, and those of us on this side of the house do too. It is time for the government to stop giving up on these young Victorians, especially in the regions, and give them hope again. Let them believe again in the great Australian dream and support them, and they can pursue it.

A house is a home, and it is so important to creating a family. The security of owning your own home is second to none and will give Victorians the peace of mind that they deserve.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (17:22): I am very happy to speak to this matter of public importance, and I was reflecting on the various points or the various elements of the MPI and I was thinking, 'Either there's some amnesia or they're trying it on.' Take your pick. I would say they are trying it on, but anyway, good luck, because they absolutely gutted TAFE. They gutted TAFE. Matthew Guy's Liberals closed 22 TAFE campuses, cut hundreds of critical, job-ready courses –

**Brad Rowswell**: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I know the member on her feet is new to the Assembly. But referring to members by their correct titles is the appropriate form of the house, and the member just did not do that.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**: I would encourage all members to refer to members by their correct titles.

**Nina TAYLOR**: Yes, I note this. I am very, very happy to be corrected on such things, and I shall take that on board. Nevertheless, it does not take anything away from the fact that the Liberals gutted TAFE, does it? Whomever you refer to, we know the Liberals absolutely gutted it. Those opposite ripped over \$1 billion out of the TAFE system. They shut 22 TAFE campuses. They sacked thousands of teachers. Yet they have the nerve to turn around and look at us and say, 'What are you doing about skills shortages? What about funding for TAFE?' Well, let us look at you. Let us look at what you did over there. I think they are trying it on, because I think they know very well what they did. It is on record. There are no secrets here. I think they are trying it on, but we are not copping that, because we are going to say the truth, the absolute truth, as we have all throughout this MPI, as we do every day, day in, day out, just telling the truth to the Victorian people, because at the end of the day they are the ones who rely on us to make the right decisions for their futures and to invest in skills.

In stark contrast, the Labor government's free TAFE initiative has saved students almost \$300 million in fees. Get that.

**A member**: No way.

**Nina TAYLOR**: Yes. Since the Labor government introduced it in 2019, removing the barriers to training for a great new career for more than – get this – 180,000 Victorians.

**A member**: How many?

**Nina TAYLOR**: 180,000.

**A member**: Say it again.

**Nina TAYLOR**: 180,000. Three times: I think they might hear that. They were trying it on, but the facts speak for themselves, don't they? You cannot argue about the numbers, round numbers: one, eight, zero, zero, zero, zero. There we go. It is in *Hansard*. It is there, and hopefully they might read it back, because they may not take it from me but they might take it from *Hansard*. You never know your luck.

But we will not be accused of denying students VET by those opposite. Thousands of Victorians are on the way to getting the skills they need to secure jobs in high-demand industries. The Andrews Labor government has enrolled nearly, get this, 200,000 students in free TAFE courses since the program began in 2019. You can see I am repeating a little bit here, but it is because we have had a little bit of poetic justice with this matter of public importance. They are throwing some stuff out there, seeing where it lands, seeing what we do with it. We are just going to push the facts right back at them. I think that is the best solution, don't you? I think that is what we are here to do.

And we have added more courses to the free TAFE list so there are now, get this, 70 free TAFE courses available. Is that not brilliant? This is helping to support Victorians to get where they need to go – that

is, to fill those skills shortages. We have directly put systems in place to facilitate this. Instead of gutting TAFE, which is what those opposite did, we are rebuilding TAFE for the benefit of all Victorians. This is what our government is all about, because we look after the most vulnerable, and we take away the barriers to people getting into the careers that they want and that they love – good jobs for Victorians.

I want to just bust some myths as well. There are a few. Where do you start? Take your pick – there are plenty there. I want to address the question around funding. Let me speak to this very specifically. Total government real recurrent expenditure was \$1.7 billion, consistent with the pre-COVID years of 2018 and 2019. Let us get to the heart of this. Extra funding was provided to TAFEs during the COVID lockdowns in order to support them through this difficult time. This accounts for the differences in funding amounts. While those opposite during COVID had their heads in the sand and were hoping it would go away – ‘We just want to be popular. What do we say today? What do we say tomorrow? I don’t know’, not about doing the right thing, head in the sand, just denying it was ever there – we faced it head-on. We did the right thing and, guess what, we are back here. We are back here in government.

Victorians knew that we were doing the right thing. Those opposite was muddying the waters and distorting the rationale and the reason and not looking for the rationale and the reason in the funding. They were just twisting it around, making it look like a blunt negative for Victorians and frightening Victorians with these figures. We are not going to do that. We are being factual about this. We are being absolutely factual because it is not fair and this is what happened a lot during that period – they played with Victorians, didn’t they? They played with them emotionally during a very difficult time. They did. It was tortuous. But we are not going to do that; that is not who we are. We did the right thing. We looked after the health of Victorians, and here we are.

To address the skills shortages late last year the Andrews Labor government expanded the eligibility criteria for free TAFE in order to ensure more people have access to free training, not less. I heard someone opposite say we are not doing anything, that we are doing nothing to address skills shortages. Well, let me tell you, we are doing an awful lot here. We are doing an awful lot here on so many fronts. I am happy to unpack that so those opposite are not trying it on, as they do. Under the changes the government has removed the upskilling rule for access to all government-subsidised VET training and free TAFE courses in Victoria, which had prevented people enrolling in a free TAFE course if they had previously completed a higher qualification. Can you see here that we have been removing barriers? We are enhancing the ability of Victorians to get the training they need to get into those vital jobs that are needed to take Victoria forward.

More than 50,000 people have started courses in health care and social assistance since the launch of free TAFE, and over 10,000 have started their free TAFE journey in education and training, including early childhood, to help them support the rollout of the Labor government’s ambitious Best Start, Best Life reform. This is not only great for the children in early childhood education, it is also good in terms of having educators who are actually provided with high-quality training so that they can then in turn bring the best out of the children of Victoria for the future as well. So it is a win-win – it is a win in terms of having high-quality educators, but also kids are getting the best possible outcome and the best possible experience in their early childhood education too. Because the Labor government always have a holistic approach, don’t we. You cannot just take one convenient little component that is good on a little media spot, a little doorstep – just take one little segment and paint it as a cut or otherwise – and conveniently leave out the facts that underpin the decision on the particular element that is being put forward on that particular day.

Anyway, the once-in-a-lifetime limit – I just want to go further to explain the removal of the barriers – when enrolling in free TAFE courses linked to priority pathways such as community services, nursing, agriculture, early childhood, and building and construction has also been removed. These reforms are designed to address critical workforce shortages, so I hope I can allay the concerns of those opposite, because we are deliberately removing the barriers to ensure that those critical workforce shortages are addressed by opening the door for more people to get the skills they need in priority

industries regardless of their previous qualifications. I can see I have only got a few seconds left. To round it off, those opposite gutted TAFE. We are rebuilding it. We are helping Victorians to get the training they need – we are removing the barriers to the training they need – to fill those critical workforce shortages.

**Sam HIBBINS** (Pahran) (17:32): I rise, and, look, I am a bit disappointed that the member for Ovens Valley has not stayed in the chamber, because I reckon you can get a good latte in the Ovens Valley – is it Bright, I think? Last time I was in Bright I reckon you could get a very good latte. I do not share the sentiment of the inner city towards rural Victoria that the member for Ovens Valley and other Nationals talk about, with their ‘grumble-grumble, inner-city Greens’ schtick. As everyone knows, people in the inner city and right across Melbourne absolutely love our regional areas, love visiting them, love local produce and are really keen to see those regions thrive. I know it is part of the Nat’s schtick to do the ‘You’re all against us’ sort of thing, but it really does not match up with anything that is in reality.

But this is a serious matter of public importance put forward by the member for Sandringham in regard to the cost-of-living crisis. Costs are massively, massively rising across the board, and workers have experienced the biggest real-wage cut on record – back to 2010 levels. People are being pushed even further to the margins. Those on the margins are being pushed off the cliff. Poverty is rising, more people are requiring material support, like food, like clothing. Homelessness continues to rise, and people are struggling to pay the rent, pay the mortgage, pay the bills, put food on the table or access health care. And even prior to the current crisis, so many people, particularly young people, were in a precarious position, with unaffordable housing, costs like schooling and low wage growth. In addition to this we now have the current high inflation – yes, driven by, obviously, the economic upheaval following the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, but importantly what has been found is that it certainly has not been driven by wages but in fact has been driven by corporate profits, sustained low wage growth over years and sustained corporate profiteering. And it is absolutely galling that as this crisis is hitting people at home, where increasing corporate profits are part of the cause – you have got Coles and Woolies putting up prices, you have got banks profiteering off interest rate rises – the solution on the table from the Reserve Bank is to simply make things worse for people at home and give the big banks even more of a chance to profiteer. And the risk they cite is not even more corporate profits adding to inflation but perpetuating this myth of a wage-price spiral.

And so people are rightly angry at the Reserve Bank of Australia for putting up interest rates. But more than that, people are fed up with a broken and unfair economic system – an ideology, a neoliberal ideology, that for far too long was favouring the big end of town, the people who have the most, perpetuating this myth of trickle-down economics instead of creating a society that we actually want to live in.

As I said, even outside of this cost-of-living crisis, a society like ours should not have people without a safe and secure place to call home. It should not have people going hungry. It should not have people living in poverty. It should not have people unable to access health care, mental health care and social services, people who cannot travel to work, education and training. Poverty and the society that we live in is a political choice, and the government’s role is central, is absolutely central, to making sure that everyone has what they need to live a decent life.

