



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Tuesday 30 May 2023

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly
60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

Juliana Addison, Christine Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Paul Edbrooke, Bronwyn Halfpenny,
Paul Hamer, Michaela Settle, Meng Heang Tak and Jackson Taylor

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Daniel Andrews

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Jacinta Allan

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

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel	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	South Barwon	ALP	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	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Fowles, Will	Ringwood	ALP	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hibbins, Sam	Prahran	Greens	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Wayne Farnham	Narracan	Lib	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

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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Tuesday 30 May 2023

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

Bills

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Bill 2023

Introduction and first reading

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (09:33): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to make amendments to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 so that appropriate regulatory authorisations can be established for pharmacists operating under the community pharmacists statewide pilot, including safeguards to protect consumers.

Motion agreed to.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:34): I ask the minister for a brief explanation of the bill.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (09:34): This bill seeks to amend the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 to support the community pharmacist pilot and increase access to timely treatment for common conditions. The bill will allow for the creation of regulations which permit pharmacists to supply some common medications without a prescription or instruction from a medical practitioner. The pilot is consistent with the pilot progressed by Queensland and a trial being established by New South Wales and is aligned with Commonwealth initiatives to increase timely access to safe primary care and common medications.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023

Introduction and first reading

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (09:35): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to make minor amendments to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022, to make consequential amendments to the Judicial Proceedings Reports Act 1958 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:35): I ask the minister for a brief explanation of the bill.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (09:35): This bill will amend the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 to ensure it operates as intended and can be implemented when it commences on 1 September 2023. Many of these amendments are minor or technical in nature, making corrections or providing clarity since the passage of the act in 2022. Other amendments within the bill are necessary to respond to changing circumstances in the evolving mental health service system since the act's passage, including recognition that statutory obligations must not come into force before the system's readiness to meet them.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Owners Corporations Amendment (Short-stay Accommodation) Bill 2023*Introduction*

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (09:36): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Owners Corporations Act 2006 to put a cap on the total number of days that a dwelling can be used for short-term rental accommodation, to give owners corporations in multi-unit complexes the power to ban short-term rental accommodation in their buildings, to establish a mandatory register of short-term accommodation dwellings and for other purposes.

I would like to speak to the motion. I urge MPs: allow this bill to proceed to debate, given the context of the urgent rental crisis. Right now retired women are sleeping in cars, families are living in tents and young renters are having to line up for blocks just to inspect a property alongside dozens of other renters who are desperate for a home that no-one can afford. In short, Victorians are struggling through an unprecedented housing crisis.

The number of available rentals in Victoria has plummeted to a record low while tens of thousands of properties on Airbnb across Victoria sit empty for the rest of the year. Victoria's almost entirely unregulated short-stay industry has played a role in this worsening rental crisis. Instead of providing secure housing for those in need, the short-stay sector is allowing investors to accumulate wealth by leasing out properties that should be homes as hotels through platforms like Airbnb. So while renters are desperate for a home, regulating Airbnbs and short stays –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Richmond, have you concluded your contribution?

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: I have not, sorry.

The SPEAKER: The member for Richmond to continue.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: incentivises owners to put their properties on the long-term rental market. It is a quick, simple and effective way to increase the supply of rentals and one part of solving this complex crisis. I urge this bill to be debated, because we know that this issue is having an acute impact in our regional towns, where essential workers like hospo workers, teachers and aged care workers cannot find a place to live.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order! The Assistant Treasurer will come to order.

Ellen Sandell: On a point of order, Speaker, the member for Richmond has a right to be heard in this chamber. Even sitting next to her it is very difficult to hear her over the chatter in the chamber, and I ask whether you can perhaps bring the chamber to order.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I would ask members to come to order and show some respect for the member on her feet.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: Thank you, Speaker. In the city it is not much better. Melbourne's vacancy rate is just 0.8 per cent, and right now in my electorate there are over 1000 short-stay apartments within Richmond. One provider in my electorate has 36 properties listed on Airbnb. While the state delays on action for renters, local councils have taken things into their own hands, creating policies to regulate short stays that might differ from area to area. The Municipal Association of Victoria has recently been tasked with advocating to the state government on behalf of all councils in Victoria to urgently regulate short stays because of the impact they are having across regional and metropolitan communities.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, it would appear that the member on her feet is wearing a badge of her political party, which I understand is inappropriate in the chamber. I ask you to clarify that for us, please.