Now, I think it is only fair in this debate that we put solutions on the table, and to be honest, I have not heard many that have actually been put on the table beyond the bickering between the two parties. There has been lots of raising of complaints and issues but very little in regard to solutions. I think we need to absolutely guard against this myth that with the upcoming budgets there is no money, that the government cannot afford what we need, that the government is going to have to cut back because the budget is tight. The government could be raising billions of dollars of revenue from making the profiteering big banks, the property developers and the gambling industry pay their fair share, and it could be saving billions by moving away from the policies of mass incarceration and embracing real criminal justice reforms. One of the things that I have found appalling, certainly in my time here, has

been the billions of dollars that has been spent on creating new prisons whilst we are in a housing and homelessness crisis – what a failure of social policy.

Now, I do want to mention at the federal level this is the case even more so. When you look at Labor and Liberal, they are in lock step over these stage 3 tax cuts on track to essentially what is very close to a flat tax system whilst leaving the rate of income support, which keeps people below the poverty line, unchanged. Increasing the low rate of income support should be a state issue. As I said to the Premier last week, he does not back away from advocating in federal policy areas when he thinks it is in the interest of Victorians. Leaving the rate of income support, leaving people in poverty, not only is that bad for people – we are keeping people in poverty – but it is a massive example of cost shifting from federal to state, because obviously people in poverty are then having to access already overstretched housing and homelessness services, already overstretched social services. People are landing up in crisis in our hospital system. This government should be advocating to the federal government, to the Prime Minister, to lift the rate of income support and to abolish the stage 3 tax cuts and reinvest that money from people who have the most to people who need it the most.

Now in regard to state issues that can address the cost of living, of course no doubt the housing crisis has really been a key focus for myself and the Greens for many years now. That is why on day one of this Parliament I introduced a private members bill to make housing a human right, to set a target for the building of public housing homes and to set a target for the funding of homelessness services. And that bill would have an aim to end homelessness by 2030. I do believe that is something that is achievable as a state, and it should be an aim for our state. The reality is there is not enough public housing being built. The waiting list continues to grow. Homelessness services do not have enough funding. They are having to turn people away.

I mean, cutting the From Homelessness to a Home program – this was supposed to be an example of what could potentially be used to end homelessness. The minister at the time said so himself, and if we can have a program like this during a pandemic, we can have it outside the pandemic.

We need to be much more interventionist in the housing system. We do need rent controls to stop these massive rent increases. We do need proper regulation of short-stays to free up housing supply. The government does need to reform stamp duty. We are seeing this taking place in the ACT; New South Wales is going in that direction. It is a reform that needs to happen in this term of Parliament to lower the up-front costs of housing.

Wages need to increase. It is extraordinary that in a time of low wage growth and high inflation we have already seen that this idea of wages adding to inflation is just not the case, and that the government has an official policy to keep wages low, representing a massive wage cut, a real wage cut, not just for public sector workers. It is clear that the government having an official wages policy that is low sends a signal to the private sector that they can keep wages low as well.

I want to touch on health. We have got the potential collapse of the bulk-billing system across the country. Now, the Premier is right to raise it as an issue, but he seems to be ignoring that the state government also has responsibility for some primary care. We have got massive waiting lists for things like public dental. The community health services are crying out for more funding, and they can provide more free GPs, more free dentists to people who need it most.

And of course when it comes to bills, we have got to get houses off fossil fuels and off gas, make the transition to cleaner, greener more energy-efficient homes and certainly not drill for more gas. So look, this is possible. We can have the society that we want to live in. We can end poverty. We can end homelessness. And we can make sure that everyone has what they need to live a decent life.

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh) (17:42): I rise to make a contribution on the matter of public importance submitted by the member for Sandringham and note some people in this house might be aware that the member for Sandringham and I attended the same school; we are both St Bede's alumni. It was casual dress day one day, and the member for Sandringham turned up in a Liberal Party T-shirt.

It was year 12, and he disappointed me greatly that day. But he has made up for it with this MPI. He has made up for it with this MPI because it is one big, long Dorothy Dixier. They say practice makes perfect. You know, when you are a little kid and your parents are teaching you to ride a bike, you start off with the training wheels and they just say, 'Come on, practice makes perfect'. Eventually the training wheels come off and off you go. Well, it is just like in opposition, except in this opposition practice does not make perfect. They have been in opposition eight years, and they just get worse every single day.

Point (8) of this MPI talks about a skills crisis. Every day I sit in this chamber I am staring at a skills crisis right in the face. You know, this would have to be the worst opposition in this country, probably second only to WA, but the Liberals in WA have just two members. This is an MPI that just gives us an opportunity to talk about things like free kinder and free TAFE and to talk about what those opposite did to TAFE. It gives us the opportunity to talk about the Education State, to talk about how those opposite when they had the chance ripped out the education maintenance allowance from our public schools so that our schools could not afford to assist those most vulnerable in our school communities. We could talk about a whole host of other things. We could talk about the power saving bonus that this government introduced. We could talk about the fact that this government is bringing back the SEC – as I said, one big, long Dorothy Dixier.

Over the eight years that this government has been in power, I think its central mission has been to give dignity and opportunity to the people of Victoria. That is through a number of things, and I will start with stable housing. This government has embarked on the Big Housing Build – 12,000 new community, social and public housing properties.

Just recently I was out in Cheltenham, where we had the opening of the newest such development funded out of the Big Housing Build. I was there with a former Labor member for Bentleigh Rob Hudson, who is currently with the National Affordable Housing Consortium, and it has been his life's work – the pursuit of social and affordable housing. I met with some of the tenants at this new building over in Cheltenham, and these were people who are able to rebuild their lives because they do not have to worry about having stable and secure housing. Because they have stable and secure housing they can go and join a free TAFE course, or they can pick up that university course that they were studying on and off because they did not have secure housing. They can actually go and get a job. This is life-changing, and we heard the member for Gippsland East during his contribution on this MPI lament the state of public housing in Victoria and also bag out this government's record on that matter. Can I just say, if anybody wants to bring a claim into this house that those opposite actually support public housing, they will be challenged on it, because I with my own eyes have seen some disgusting campaigns that those opposite have run on public housing developments over the years and their absolute denigration and vilification of public housing tenants. It is disgraceful. Those opposite have never supported public housing, and frankly for them to come in here and for the member for Gippsland East to start talking about those issues, it is really just an act of hypocrisy.

But it is not just our investment in the Big Housing Build, it is also stamp duty concessions and exemptions to first home buyers – we have paid those out to 44,000 first home buyers – but it is also the government's shared equity scheme as well. These are all things that are making a difference, but this government has also introduced universal three- and four-year-old kinder but also free kinder. Free kinder from this year is saving families up to \$2500 per child per year, which is a significant saving but also a significant economic reform in many other ways, because when you think about investing in our people it is the best thing our government can do. Whether it is free kinder, universal kinder, whether it is the Education State, whether it is investing in the best possible public education, whether it is investing in free TAFE, this is the best possible economic reform because it is investing in the skills of tomorrow, and that is what this government is all about.

If I can just stop on the issue of TAFE, because part (8) of this MPI does talk about the skills crisis and talks about TAFE. I think it has been well canvassed during this debate today that the former government really did take the axe to TAFE. We have heard that they cut more than \$1 billion out of

the TAFE system and closed 22 campuses, but let me go through the impact on the students themselves. During that time enrolments at TAFEs in Victoria dropped by 33 per cent. That was the effect of this massive cut by the former government, and the number of students in apprenticeships and traineeships was down by 40 per cent – then those opposite talk about a skills crisis. There was a 29 per cent decline in young people aged 15 to 19 in government-funded training, and the number of regional students in training fell by 19 per cent. It is well known that this government over eight years has taken a different approach to TAFE, and we are proud of that.

Of that very exhaustive, that long free TAFE list, one of the most popular free TAFE courses is the diploma of nursing. That is run out of Holmesglen TAFE's Moorabbin campus. Holmesglen TAFE, in addition to running the diploma of nursing for free – prior to this reform it cost about \$13,000 or \$14,000 to get your diploma of nursing – Holmesglen is also the only TAFE institute in Australia to offer the bachelor of nursing. So if you are a Holmesglen student in Moorabbin, right in the heart of my electorate, you can complete your diploma of nursing for free, you can then move on to a bachelor of nursing – thanks to this government – currently for free and you can then do your clinical training on site at the Holmesglen hospital.

That is what our TAFE system can achieve when you have a government that backs it in, not when you have a government that just rips the guts out of the TAFE system, and that is exactly what those opposite did. We could go on about a whole lot of other things, because this is quite a lengthy MPI. It says stuff in here about debt. When I read the reference in here to debt –

**Brad Rowswell** interjected.

**Nick STAIKOS:** Yeah, yeah, I will come to that briefly; I have got just over a minute left. We remember 48 hours before the last election the then Shadow Treasurer – they have upgraded, I am happy to say, but David Davis was the Shadow Treasurer prior to the election – came out and did not know what his costings were. He came out to announce his costings 48 hours prior to the election and did not know what the costings were, so what credibility have they got opposite?

As I said at the outset, this is a mob that after eight years just gets worse. Do not take my word for it. The numbers do not lie. Every election – 2014, 2018, 2022 – they have just gotten worse. They are the second worst opposition in this country, beaten only by the Western Australian Liberals. They do have a lot of soul-searching to do on that side of the house. They need to address their own skills crisis before they come in here and lecture this government on a whole raft of things, including the cost of living, education and things like public housing. None of us believe that those opposite care one dot about any of those things. This really is a ridiculous MPI. I am, however, grateful that it was submitted because it has given those on this side of the house the opportunity to talk about the fantastic achievements that this government has made on behalf of the people of Victoria.

**Jess WILSON (Kew) (17:52):** I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this matter of public importance submitted by the member for Sandringham. The member for Sandringham did ask for input – as he does; he is a very collegiate colleague – on this MPI today, and to be honest it was hard to stop at just eight points. The eight points on this MPI today around the cost of living are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the pressure that Victorians are under.

Cost of living is no doubt the number one issue raised with me in my electorate. Whether it is energy prices skyrocketing, the cost of sending your kids to school or just going to the supermarket to buy basic groceries, it is getting harder and harder to make ends meet. This is at the same time that the Andrews government presides over record debt – net debt that is set to reach over \$165 billion by 2025–26. The Premier and his government clearly have no plan as to how to pay down this massive debt. It will be generations of Victorians – generations that come after me – that will be burdened with this massive debt. They will be burdened with higher taxes. By 2025–26 the forecast interest repayments on the debt are \$7.4 billion a year, and with every RBA interest rate rise like yesterday – the 10th in a row – we are seeing hundreds of millions of dollars added to that interest repayment bill.

This net debt is a result, in many ways, of \$30 billion of major project cost blowouts. That is a huge amount. Imagine what that money could have been spent on.

Just one example of this is the North East Link, a project that will have significant ramifications for the electorate of Kew and that my constituents do not feel they have been heard on. It was promised to the people of Victoria at a cost of \$5 billion. It is now expected to be one of the most expensive transport projects in the history of this state at a record \$18 billion.

**Brad Rowsell:** How much?

**Jess WILSON:** \$18 billion, member for Sandringham. That is a \$13 billion blowout on one single project. This is just not sustainable. No family would run their household budget in this irresponsible manner, and Victorians expect their government to do better.

We have heard over recent days some quotes from the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry from the other side, and I thought I would read this one in today. This is from the chamber's budget submission released a couple of days ago for the Victorian budget. The chamber states:

The Government should also focus on fiscal repair to reduce the State's debt via cost reduction and project control. It's imperative that the forecasted path to budget surplus is met ...

Well, we on this side of the house could not agree more with the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. And it is important to remind those on the other side of the house that this debt, this mismanagement of the state's finances, this overspend on projects is spending Victorians' hard-earned dollars. This is taxpayer dollars, and they want to see value for that money.

As the Shadow Minister for Home Ownership and Housing Affordability on this side of the house, I want to spend some time talking about this problematic area for many Victorians. Housing affordability has long been a topic of conversation around the barbecue, as I am sure many of us know in this place, with tales of lost auctions and disbelief at listed auction prices and then the final price. While the current moderation of housing prices in Melbourne and regional Victoria helps those wishful owners put together a deposit, with each interest rate rise we see the capacity to borrow fall. And this week, as I have said, we have seen the 10th straight interest rate rise adding more stress to household budgets and putting home ownership further out of reach.

The rate of home ownership has been in decline for decades, especially amongst young Victorians – those first home buyers that are looking for their little piece of this great state. It is not because, unlike those on the other side like to believe, this cohort no longer wants their own piece of the Australian dream. Just like previous generations, they too want the financial and the social security that home ownership brings. It is because incentives are not aligned to affordability. Let us start with the obvious. Housing affordability is an issue because house prices are increasing quicker than purchasers' incomes are increasing. The Australian housing-price-to-income ratio has increased more than one-third since 2015, according to OECD data. As of June 2022, ANZ reported that the proportion of annual household income required to service a new mortgage increased to 43.1 per cent in Melbourne and 42.8 per cent across the rest of Victoria. This is up from 40.2 per cent in Melbourne and 30 per cent in regional Victoria in March 2020.

It is obvious who benefits from higher house prices – owners, investors, banks and real estate agents. What is less obvious are some of the biggest winners of all – state governments. State governments are relying on property taxes, and Victoria is one of the worst offenders. Under the Andrews Labor government at least 20 separate property-related taxes have been introduced or increased. Stamp duty and land tax, as I said in my first speech in this place, now make up almost half of all taxation revenue in a given year. Previous data from the Housing Industry Association reveals that Victoria has the highest stamp duty burden in the nation. Of course I am sure that many of us are hearing from our local constituents – I know that we on this side of the house are – that land tax is a real hit to many mum-and-dad investors, and the massive 25 per cent increase in land tax revenue this year will mean rents will have to increase yet again for many Victorians who are already struggling to pay their rents.

The CEO of the Real Estate Institute of Victoria has said that skyrocketing land tax bills are hurting the battlers and that:

... 80 per cent of investors into rental real estate across Australia are people who own one property and earn under \$90,000 ...

It is clear that there is an inherent conflict at the heart of housing affordability and home ownership policy, especially when the state's finances are in the red.

Not only is this government putting up taxes and making home ownership and housing affordability more and more out of reach, but there is a shock drop in the number of new build approvals, making it even harder for home owners. We saw recent data released from the ABS that shows the total of dwelling units approved fell 38.6 per cent for the month, well above the national average, and we are down 11.9 per cent for the 12 months to January 2023. A fall in dwelling approvals means a decrease in new housing stock coming onto the market, which only places more pressure on prices. These latest figures confirm that the continued fall in housing affordability under the Andrews Labor government makes it harder and harder for Victorians to own their home, particularly for first home buyers.

Turning back to the cost-of-living pressures that this MPI is focused on, we heard from my colleagues on this side of the house that Melbourne is the most expensive city for public education, 17 per cent higher than the national metropolitan average for government schools, with over \$13,000 more per child in Melbourne than Sydney in government schools. We heard that the average cost of household gas bills increased by around \$675, a 45 per cent increase, in the year ending January 2023, and households in Melbourne's eastern suburbs and Gippsland faced the steepest rise in energy bills, with an increase of nearly \$1000. All of this adds up to the fact that Victorians cannot make ends meet, and we are constantly hearing that from our constituents.

I will finish where the member for Sandringham started. NAB's recent financial hardship survey, released earlier this month, shows that 37 per cent of Victorians experience financial hardship, with 8 per cent of Victorians experiencing the inability to pay rent on time. This is the highest rate in Australia. Twenty per cent of Victorians experience not having enough for an emergency situation, while 15 per cent of Victorians experience not having enough for food and basic necessities. This is unacceptable, and as we have spoken about today, this is the result of poor financial management in this state – whether it is on education policy, where Victorian families are paying more than any other place in Australia but the Victoria government is spending less on their children's education or whether it is on energy policy, where we are seeing bills increase, whether that is for households or for small businesses. We are seeing that when it comes to housing affordability. We are seeing the lack of investment in skills and training. All of this comes together to mean it is a little bit harder to do life in Victoria, and we on this side of the house will continue to stand up for hardworking Victorians.

### *Motions*

#### **International Women's Day**

**Debate resumed.**

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (18:02): Next, my great-aunt Gina, an active member of the railways union working on the interstate buffet cars and later in the railway workers canteen, was the first woman, they say, to march under the railways workers banner. She was a member of the railways union, and the first involved in an industrial action that was taken by women at the railways to increase the number of staff in the canteen. I also was told that she saved the stale pies for anyone that broke strikes. She was also active in the Union of Australian Women, and we heard yesterday of the sad passing of another Labor stalwart woman, Amy Duncan, who was also active in the UAW campaigning for child care and established some of the first kindergartens decades ago. As with many people that are part of the labour movement or part of socially progressive movements, we will never know them all or how much they as individuals have done, so I pay tribute to the countless women

who were part of all those struggles to make a better world, a more equal and just world, but whose story may never be told.

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (18:03): It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak on this motion today in regard to International Women's Day. In speaking to this motion I do want to note the motion's objective really is to mark that (1) this year is a hundred years since women had the right to stand for election to the Victorian Parliament and (2) for many years First Nations women did not have the same political rights as other Victorians. Globally, National Women's Day was celebrated in the USA in 1909 to honour women who had protested against working conditions in the garment industry, and they marched for better working conditions and the right to vote. From this workers movement International Women's Day has grown to become a bit of a rallying point around the world to fight for women's equality, and over the years International Women's Day has meant different things for different people.

It is an important marker in gender equity awareness and change, but the pursuit of gender equality does go far beyond one day of the year. It is a time to reflect, a time to celebrate how far we have come but also an opportunity to remind us all of how far we have to go, and I thank all those women and their male supporters, who have secured tremendous advancements over the past century.

As I mentioned, it is now 100 years since women could stand for election to the Victorian Parliament. Lady Millie Peacock was the first woman elected to Parliament. Although women had won the right to stand, she was not successful until 1933, when she made history. However, for every successful woman that has been elected to Parliament since, there have been many who have not been rewarded with that opportunity. Women have stood, fighting for equality and fighting for their communities, and their stories are remarkable. Their efforts and achievements are no less admirable than those of their victorious sisters. They came to politics driven by their values and the importance of community involvement in that political process.

When I was doing a little bit of research I did learn that Alicia Katz, the first woman to actually stand at a state election, in 1924 in the seat of Barwon, reportedly said to audiences and her voters that she would like to do something besides playing the part of a wife and a mother. That was something that resonated with me. And of course over the years we have seen more women stand. I think that those who have run before or considered politics would agree that we need strong democracies around the world, but it has never been more important to have our own Parliament be an exemplar. Here in Victoria the Andrews Labor government has led on equality. Decades of action, including affirmative action and quotas, have meant that we have walked the talk. As statistics that have been shared today show, 54 per cent of our Labor Party members in Parliament are women, and in the Andrews Labor government cabinet 64 per cent of ministers are women. All are the result of women so powerful and dedicated to the cause. With previous generations of women fighting for the right to vote and to run in Parliament, today here we stand on the shoulders of these giants, and I know that the opportunity that I have had to stand here today is because of the women who have come before me.

It is important here to note, though, that for many years First Nations women did not have the same political rights as other Victorians. While white Australian women were given the vote nationally in 1902, Indigenous women had to wait until 1962 for the same right, although it was not compulsory. That unusual situation of it being optional really remained in effect until 1984, when voting was made compulsory for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults in line with the rest of the nation. I would like to take this opportunity, though, to acknowledge two First Nations women who are leading in our region, the Bellarine and Geelong community, Corrina Eccles and Danae Coots, who I am in a very fortunate position to learn so much from.