The SPEAKER: Order! Is the member for Richmond wearing a party-political item? I would ask you to remove it.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: It is a pronoun badge, but I am happy to take it off.

The SPEAKER: Thank you.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: Thank you, Speaker. This issue needs to be addressed right now, and that is why we are introducing this bill. It will cap the number of days an investment property can be listed on Airbnb or other short stays to 90 days maximum to release investment properties onto the long-term market. It will seek to empower owners corporations to decide whether or not they allow short stays in their buildings. Residents should live in a community, not in a de facto hotel. This bill will establish a mandatory register of short-term properties so that we can properly hold property owners to account and regulate the industry. Victoria is embarrassingly behind on this issue; jurisdictions across the globe have introduced short-stay regulations. I am appealing to MPs in this chamber to let this bill be brought to debate. The prevailing attitude that results in the rejection of non-government bills stands in the way of problem-solving in an urgent housing crisis and stands in the way of democracy.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (09:42): I rise to oppose the introduction of the bill. This is yet another example of grandstanding by the Greens political party, a party who have demonstrated time and time again that they actively oppose housing developments in this state, be they social housing developments or indeed developments to bring on –

Ellen Sandell: On a point of order, Speaker, the Leader of the House knows that reflections on other members are not appropriate in this chamber. This is a very narrow debate about the procedure of first reading a bill, not about attacking other political parties.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask the Leader of the House to come back to debate on the bill before the house.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: These are extremely serious issues that we know are being experienced by renters and indeed those seeking to enter the housing market right across the state. That is why our government will do the hard work that is required before you bring legislation to this place. Consultation with community and with industry, the preparation of a bill in response to policy – that is what our government will do. Again, we are opposing this. It is grandstanding, and it wastes the time of this house on a very important day when we should be discussing the budget.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (09:44): I am delighted to speak briefly on this motion. There are two matters before us: the first is whether non-government members should be able to bring bills to this chamber and have them debated; the second is whether this bill in particular is something that is important and urgent enough to be brought on now. I think yes to both of those things. Firstly, this government does not allow any bills or matters to be brought by non-government members for debate and vote. We are the only parliament in the Westminster system that does not have non-government business time or general business time that allows backbenchers, opposition members and crossbenchers such as the Greens to bring bills on behalf of our constituents to have them voted on, and that is something that needs to change. It is completely undemocratic, that system, and it is something that needs to change urgently.

Secondly, on the motion before us about whether this particular bill to cap short stays in our state is important and urgent enough to bring on – it absolutely is. I was looking back over my record in Parliament, and I first raised this, I believe, in 2014 – nine years ago. The Leader of the House talks about needing to go through proper process in order to make change on these issues. Well, this

government have had nine years to address this issue, and in my electorate of Melbourne we have seen this huge proliferation of short-stay apartments, which means that people are really suffering. They buy into apartment buildings thinking that they are going to live in a community, thinking that they are going to have all the benefits of living in the inner city with close-by neighbours in a tight-knit community, but actually what ends up happening is they end up living in de facto hotels. They end up paying extra for things like the wear and tear on the lifts and the communal facilities. They end up having neighbours that they do not know. They want to live in a community, and I think everyone has a right to live in a community. I have completely lost count of the number of constituents who have contacted me about this issue, particularly those in the CBD and Docklands, represented by groups like We Live Here, who are volunteer community groups who have banded together around this issue because it is affecting people so deeply. They deserve to live in a community.

That is one element of the issue, but now we are also seeing this huge rental crisis biting, and we are seeing that people simply cannot afford to rent a home or buy a home and people have nowhere to live. I had a constituent just the other day talk to me – Nat; she has got a young child in primary school in my electorate. She lives in the inner city in the CBD. Several people in her son's school have had to move out of their school zone because they simply could not find a place to live. She has seen notices – emails and things – from real estate agents in the CBD talking about how they can 'jack the rents up' and 'Now is the right time to do it'. It is pushing people like her out of our city, and that is not what any of us wants. As the member for Richmond said, we have thousands and thousands of properties sitting empty most of the time, when those properties could be properties that people live in. We actually have the supply; we are just not using it. We are using it for private profit for people who have multiple properties rather than the fundamental human right of everyone deserving to have one home and one place over their head.