The Andrews Labor government has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to improving gender equality here in Victoria and to improving outcomes for women at all stages of their lives. It is not just words, but it is being guided by the work in the gender equality strategy. As this government has worked on those reforms from the gender equality strategy the investment and the outcomes have

followed. We have supported women in leadership through the funding of numerous leadership programs such as the Joan Kirner Emerging Leaders Program and the Women of Colour Executive Leadership Program, and one that I was really pleased to be involved in was the re-establishment of the Rural Women's Network. We invested \$3.7 billion in helping implement every recommendation by the Royal Commission into Family Violence. There is investment of approximately \$940 million in the 2022–23 state budget initiatives primarily aimed at improving all outcomes for women. I spoke about this today – delivering an ambitious once-in-a-lifetime generational reform in early childhood education with free kinder. These are only some examples, and the list is very long and exhaustive.

I will take this opportunity to acknowledge some women from the Bellarine who have made some significant contributions. There are many women who are doing extraordinary things on the Bellarine and I wish I could list them all. I do not have time to do that, but I would like to highlight a few women and organisations that have impacted the Bellarine community. Firstly, I must acknowledge the former member for Bellarine, Lisa Neville, a formidable minister and a hardworking local member. When I drive around the Bellarine I literally can point out the investments that she has made across the Bellarine. She was the first female police minister and the state's first Minister for Mental Health. She has paved the way for many in politics, and her support and mentorship have been very much appreciated.

Secondly, as I was exploring politics before coming to this place and my desire to get more involved, I found a group called WILD. It stands for Women in Local Democracy, and yes, they are wild women. But what they are very wild about is gender equality and the fact that we still do not yet have parity at a local government level. WILD plays a really important part in the Geelong community in mentoring and training women who are considering getting involved in politics at a local government level and may like to consider running as a candidate. This sort of leadership by women for women does lead to greater outcomes. Jenny Wills is one of those women who has continued to provide support for many others, and she should be congratulated for her tireless work for the benefit of our community.

Another group that I would like to mention is the Bellarine Women's Workshop group. This group started with a Facebook post during COVID, where a woman asked whether there were any women's groups like a men's shed for women on the Bellarine. When it was discovered that there was a bit of a gap in that service, as wonderful women do, they sprang into action and created their own group. They gather weekly and they do all sorts of activities like a men's shed would do. It is a wonderful organisation. One of the women quoted: 'We needed a village, so we created one.' I had Mel Rogers and Jules Merrifield here as guests today for International Women's Day. They have created a positive workshop and space for women to go to, and it is improving their wellbeing and their connection to community. I cannot wait to see what is next for this group, and I will do all that I can to support their goals going forward.

If the house will indulge me for just a moment, I would like to shout out to my mothers group. Wow, what an eclectic group of women. I have so much to thank them for – their support and the support they give to each other as we navigate motherhood. I know many women enjoy having the company of their mothers group, but it gets us through some very tireless and sleepless nights.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge Lorraine Stokes OAM. She is a local historian and a wonderful woman who has just published a book. She tells the names and stories of the 100 women that were on the Bellarine when they signed the 1891 suffrage petition – very significant. She has captured all their stories. There were many very brave women who played an important role in giving us all a better future on the Bellarine. We must not forget that, and we must continue with their legacy. On that note, I do support this motion, and I will end with saying happy International Women's Day to everyone.

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (18:13): I am pleased to rise to contribute to this motion because it gives us an opportunity to talk about all the huge differences we are making for women in Victoria. Of course we have had great representation across my region of Geelong, which I want to focus on today. But I do want to shout out to the member for Lara, the member for Bellarine and the federal

member for Corangamite Libby Coker for the work that they do and thank them for their contribution to our Geelong community.

At some point going forward I would love to see the day when we see more women with disability, First Nations women and women from the CALD community sitting in this chamber. I think it is something that all of us recognise as being an important area that we need to focus on as a Labor government or a Labor party. With 54 per cent women MPs, I think that is a huge achievement, and I am really proud to be part of a government that has an agenda to focus on women and focus on the issues impacting on women. Clearly, with so many women sitting around the table, it does make a huge difference in good government policy, which is what we are all about.

But I do want to acknowledge and say how proud I am of this government's agenda to implement the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* – voice, treaty, truth, justice and self-determination – because that is what we are on about. I want to acknowledge First Nations women and in particular women such as Aunty Jill Gallagher, who was appointed as the Victorian treaty commissioner and who began the significant work towards building the framework for the First Peoples' Assembly. We owe a lot to Aunty Jill for her work.

We are thankful for the hard work of Aunty Geraldine Atkinson, co-chair of the First Peoples' Assembly, the independent and democratically elected body to represent traditional owners of country and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here in Victoria; and of course Aunty Eleanor Bourke, who is one of the Yoorrook commissioners looking into the past and ongoing injustices experienced by traditional owners and First Peoples in Victoria.

On a local level I want to mention Wadawurrung woman Corrina Eccles, who leads the way in supporting First Nations women and girls in our community. She plays a significant role as a role model not just for First Nations women but for women across the community, and she is known very well in the Geelong area. Just this morning Corrina was awarded the Frank Costa Leadership Award at the Committee for Geelong's International Women's Day breakfast. So a huge shout-out to Corrina, and I thank her for everything she does in our community.

But we are also lucky to have Wakaya woman Bek Lasky heading up the Ngarrimili First Nations business centre that will mentor and support First Nations businesses. I am really proud that as a Labor government we have been able to support Ngarrimili, and right as we speak now their new centre is being fitted out, which will include a retail space, a gallery, a meeting space and a mentoring space for First Nations businesses, so we should all be very proud of that.

Later this year we will have the opportunity to vote in the referendum on the Voice to Parliament, and from my perspective we have to recognise First Nations people in our constitution if we are ever going to close the gap and really listen to First Nations people about how they want to address the many issues impacting on First Nations women in particular. I think we all have a responsibility to promote a yes vote in that Voice to Parliament.

We also have women like Tracey Slatter heading up Barwon Water; Frances Diver heading up Barwon Health, Tracy Carter heading up Geelong and Bellarine tourism, Vanessa Schernickau heading up the Geelong Regional Library Corporation, Jennifer Conley heading up the Geelong Manufacturing Council, and amazing women like Linda Blake and Lynne Foreman who are leading the charge on accessibility and inclusion.

Women in my community very clearly support this government's agenda. There is absolutely no doubt about that. When you have women at the table putting forward what impacts on women, that is what drives good policy. It was clear throughout the election campaign that women were coming more and more towards the Labor Party because of what we are doing in addressing the issues that women have faced forever – actually doing something about them and putting good policy in place.

We of course are now completely changing the way women's health is treated in Victoria, with 20 women's health clinics, one-stop shops for women. There will also be dedicated First Nations women's health clinics. This was so welcomed in my community. The day this announcement was made leading into the election the Premier came to Geelong, and we had a number of health professionals, women who were there on the day, who were virtually in tears over the announcement, because it was something that they had been working towards for so long but could not quite get there because of the funding required to do that. The fact that the Premier announced it that day was an incredible experience for them, along with me. I wish that had been around when I was a younger woman.

**A member:** You're still young.

**Chris COUZENS:** Thanks. I think it is important that we continue down that track of ensuring that we are covering off on the serious health issues that women face, whether it be heart disease, whether it be endometriosis, period pain – all those things that I would suggest most of us in this chamber right now would have experienced at some point in time – and that they are being addressed in the right way.

I have to give a shout-out to older women, who become invisible and who are not recognised for their contributions. I thank them for everything they do in our community. Unfortunately there is this assumption that the older you get, the more brain you lose and that you are not capable of contributing any longer. As an older woman I experience that, and many women in my community often talk about the fact that because they are older they are not seen as being able to make a good contribution to the community. I want to shout out to them because I know the experiences they have.

One of the great things that I have experienced since we introduced free TAFE is meeting women, whether they be young women or older women, who for the first time are able to go to TAFE because it is free and retrain, or who may never have really finished any education. What that is doing is leading to a real pathway to employment. We know employment and education are key factors of poverty. What we are doing in terms of that whole education space around TAFE is just so important for women in my community and I am sure for women right across this state.

The Geelong Tech School, which was built in our first term of government, has made a significant difference to the thinking of young women, young students, in the Geelong community, particularly around those male-dominated industries. They now have the opportunity to experience some of those male-dominated industries at the tech school and we are starting to see a significant change in young women thinking about what their career path might be. That has been fantastic for my community. We also are producing the young women leaders of the future, which is just fantastic, whether it be through TAFE or the tech school or any of the other amazing opportunities that this government is offering.

The early parenting centre is another one that is supporting women and their families who may be struggling with a new baby or a toddler, and that building is underway right now. What that will mean for those women is just extraordinary. To get the professional support that they need is just so important.

We are focused on real change for women; there is no doubt about that. If we look at the achievements – and I am going to run out of time to talk about everything – I see the reality of that playing out in my community, which is why I wanted to talk about that today, because that is just so important. Happy International Women's Day.

**Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree)** (18:23): I am delighted to rise to speak on this motion, being:

That this house notes that today is International Women's Day and –

- (1) this year marks 100 years since women won the right to stand for election to the Victorian Parliament;
- (2) for many years First Nations women did not have the same political rights as other Victorians.

One hundred years on women are changing this place for the better, and it is about damn time. International Women's Day is an opportunity to reflect and acknowledge the contributions and achievements of Victorian women MPs. It has been a century since some Victorian women won the right to be candidates for election – and I very deliberately say 'some' because it is also important to

remember and recognise that First Nations women did not have the same political rights as other Victorian women for far too long, 60 years in fact. The women of Australia who were not Torres Strait Islander women and who were not Aboriginal women, the women of Australia who were not those people – the rest of us – were among the first in the world to obtain the right to vote and to stand for federal Parliament, which was granted in 1902. It is important to recognise that our First Nations sisters did not have the same rights as non-Indigenous women. The 1902 Commonwealth Franchise Act removed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's right to vote in federal elections. This right was not reinstated until 1962, in the Commonwealth Electoral Act. It is important to acknowledge the hurt, the shame and the disrespect of the disenfranchising of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the racism, discrimination and disempowerment they experienced.

Between 1908 and 1962 First Nations women did not have the same political rights as other Victorians. In Victoria some women gained the right to vote in state elections, and subsequently it was legislated in 1908 after being defeated as a private members bill 18 times. So a private members bill came 18 times to this house before we finally got the right to vote.

But it was not for another 15 years, in 1923, that some Victorian women won the long-fought right to be candidates for this Parliament, the Parliament of Victoria, shamefully making Victoria the last state to grant both these rights to some women. It is really interesting to reflect that 100 years ago we were the least progressive state and now proudly we are the most progressive state. It was the Parliamentary Elections (Women Candidates) Act 1923 that enabled women to become candidates in parliamentary elections, stating:

... no woman shall by reason only of sex or marriage be disqualified or disabled from ... being a candidate at any election ...

However, this right to stand as a candidate did not translate to the increase in parliamentary representation of women that many women would have hoped for and that many women would have fought for. The first woman elected to the Victorian Parliament was Lady Millie Peacock, 10 years after women won the right to run for election. In 1933 Lady Millie Peacock became the first female member of the Parliament of Victoria. She won the seat of Allandale in the Legislative Assembly, this place, in a by-election caused by the death of the sitting member Sir Alexander Peacock, her husband. At the age of 63 Lady Millie Peacock was sworn into this place as a member.

Disappointingly, our first woman MP was not the champion Victorian women needed. The member for Allandale declared that as a widow in mourning she would not make speeches in the Parliament. However, she did make a speech, just one. Further, Lady Peacock made her views on electing women to the Parliament of Victoria very well known. Leaving Parliament after a short time she declared, 'This is not a place for women.' However – here comes the hero of the story – Labor's Fanny Brownbill was not deterred, being elected as the member for Geelong in 1938. Well done to the member for Lara on her contribution about Fanny Brownbill. It was really great to hear the member for Lara talking so passionately about the member for Geelong.

This house is now a place for women – Lady Peacock got that wrong – and it is thanks to the many women who have broken down barriers and forged a path for women MPs like me and others sitting in the chamber right now. Women MPs today are indebted to Ivy Weber, to Joan Coxsedg, to Val Callister, to Pauline Toner, to Joan Kirner and to my dear friend Caroline Hogg, Minister for Health and Minister for Education in the Cain government. In 1977 Pauline Toner won the seat of Greensborough in the Legislative Assembly for Labor, and in 1982 she was appointed as Victoria's first female cabinet minister. From this important breakthrough came many more wins for women. When Pauline Toner resigned in 1989, after 11 years in Parliament, women representatives had increased from two to 10 in this place and seven in the other place. Two years later a woman was appointed Premier of Victoria, the great Joan Kirner. Other great trailblazing Labor women made other breakthroughs that made this place a house for women. In 2003 Judy Maddigan became the first woman Speaker of this place and Monica Gould became the first woman President of the other place.

The now Deputy Premier, the member for Bendigo East, became the youngest woman to become a minister in 2002, and she is the longest serving woman MP in Victorian history. I also want to recognise Sheena Watt for becoming the first Labor Aboriginal woman MP in the Victorian Parliament. The number of women MPs continues to increase, as does women's representation in the cabinet. Significantly, women now comprise 48 per cent of all parliamentarians, and Labor is making important progress, with the highest number of women ever on the government benches and in the cabinet in Victoria. A record 54 per cent of Labor Party members of Parliament are women.

This extends to the cabinet where 64 per cent of ministers are women; unfortunately the same cannot be said for the Liberal Party. I am proud to be a member of the Australian Labor Party that has worked towards affirmative action targets and quotas for decades. We know that gender equality and diversity strengthen our democracy. We know that these quotas work, and the quality of women MPs elected at the 2022 state election is proof of that. I will not be drawn into any ridiculous arguments about merit, because all of our women are meritorious – unlike some of the men throughout the history of this place who have been more than mediocre, becoming preselected based on the old school tie, on family connections and membership of the boys club. Our women MPs are here because they deserve to be here – they work hard, and I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the member for Albert Park earlier today who made the very same points.

Having more women in Parliament and positions of power means that our policies reflect women's needs. This was highlighted through the introduction of the Gender Equality Act 2020 which requires public sector organisations from local councils to universities to demonstrate progress towards gender equality and report their progress every two years. We know there is more to do. That is why a new gender equality strategy will be launched later this year to build on the strong foundation and ensure that we do not lose momentum.

We are also making sure that we celebrate women's achievements equally, and in doing so offer inspiration to the next generation of girls. It is why we invest in programs like the Victorian Honour Roll of Women. Each year the Victorian Honour Roll of Women recognises women who have demonstrated remarkable leadership and excellence in their field of expertise, interest, endeavour or through their commitment to the community. Since 2001 more than 700 women have been recognised for their incredible efforts in Victoria, Australia and beyond. I had the privilege of chairing the nomination process for inductees in 2022, and I congratulate all inductees. Inductees to the honour roll are recognised for their achievements in a broad range of fields, including science, arts, environment, law, social justice, family violence prevention, research, health, media and education. They each represent the courage and determination of women across Victoria, using their unique skills, experiences and insights to forge a brighter path for all women. I am proud that we have a strong focus on recognising and honouring First Nations and multicultural women.

Looking forward to the next century, one can only imagine what it might be like for women in Victoria. My youngest daughter will be 112 – perhaps she will even still be alive. The decisions we make and the actions we take will contribute to the lives of our grand-daughters and our great-grand-daughters. Will the progress of rights for women continue, or will we see the winding back of reproductive rights, women's workplace participation and anti-discrimination laws? I will fight for our women and fight for our future.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Bills*

#### **Heritage Amendment Bill 2023**

#### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed on motion of Sonya Kilkenny:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (18:34): It is a pleasure to rise to make my contribution on behalf of this side of the house to the Heritage Amendment Bill 2023. I state at the outset that we are not opposing this bill. The bill will amend the Heritage Act 2017 to provide for exclusion determinations and to make other amendments to improve the operation of the act and for other purposes. These legislative amendments will create the following reforms in relation to notices, the publication and inspection of documents and hearings and that will provide for online access to heritage documents and notices and Heritage Council hearings, and I will come back to expand a bit on that.

The second purpose is to provide for exclusion determinations, and that will allow for applications to exclude places and objects from the Victorian Heritage Register. Finally, the purpose of the bill is to make other general amendments which will clarify and improve the operation of the Heritage Act.

In terms of the main provisions, the bill makes a number of amendments in relation to notices and publication and inspection of documents:

These amendments are intended to allow for the publication and inspection requirements of the Principal Act to be met in a more modern and flexible manner which would minimise the disruptions associated with social distancing measures, such as those imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

That in our view is common sense if you look at what we have been through in the two years of the pandemic, where our practices moved on to dealing with things online or using modern technology to meet or get access to documents, and so this is really catching up. If anything, there are a few on our side of the house who were a bit surprised that here we are in 2023 and these measures were probably needed back in 2020–21, COVID years, so we are fully supportive of the intention to minimise the disruptions associated with social distancing measures and those imposed during COVID-19. That just makes sense, and I think – touch wood – if we ever had a pandemic again or circumstances where that was required, all these measures would allow common sense to prevail there. The explanatory memorandum says:

The Principal Act contains a number of notification and publication requirements, as well as requirements that certain documents, the Heritage Register and Heritage Inventory be made physically available for inspection. The amendments made by this Division provide for the Heritage Council and Executive Director to comply with these requirements via online publication provided the Heritage Council and Executive Director continue to facilitate inspections by persons upon request.

So, again, that just outlines that main provision there in terms of notices and publication and inspection of documents.

The bill also makes a number of amendments in relation to hearings conducted by the Heritage Council, and again the view formed by us was that this is supported – common sense. The memorandum says:

Part 12 of the Principal Act governs the conduct of Heritage Council hearings. Division 2 of Part 2 of the Bill makes a number of amendments to Part 12 to allow the Heritage Council to conduct hearings electronically. The purpose of these amendments is to provide the Heritage Council with greater flexibility in conducting proceedings and also minimise the disruptions associated with social distancing measures, such as those imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To hark back to the point I just made, conducting or having the ability to conduct online hearings is just common sense in this day and age. I mean, we are all members of Parliament. We are in the people business. I for one like a face-to-face meeting and like to engage with people in a face-to-face manner but recognise there are times when online meetings, or online hearings in this case, make sense, or provision to allow for them makes sense. We hope certainly that hearings will still be conducted in a face-to-face manner and allow that interaction in these important matters, but we do recognise that this bill does amend the act to allow greater flexibility in conducting those proceedings online and minimising the disruptions associated with, again, social distancing measures and those imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The bill provides for exclusion determinations. This allows applications to the executive director of Heritage Victoria to exclude a place or object from the Victorian Heritage Register. Applications are likely to be made where there is some possibility that a place or object has some heritage value or where this remains unclear. This is an important part of the bill. We explore this in great detail. The process will allow the significance of the heritage place or object to be established and considered in the planning stages of a project.