These are very sensible reforms that the Greens are putting forward, that I have put forward since 2014, that we have put forward and prosecuted many times, but the government has decided not to pick up. We do not know exactly why that is. Is it the influence of property owners? Is it that they are too scared to tackle this reform? We do not know, but let us bring this bill on for debate. Let us have that debate. Let us talk about the best way to do this. We have got a model for regulating short stays that we think will work. We think it will work to create more housing affordability and create communities for our constituents, who deserve to live in communities. If the government wants to have a different model, let us have that debate, but why will it not even let this bill be brought on for debate? That is the key question. I very much urge this government to adopt the measures put forward in this bill. If they will not let it be debated because it is a Greens bill and the government do not want to give the Greens any credit, fine – take it. We will freely give you this bill, and you can pick it up and introduce it as your own.

Darren CHEESEMAM (South Barwon) (09:49): It is somewhat disappointing that I have to again rise to my feet. The reality is that the Legislative Assembly –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Caulfield! The member for Caulfield and the Leader of the House will come to order.

Darren CHEESEMAM: Thank you. The Legislative Assembly is a chamber of government, and what I have had to say on a number of occasions in debates over the last four or five years is: if you want to have a say in this place, get yourself elected to government, because it is the government that sets the agenda in this chamber. To the Greens, again, you are in here politically grandstanding. If you wish to waste the time of the Parliament, go and get yourselves elected to the Legislative Council, where you will get the opportunity on a Wednesday to debate the things that are important to you. This is a chamber of government. We believe in establishing good public policy through our normal –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Malvern will come to order.

Wayne Farnham: On a point of order, Speaker, I ask you to ask the member to stop using the word ‘you’. It is a reflection on you.

The SPEAKER: Order! I am very pleased that members have taken notice of my ruling, and I do ask all members not to use the word ‘you’.

Darren CHEESEMEN: Thank you, and of course I will not use the word ‘you’, but I think we have just seen at its finest the Liberal–Greens coalition coming in here to waste the time of this chamber when we have an important business program to get through this week. I will be voting, along with my colleagues, against this motion because we have important work to get through this week. We will be getting through that work. We are the government, we set the terms of debate in this place and we will continue to do so.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:51): Contrary to what the previous member said, this is actually the people’s chamber, and the debate this morning is about whether or not the non-government members of this place have a right to introduce matters into this chamber – and they have the right to introduce matters into this chamber. On the substance of this bill we do not agree with the Greens. I will make that clear: we do not agree with the Greens. We oppose what they are proposing today. But we absolutely support their right to use this place – the people’s chamber – to put that forward. We absolutely support their right to do that. We have said that previously. I am sure we will do it again. When it comes to members of the non-government parties seeking to move items in this chamber, we will support them on that principle alone, not on the substance. I say to the government: this is the people’s place, and the words that just came out of the previous member were entirely arrogant. They go to the heart of the problem with this government. It is outrageous. This is the people’s place, and none of us should forget it. We on this side know it. Those on the other side have absolutely forgotten it, and it is disgraceful.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (09:52): I rise to oppose this motion. The first thing I would like to acknowledge is that the opposition are not supporting the bill, and I wonder if the people that got the member for Richmond over the line on Liberal preferences are aware that she is coming in here to propose motions that they will object to. So on the substantive nature of this motion, it is pretty extraordinary –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Nationals will come to order.

Michaela SETTLE: to see the grandstanding from those on the other side.

The member for Richmond, perhaps when she was on a council, might have been able to put a motion like this, instead of standing along with other Greens councillors to vote down public housing in her area. The hypocrisy and the grandstanding from the Greens member for Richmond is pretty extraordinary when she has stood to make sure that people continue to not have suitable housing.