I will just turn briefly, if I can, to the minister's second-reading speech, which clearly outlines the intent here:

Government agencies tasked with delivering major transport projects in Victoria have sought greater certainty on their obligations under the Heritage Act. Agencies have sought a way of establishing the heritage significance of any place or object affected by a major project early in the planning stages. Under current legislation, there is a significant risk that major transport projects will be disrupted or delayed by the receipt of a new nomination from a third party after works have started.

Again, referring to the minister's second-reading speech:

The Bill will create greater certainty for these projects. This is achieved by allowing agencies to apply to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria to exclude a place or object from the Victorian Heritage Register. Applications are likely to be made where there was some possibility that a place or object have some heritage value or where this remains unclear.

Of course when members first read that their antennas went up a bit or concerns were raised: how is this process going to operate, and what confidence can we continue to have that it will not be used for short cuts in projects? But upon exploring that and getting information from the minister's office those concerns were dealt with. I have had a number of discussions with my colleagues, and I make the point that this does not change a process or take a short cut or put something behind closed doors. All it really does is frontload the process. There are only inclusions now in the act, and this gives exclusions, which allow for a proactive assessment. It frontloads all the planning. All the planning is done up-front, and that gives greater certainty to projects. Certainly people I spoke to in industry and industry representatives talked about this. In planning any project or with any project management, they cannot see why this is not done; it is a good idea. As I have argued, if we were in government we would also probably look at doing something like this rather than getting into those long-term projects and then part way along the process finding something that may or may not have heritage value and then be uncertain how that should be dealt with. If that can be identified at the start and at least dealt with, that gives greater certainty to the project or allows that matter to be dealt with first up.

Again, we have to be very clear here. It is not short-circuiting and it is not prohibiting proper due process to take place; it is really just allowing those to be identified earlier on and dealt with. On a major project, for example, we could say, 'Well, we know that's got heritage value. We need to deal with it in a certain way. We're unclear of this and we're uncertain of that. Let's look at getting it assessed and finding out if it should be included and kicking off that process or if it should be excluded.' So it is all about frontloading and it is all about allowing applications for exclusion, and we are comfortable on this side of the house with the safeguards that are built in.

I will refer members of this place to the explanatory memorandum. I think the part 3 'Exclusion determinations' are dealt with from clause 19 onwards, and if you read through a number of clauses after that, right up to clauses 20, 21, 22 and onwards, you will see the sort of process that is involved, right up to and including clause 24. The process involved gives us some confidence, as I said, with the concerns that were raised about that process. Again I thank the minister's office for clarification on how that works and for giving us that confidence and allowing us to ask questions about how that will operate, what the process will be and how it will work. I think that deals with the applications for exclusion, where that sits in the bill and our assessment of that.

Finally, the bill makes a number of other general amendments. In my time it was not my intention to go through all of those, but they are dealt with in the bill and certainly in the explanatory memorandum. On page 26, part 4, 'General amendments', talks about a number of other general amendments there.

I will not use my time to go into detail on those. They are fairly straightforward and did not cause us any grief or concern there.

There was, however, one area of concern which was raised in relation to clause 100, and that is on page 33 of the explanatory memorandum, or page 90 of the bill. The point that was raised with me was that clause 100 substitutes a new subsection (4) into section 201 of the principal act. This amendment empowers an inspector or authorised person to enter an unoccupied residence if either the owner of the residence has given written consent to the entry or in the absence of written consent after two days clear notice has been given to the owner of the residence. Subsection (4) as amended also continues to provide for entry into occupied residences with the consent of the occupier.

So again, this just raised the antenna for us to say, ‘Well, how does this operate, and what is fair in these circumstances?’ The advice at the bill briefing we were given was that the only person who can authorise entry is the occupant, but this deals with unoccupied residences. Examples were given to us where you might have a situation where an inspector has to get in very quickly and have a look at a place that needs early assessment. So therefore it is really a balance between what is fair notice to the owner or the person responsible for an occupied residence and what is practical in terms of being able to get in there for early, quick assessments. So we just reassured ourselves about the process – how that would work, whether two days is enough and in what sort of circumstances.

Talking to people in industry about how this practically operates, I am confident as the lead speaker on this bill that that process will work well, but I understand the concerns that were raised, because what if a person is absent, in hospital or away? In any of those sorts of examples, is it fair and would two days be adequate time? With many of these things it is a leap of faith, of confidence, that this will be used in the proper way, and we trust and hope that it will. But again, it was something worth exploring at the bill briefing on behalf of stakeholders and on behalf of my colleagues just to assess that ‘two days’. But we understand the argument there – if you need to get in and assess a place fairly quickly, there needs to be provision for that. I think from memory, or if my notes serve me correctly, it is not a common way of accessing an unoccupied residence. Normally the process operates quite well to allow an inspector to get in. Nevertheless, I did want to put that concern about clause 100 on record and just talk about the absence of written consent after those two days clear notice so that people are aware that we did raise that.

As always, I did just want to spend a little bit of time putting on record my thanks to the people involved in the bill briefing. When you get bills that come into this place, as a shadow minister you are often left with a short period of time. When a bill is introduced on the Tuesday of a sitting week and second-read on the Wednesday, you have virtually got a fortnight before the bill might come on for debate to get feedback from your colleagues, to seek feedback from stakeholders, to have a bill briefing, to form a view and to run through party processes, and that can be a very tight time frame. Certainly the minister’s office is working us pretty hard. I think we have got another bill in this week, so this is the third in three or so weeks. But we did manage to run that process well. We went out to a number of important stakeholders who were engaged by email, phone and other invitation to make comment on the bill. No concerns were raised by any of the stakeholders. In fact I think we had shadow cabinet on Monday and one of the stakeholders did email me after and basically put on record that they had no concerns and they were consulted, so it was good to see that process worked well.

The other point I want to make is that I have held a number of shadow portfolios over my time in this place and I have always enjoyed a good working relationship with ministers and ministerial office staff, but I do want to put on record my appreciation for the way that Aidan Wright has conducted himself. He has been nothing short of professional. He gives timely information –

**James Newbury** interjected.

**David HODGETT:** Well, I think credit where credit is due, Manager of Opposition Business. The Minister for Planning was in here at the table before, and I thought I might be damaging his career by

saying that we are getting great assistance from the minister's office. The minister, if she is listening, may well run back and say, 'Stop being so helpful. Make it hard for these buggers.'

**A member:** Offering him a job, are you?

**David HODGETT:** Well, who knows how he votes? He could be a professional staff member, and I am not imputing that at all.

Aidan, who I know is here in the chamber at the moment, always conducts himself very professionally and gives timely bill briefings and timely follow-up information, and I just want to place on record my thanks, because it does help me as a shadow to allow smooth processing of the way we want to conduct our assessment and scrutiny of bills. There will be times when we support – when we do not oppose – and when we oppose bills, and we respect that relationship, but it is good to have questions put and answered. For example, we run through party processes, and we had a follow-up question from one of my colleagues. It actually asked about the minister's powers to be able to intervene in respect of registration management review of heritage permits. Again, I was able to put that through Aidan in the minister's office and got a thorough response both outlining the minister's powers and the process with heritage registrations and permit reviews, and I was able to feed that back to colleagues. When you get this information it either alleviates fears or concerns or reinforces them and allows us to form a firm position on the bill. In this case the amendments to the Heritage Act clarify the minister's call-in powers in respect to permit reviews by ensuring the minister takes into account the same matters considered by the executive director when determining a permit review and that the same parties that can be heard and make submissions at an ordinary Heritage Council permit review hearing also have these rights when the minister is making the decision. So again, I am very thankful for that information and the opportunity to have multiple dealings with the minister's office.

Just to finish that off, I thank Aidan Wright but I also thank Amanda Bacon from Heritage Victoria and, I think, if my notes serve me correctly from the bill briefing, Nick Mann and Steven Avery, also from Heritage Vic, who again provided a thorough bill briefing, good information and answers to our questions.

**James Newbury:** I have got a lot of outstanding constituency correspondence. Can I send it to Aidan?

**David HODGETT:** Send it through. We can work Aidan pretty hard. He has got plenty of time on his hands. We can do that.

In conclusion, we did go through that stakeholder consultation. There were no concerns raised, so we formed a view that the bill is straightforward and makes a number of practical improvements. The bill modernises the legislation and increases public visibility of Heritage Act processes by allowing online access to key documents and notices via the Heritage Victoria or Heritage Council websites. Public access to Heritage Council hearings will also be enhanced with a process for hearings to be held using audio or video links, and furthermore I am satisfied with the exclusion determinations, the process of how that will work and the built-in safeguards. As such, we have taken the position of not opposing this bill, and I look forward to having the opportunity for many members on our side of the house to make contributions on this bill over the coming day.

**Katie HALL (Footscray) (18:54):** I very much enjoyed the Shadow Minister for Planning's contribution and maybe was hoping he could keep on going there for a few minutes, but I very much enjoyed the –

**A member** interjected.

**Katie HALL:** To be fair to the shadow minister at the table, I thought his acknowledgement of Aidan was excellent, and I am very pleased that they are not opposing this sensible bill.

We have got a few minutes for some Footscray history chat, which I know you are all probably looking forward to. This bill seeks to ensure that the historic beauty of our state, where appropriate, is preserved and celebrated. The bill makes several changes to primary functions within the existing legislation. As the shadow minister outlined, this bill responds to a number of issues that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic and improves access to heritage processes. It allows for notices and documents held by the Heritage Council and the executive director to be available for inspection in person as well as online.

But given I only have a few minutes, I might get straight to the Footscray history chat, because one of my favourite things to do is to talk about all of the beautiful heritage sites we have in Melbourne's inner west and how important it is to preserve that history. My electorate of Footscray has very rich First Nations, Victorian and industrial heritage. We have, sadly and inevitably, over time lost a number of significant buildings. I can think of a few pubs that we have lost to apartment blocks over the years. You just have to walk down Barkly Street and look above the awnings to see some of Melbourne's best Victorian architecture and places that certainly deserve protection, although I would note that this bill does deal with state significant sites. It is very important to have a proactive council that works on their heritage overlays.