This government has worked again and again and again to support the most vulnerable in our community, and we will continue to do that. This government works hard and consistently to make sure that the legislation we put before the house serves the most vulnerable and serves all the community, and we will continue to do that. This government will continue to look at the issues of housing affordability, and we will continue our big build. We will not be objecting to social housing in our communities. We will be standing with the vulnerable in our communities, not just standing in Parliament to grandstand.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (32): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Sam Hibbins, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, Ryan Smith, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Jess Wilson

Noes (53): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Daniel Andrews, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Motion defeated.***Business of the house*****Orders of the day**

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (10:00): I move, by leave:

That the motion for the order of the day for the bill introduced at 9:33 am on Tuesday 30 May 2023 to amend the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 be rescinded.

Motion agreed to.***Bills*****Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Bill 2023*****Introduction and first reading***

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (10:01): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 in relation to the supply, dispensing, administration, use and sale of Schedule 4 poisons by pharmacists without a prescription and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (10:01): I ask the minister for a brief explanation of the bill.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (10:01): I am happy to report that the brief explanation remains the same. This bill seeks to amend the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 to support the community pharmacist pilot and increase access to timely treatment for common conditions. The bill will allow for the creation of regulations which permit pharmacists to supply some common medications without a prescription or instruction from a medical practitioner. The pilot is consistent with the pilot progressed by Queensland and a trial being established by New South Wales and is aligned with Commonwealth initiatives to increase timely access to safe primary care and common medications.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Notice given.

Petitions

Bendigo pedestrian safety

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East) presented a petition bearing 105 signatures:

The petition of

Residents of City of Greater Bendigo, Victoria

points out to the House

That Specimen Hill Road, Golden Square is a dangerous and busy main arterial road on a freight route through the City of Greater Bendigo. Outside of Bethlehem Home for the Aged (36–42 Specimen Hill Road, Golden Square) on either side of the road is a bus stop that means that many residents have to cross this road when embarking or disembarking from the bus. Many of the residents that cross this road are vulnerable residents, namely school children, the elderly and parents with prams.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria

Resolve this problem by being proactive and preventing serious injury or death rather than reactive, namely waiting until someone dies or is seriously injured. Any of the following, may prevent a tragedy:

- **Creating an overpass (looking into the future growth of the City of Greater Bendigo); or**
- **Controlled pedestrian crossing; or**
- **Uncontrolled pedestrian crossing; or**
- **Islands in the centre; or**
- **Change the freight route of the trucks that use this road.**

Documents

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

Victorian Government Annual Report 2022: Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (10:03): I table, by leave, the *Victorian Government Annual Report 2022: Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*.

Committees

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Alert Digest No. 6

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (10:03): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest No. 6* of 2023, on the following bills:

Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023

Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023

Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Home Stretch) Bill 2023

Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023

Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023

together with appendices.

Ordered to be published.

Documents**Documents****Incorporated list as follows:****DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:*

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 31, 32, 34

Documents under s 16B in relation to the *Environment Protection Act 2017* – EPA Designation-Classification of PFAS-impacted soil

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1994 – Notice under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Regulations 2018 (*Gazette G21, 25 May 2023*)

Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001 – Government response to the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's Assessment of the values of the Strathbogie Ranges and Mirboo North Immediate Protection Areas.

PROCLAMATIONS – Under SO 177A, the Clerk tabled the following proclamation fixing an operative date:

Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Act 2022 – Sections 15 to 21, 34, 38 to 44 and 51 – 1 July 2023 (*Gazette S253, 23 May 2023*).

Bills**Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023***Appropriation*

The SPEAKER (10:05): I have received a message from the Governor recommending an appropriation for the purposes of the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023.

Address to Parliament**Governor's speech***Address-in-reply*

The SPEAKER (10:05): I remind members that the address-in-reply to the Governor's speech on the opening of Parliament will be presented at Government House on 7 June 2023 at 11 am. Members are invited to accompany me.

Business of the house**Standing and sessional orders**

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (10:05): I desire to move, by leave:

That the resolution of the house of 18 May 2023 relating to the order of business be amended so far as may be necessary to omit the matter of public importance for this week.

Leave refused.

James Newbury: Can I speak to the issue?

The SPEAKER: You can grant leave and speak.

James Newbury: I am denying leave.