As I mentioned, Footscray in the second half of the 19th century was the industrial powerhouse of Australia. During the war and Great Depression era we provided the engine room of Australia's war efforts. Some of those significant buildings, I am pleased to report, are still intact, including the gunpowder storage facility of Jacks Magazine, which was built in 1878. If you have the opportunity during Open House Melbourne to go and check out Jacks Magazine, it is absolutely worth doing. Another favourite part of Footscray's heritage I have is the beautiful old grand theatres that were built during the boom era in Footscray and in the early 20th century. Many of those are still intact. They perhaps need a little bit of love, but it is great that they are still there.

We have places like Footscray Park, which has one of the oldest and most substantial Edwardian gardens in Australia. That was paid for and fundraised for by the people of Footscray, who wanted to have a park of similar significance to other suburbs of Melbourne along the Maribyrnong River, which was home to many of the industrial sites and factories, mostly abattoirs, near the Kensington meatworks. A bit of Footscray history chat to round out our Wednesday evening, but I am really pleased that this bill builds on our work in heritage.

One of the things that I was most excited about in the election campaign was the announcement that we would make sure our live music venues are protected with new overlays.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I am required under sessional orders to interrupt business now. The member may continue their contribution when the matter is before the house next.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### *Adjournment*

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

That the house now adjourns.

### **Heidelberg-Kinglake Road–Rose Avenue, Hurstbridge**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (19:00): (81) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Hurstbridge residents and parents are very concerned about the dangers for pedestrians, particularly children, crossing the Heidelberg-Kinglake Road. The action I seek is for the minister to organise simple measures to improve pedestrian safety when crossing the Heidelberg-Kinglake Road at Rose Avenue in Hurstbridge.

Currently there are no pedestrian safety measures in place between The Glen and Rose Avenue. Children must cross this busy road after being dropped off by the school bus opposite Rose Avenue. The road is also regularly crossed at other times by pedestrians and cyclists who access the oval, the

wetlands, the community hub and the Diamond Creek trail. Those training for cricket, football and basketball also cross here to access sporting grounds. I met with local parents recently to inspect the road at school pick-up time and saw the students ducking off between the traffic to cross the road.

Heidelberg-Kinglake Road is a main road, and it is busy. It is the only road leading to the high schools. It is dangerous for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers. The speed limit does drop coming from Wattle Glen from 80 to 60, but despite that, vehicles tend to speed along. This ability is sometimes compromised due to blind corners, and pedestrians are at risk.

There are easy solutions. Nearby Haleys Gully Road has appropriate pedestrian safety measures already in place. They have got multiple refuge islands. They have got pedestrian warning signage, red rumble strips and ample speed signs, and I know the Hurstbridge residents would like to see similar treatments made between The Glen and Rose Avenue. It is wide enough. They can do these sorts of works. Many parents have contacted me. Grant Morgan says:

My 10 year old son and I cross here to access the Hurstbridge Community Hub, the new Diamond Creek Trail, the football oval and cricket nets.

They have had several near misses with cars and heavy vehicles. Kate Mildenhall says:

We regularly walk and ride to and from Hurstbridge. A safe road crossing at Rose Avenue where children could cross safely to join the new track to get to and from Hurstbridge Primary, basketball and football training and in a couple of years Diamond Valley Secondary College would ensure they remain safe and active.

Gabby Morrison says:

Cars frequently speed along the main road at 80km an hour and only really begin to slow as they get nearly into the village past Rose Ave where our kids get off the school bus and have to navigate their way across ...

I am fearful that one of them is going to get hit and killed.

Brendan Colville says:

I often have to cross this road as I make my way to the Diamond Creek trail with my kids.

It is a super dangerous intersection and we have had cars slow down for us when we have'nt seen them coming.

Kate and Joel say:

Traffic on Heidelberg-Kinglake main road has massively increased over the years and we now have a generation of kids starting at high school from this area. The combination of kids crossing this road now and the increased traffic is at a dangerous point. The amount of near misses that have occurred as people cross at this point is a real worry and needs to be addressed.

The minister really needs to see that these important measures are put in place.

### Metro Tunnel

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (19:03): (82) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. The action I seek is for the minister to join me to visit the Anzac station project site on St Kilda Road. On 15 March it will have been two years since we announced that Metro Tunnel's new Anzac station, 22 metres under St Kilda Road, had begun taking shape, with the final wall and roof structures being put in place. Anzac station will be part of the vital St Kilda Road transport hub, making it easier for Albert Park locals to get to major cultural destinations like the Shrine of Remembrance, the Royal Botanic Gardens and the Arts Centre precinct. With the Melbourne Airport rail you will be able to get to the airport direct from Anzac station in just over half an hour. When construction is complete the daily commute to and from St Kilda Road will be cut by up to 50 minutes. It will also take the pressure off the St Kilda Road–Swanston Street tram route, the busiest in the world, while ensuring a smoother, safer journey for cyclists. I look forward to the minister's response and welcoming her back to the site.

**Tomorrow Today**

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (19:04): (83) My adjournment tonight is for the Treasurer, and the action I am seeking is that funding is provided to Tomorrow Today in this year's budget to continue their incredible work in the Benalla community and the delivery of the Education Benalla program. Tomorrow Today is driving transformative change in the region, addressing intergenerational disadvantage and supporting more than 1500 children and families annually through more than 20 programs and engagement with 124 community partners. Off the back of strong community advocacy, Tomorrow Today received funding in 2021 from the Victorian government, with the last payment due this May.

I will take this opportunity to update the government on what a strong return on investment there has been, a return of \$4 for every dollar invested, as measured by Dandolo Partners. Since 2015 the Education Benalla program has resulted in a 9 per cent decrease in the proportion of children developmentally vulnerable in one or more Australian Early Development Census domains, as well as a 350 per cent increase in work experience placements, a 10 per cent increase in transition to work or study post school, 279 young people mentored by trained community members, a nearly 20 per cent decrease in the number of people aged 15 to 24 disengaged from education or employment and more than 80 per cent of Benalla's zero-to-four-year-olds and a parent or carer attending a Tomorrow Today parent education program.

But do not just take this from me. Take it from Emmalee, a mother who wants the Treasurer to hear her story and ensure other parents can benefit from Tomorrow Today's work. After her involvement in Parents Early Education Partnership sessions, this is what she had to say:

PEEP has helped me realise my potential and understand my kids a lot more.

It's about removing the trauma bond and making it a parent/child bond.

...

They're not just there an hour a week, they're there 24/7. They make an effort. If you're having a bad time they reach out and check in.

...

Sometimes I've had struggles with getting food. All I have to do is ring ... and grab a gift voucher. Even with child protection and family law court they've written recommendations and letters, and provided emotional support. They're cheerleaders and teachers and the biggest support a parent could possibly have.

...

We need to clone them to have them in every town!

The world would be a better place if everyone had access to the Tomorrow Today Foundation. Benalla is extremely lucky to have that service.

I wouldn't be the parent I am today if it wasn't for that service

...

Being involved in PEEP has really helped with my substance use. I recently just quit again. I have that better mental state ... and a better understanding of what's available. I can go 'I'm struggling today but we can go to the splash park or the library and it's good for me'.

I wish every parent could experience this.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Emmalee for her courage in allowing me to share her brave story. Emmalee is a powerful example of what Tomorrow Today does day in and day out. Our regional communities experience extreme disadvantage, and I ask the Treasurer to support Tomorrow Today and invest in the future of Benalla.

**Bellarine Community Safety Group**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (19:07): (84) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me and meet with the Bellarine Community Safety Group to discuss community safety and policing on the Bellarine peninsula. The safety group

was first established in 2014 by my predecessor the Honourable Lisa Neville in partnership with community leaders and local Bellarine police command. The purpose of this group is for the community leaders to work with Bellarine police and discuss and develop initiatives in addressing local community safety issues, and at a grassroots level the work of the safety group does provide communities, using their local knowledge, a real say on matters that are important to them and their families. A good example of the safety group has been the establishment of the bSafe Bellarine website, which has been operating now for nearly eight years on the peninsula. The website acts as a community safety crime prevention information hub, keeping residents and visitors on the peninsula informed on matters of community safety. In doing so the Victoria Police Eyewatch, CFA – Country Fire Authority – Surf Life Saving Victoria and Neighbourhood Watch Facebook pages also utilise this to keep the site up to date and easy to use. As the local member I am really looking forward to chairing my first meeting with this group, scheduled later this month, and I know the members of the Bellarine Community Safety Group would welcome the opportunity to meet with the minister and discuss local safety matters at one of our future meetings.

#### **Jarosite–Bells Beach roads**

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (19:09): (85) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for immediate allocation of funding for about an 800-metre strip of road where Jarosite Road and Bells Beach Road intersect. There are two car parks well known to the surfing community along the Surf Coast: the Bells Beach car park and the Southside car park. This stretch of road is a narrow, winding, very steep, up-and-down stretch of road that is actually a crucial link in a nearly 42-kilometre patch of bike-riding trails and walking trails that are used not only by the local Torquay/Jan Juc community but further afield down to Anglesea and of course by the many thousands and thousands of visitors and outdoor activists that come down and enjoy the wonderful sights and sounds and surrounds of the Torquay–Bells Beach area.

What happened was last week I had an opportunity to meet with young Aaron Tremul, the Surf Coast Mountain Bike Club and local councillor Mike Bodsworth. We met on the site where young Aaron was almost killed late last year, because what happens is the bike riders have to leave the safe, beautiful, picturesque trail, the Surf Coast cycling trail, and they have to enter onto this steep bit of track along near Bells Beach, and they have to do that for about 800 metres and then rejoin the track. It is a simple solution. The road needs to be widened. The road needs to have clear markings for cyclists to go on.

Just in the short time I was with the latest victim of an accident there, young Aaron, and the mountain bike club there were many, many cyclists doing the journey from the bike track out onto the roadway, along the road and back again. It is a clear danger. Mike Bodsworth, the local councillor, tells me that up to 100,000 cyclists use the ocean road trail on a yearly basis. That is a lot of people. It is in an area where people are keen to enjoy the great outdoors. It is an area where people are often easily distracted with the beautiful views and the sunshine, so it is not safe to have bikes and cars without somewhere clear and defined to go. The community have also said to me, ‘Look, we know that we can’t necessarily get that sign straightaway, but we can get the speed limit lowered so it’s down to a safe speed in that 800-metre track. We can also get some signage that’s much needed to advise tourists.’ One of the realities of that space is that there may be many regulars that are aware that there are going to be cyclists but many visitors as well. We need some signage to ward off cyclists, some signage to get the speed down and to make the area safe for everybody.

#### **Western Heights College**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (19:12): (86) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action that I seek from the minister is to visit the Western Heights College in the electorate of Lara and see firsthand the Western Heights specialist sports program. Western Heights College currently run four specialist sports programs: AFL, basketball, netball and soccer. This program offers student athletes a unique opportunity to pursue their sporting dreams while receiving an outstanding education. The

program also offers students the opportunity to learn more about career pathways in sports-related industries. For many years the Western Heights community has been advocating for the construction of an on-campus gymnasium. I was pleased to announce in October last year that a re-elected Andrews Labor government would deliver this major upgrade and construct a competition-grade gym. I am proud of the commitment that Labor has made to ensuring that the students who attend Western Heights College will have the world-class facilities they deserve, and I look forward to welcoming the Minister for Education to Western Heights College to hear more about the sports program and plans for the gym.

### **Community leadership programs**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (19:13): (87) This adjournment matter is for the Minister for Regional Development, and the action I seek is to urgently fund the Northern Mallee Leaders program and other regional Victorian leadership programs for five years to enable them to create public value in my electorate and right across the state. Community leadership programs have been developing confident and capable leaders in our regional communities since 1996, and yet year after year they need to advocate for funding from the very governments they are creating public value for. It does not lead to a very productive time. Funding for community leadership programs has fallen from three- or four-year commitments to just 12 months at a time. This lack of consistency makes it almost impossible for these programs to retain key staff or to keep the staff that remain from burning out as they work tirelessly to deliver programs, coordinate projects, advocate for further funding et cetera. They do work very, very hard.

There are nine community leadership programs that operate across over 217,000 square kilometres, and they boast a graduate network of over 4500 key influencers – in the right way – in their communities. This network of community-minded Victorians work together to create public value and prepare for emergencies and are at the head of every recovery effort, from bushfires to floods, the pandemic and everything else that is thrown their way. Their volunteer value is three times that of the average person that is not a graduate of the Northern Mallee Leaders program. Research currently being conducted by scholars – and I sat with a PhD candidate last week, and she was so passionate about the data that she has collected – at Swinburne University highlights that the community leadership programs are responsible for creating public value through the design and delivery of community projects and the volunteer contribution of these community leaders. Their programs also have significant economic, environmental and social impact in our regions, and many projects continue to run year after year after the graduates have finished the program. They also address both the regional development goals and in fact the United Nations sustainable development goals.

These communities are not going anywhere, and neither should the programs that are vital to creating public value in regional Victoria. With the Commonwealth Games coming up and the need for skilled volunteers throughout regional Victoria at their peak, now is the time to commit to these funding programs for at least the next five years. Each year the cohorts include community members who identify as LGBTQIA+, Indigenous or Torres Strait Islanders, carers, people living with a disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people at all ages and stages of their career. I seek this action not just for the Northern Mallee Leadership program but all programs throughout the region.

### **Pakenham electorate level crossing removals**

**Emma VULIN** (Pakenham) (19:16): (88) My adjournment is for the Deputy Premier in her capacity as Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. The action I seek from the Deputy Premier is to join me in visiting Pakenham station to see the progress that has been made towards making my electorate level crossing free. The Andrews Labor government is committing to removing the most dangerous and congested level crossings in our state, with 67 level crossings removed and the goal of removing 110 by 2030. I am proud of the work this state government is doing to make the Pakenham line level crossing free by 2025.

At the state election last year my community voted to return a government they knew had a strong record of delivering on the critical infrastructure that growing communities need. In my electorate work is underway on removing the level crossings at McGregor Road, Main Street and Racecourse Road, with the three boom gates to be gone for good in 2024. I am delighted that they will be removed 12 months earlier than originally planned. Removing these level crossings will improve safety, reduce road congestion and allow more trains to run on the network, getting people to their destinations faster.

It is fantastic to see how fast our construction workers are building this critical piece of infrastructure. By building the 2.5-kilometre rail bridge over these roads, it will create more than six MCGs worth of open space for our local community to enjoy. It is important to take this opportunity to remind our local communities to support local businesses here during the works, and I look forward to the minister coming out to have a look at the progress.

### **Rosebud Hospital**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (19:17): (89) My matter is for the Minister for Health, pertaining to the lack of funding and attention this government has given to Rosebud Hospital. Rosebud Hospital remains in a state of critical underfunding with dated infrastructure, obsolete equipment and daily struggles to service residents in need of life-saving treatment. I have witnessed firsthand just how wonderful the staff are. They are compassionate and they do a fantastic job at the hospital, but they are forced to endure working conditions well below the standard that a first-world economy should expect. They deserve a modern, world-class facility as their workplace to ensure they are as safe and as effective as they possibly can be also.

Providing gold-standard health facilities should be a team effort shared by the government, local staff and the wider community, but sadly in the case of Rosebud Hospital, the government has left the peninsula to fend for itself without the support we deserve. Victoria is a place where locals, especially our older residents and younger families, can enjoy their community without the fear that health care may be too far away in an emergency. I want to put this in terms that those the other side of the house may understand: for the people on the peninsula that would be like living in the seat of Pakenham and having to drive to the Maroondah Hospital in the seat of Ringwood to access a public hospital. And again, they want to keep us as part of metropolitan Melbourne. Well, even before I got to this place, calls for Labor's health minister to visit Rosebud Hospital were repeatedly ignored, even from the now former Labor member for Nepean when he requested that of his colleagues. Not one of the four health ministers we saw in the last term of government made the long one-and-a-bit hour trip down to Rosebud. Indeed while my community suffers the effects of health care underfunding and Labor's blind eye to the peninsula, the minister has failed to even direct her government-funded car in our direction.

My community deserves a fair go. All Victorians matter, and those on the peninsula should be afforded the opportunity to show the minister how her blindness to healthcare needs in my region has impacted our community. The action I seek is that the Minister for Health arrange an official visit to Rosebud Hospital, tour the facilities and hear from locals firsthand about the facility, which is in such desperate need of funding and improvement. If this government is truly committed to doing what matters, then I assume the minister should have no hesitation in accommodating this.

### **Flood recovery initiatives**

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (19:20): (90) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Emergency Services in the other place. The action I seek is that the minister provides me with an update on the Andrews Labor government's flood recovery and mitigation efforts in my electorate, including how many residents have accessed the emergency relief payment, rural landholder grants and business and community sport flood recovery grants since the October floods. I recently revisited the flood-affected communities of Newbridge, Avoca, Carisbrook and Lexton. In Newbridge the recreation reserve committee is continuing with the clean-up effort after floods inundated their football netball clubs in October. In Avoca the football-netball clubs and men's sheds were also badly damaged, along with many homes. The Carisbrook CFA came to the rescue of many

locals when the town had to be evacuated in October. And the Lexton community is in discussions with the Pyrenees shire's brand new flood recovery team about the need for clean-up along Burnbank Creek to avoid further flooding in future. I welcome an update from the minister on how our government is supporting these communities through recovery and what steps we are taking to mitigate future floods.

### Responses

**Ros SPENCE** (Kalkallo – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Suburban Development) (19:21): The member for Eildon raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that member sought was for the minister to implement measures to improve pedestrian safety on Heidelberg-Kinglake Road at Hurstbridge. The member for Albert Park raised a matter for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure seeking an action for the minister to join with that member to visit the Anzac station project site on St Kilda Road.

The member for Euroa raised a matter for the Treasurer. The action being sought was for the Treasurer to provide funding in this year's budget for Tomorrow Today. The member for Bellarine raised a matter for the Minister for Police. The action being sought was for the minister to join with that member to meet with the Bellarine community safety group to discuss safety and policing on the Bellarine Peninsula. The member for Polwarth raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety also. The action being sought was for immediate funding for a stretch of road – and I hope I have got these roads right – between Jarosite Road and Bells Beach Road for improvements for cyclist safety.

The member for Lara raised a matter for the Minister for Education seeking an action for the minister to visit Western Heights College to see firsthand the specialist sports program. The member for Mildura raised a matter for the Minister for Regional Development. The action being sought was for the minister to urgently fund the Northern Mallee community leaders program for five years. The member for Pakenham raised a matter for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure seeking an action for the minister to join with the member to visit Pakenham station to see the progress being made in making that electorate level crossing free, and that is fantastic.

The member for Nepean raised a matter for the Minister for Health seeking an action for the minister to arrange a visit to Rosebud Hospital to hear directly from that community. And the member for Ripon raised a matter for the Minister for Emergency Services seeking an action that the minister provide an update on flood recovery and mitigation efforts in that electorate. I will refer all of those matters to the appropriate ministers.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister. The house now stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

**House adjourned 7:23 pm.**