The SPEAKER: Then you cannot speak to the motion.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (10:06): I desire to move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow general business notice of motion 15, relating to the reintroduction of non-government business time, to be moved immediately.

Leave refused.**Program**

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (10:06): I move:

That under standing order 94(2):

- (1) the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 7 pm on 30 May 2023:

Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023

Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023; and

- (2) the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 31 May 2023:

State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023

Victorian Future Fund Bill 2023.

We are here today; it is a Tuesday, but it is really a Wednesday. We have very important business to get through over two days, Tuesday and Wednesday of this week. We have four bills that we are looking to debate and to deliver to the upper house this week. Of course I know that those on the other side of the house allegedly want to make a contribution to the budget bills. Indeed we are expecting a reply from the Shadow Treasurer. But it would seem that those on the other side, rather than focus on the task at hand, want to spend all of our time on procedural motions. People want to get up and they want to talk to the budget bills and the way in which the Andrews Labor government's budget is delivering for the communities that they represent. The opportunity that was provided to those on the other side of the house was to forgo our matter of public importance in order to enable more time to be devoted to discussing the bills – bills which need to be progressed to the upper house in order that appropriations can be in place by 1 July. It is common sense – absolutely common sense.

Let me say this: there will be many opportunities, given the take-note motion, for all members in this place that wish to get up on their feet and talk about the budget. All of those opportunities still exist. But instead what we have seen is an opposition that would rather spend its time – in cahoots I might say, as we have just seen, with the Greens – wasting time, wasting this house's time, on grandstanding and political opportunism, whereas we have got real and serious business to conduct in this place over the next two days.

This is a very important government business program this week. In fact people would say this is the most important sitting week of the year – an opportunity to hear responses to the Treasurer's budget speech. This is something that all Victorians are interested in, yet what we see is those on the other side wanting to filibuster and take every opportunity to stifle the real business of this place with nonsensical procedural motions. Now, we all know that if you cannot govern your own party, then you have no chance in hell of governing the state. And what we are seeing over there is a party that is so divided, they –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a debate on the government business program. I understand the Leader of the House is embarrassed about the chaos in the Parliament, but I would ask you to bring the minister back to the question.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the House to continue on the government business program, please.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Once again, I will alert those on the other side of the house that we have four very important bills to progress this week. We need to do those speedily because we need to get them to the upper house, but of course we do not want to constrain members' contributions. Indeed that is why we have just moved a take-note motion, so there will be ample opportunity in this place and elsewhere for those on the other side to make their contributions in reply to the appropriation bills.

As I said, right now we could be hearing from the opposition spokesperson on Treasury matters, but instead we are going to spend our time on this procedural motion. The member for Sandringham is out polishing up his speech somewhere, and you are just denying him the opportunity to come in here, get on his feet, give the address-in-reply and let us then get on with debating the budget – a very important bill that will be guillotined later today, but that does not mean there will not be ample opportunity to make a contribution.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:12): I move:

That the government business program proposed by the Leader of the House be amended by –

- (1) omitting the words ‘7.00 pm on 30 May’ in paragraph (1) and replacing them with ‘5.00 pm on 31 May’; and
- (2) omitting paragraph (2).

Victoria is now aware that this Parliament is in chaos and the government have lost control of their management of this place. It has been exposed for all Victorians to see. All Victorians now know that the government has not got the capacity to manage this place. But what is worse, not only have they lost capacity to manage this place, they are ramming through the most deadly bills we have seen in this place – absolutely outrageous bills – and we do not even know what is in them. We do not even know what is being proposed. Victorians do not know what is being proposed in this place because our government has not introduced the bills. The taxation bills, which are about to rip the guts out of schools in Victoria, absolutely attack schools in this place –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member for Brighton is both anticipating debate and saying things that are absolutely untrue – misleading the house – so I ask you to call him back to the narrow procedural debate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! That is a matter of debate.

James NEWBURY: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, I moved in my amendment that the house omit paragraph 2, part of which relates to the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023. I was speaking directly to the state taxation bill, and the reason for the paragraph to be omitted. It is a tax on schools, a tax that is going to crush our schools and non-government schools, and I have every right to refer to the amendment that I have proposed.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

James NEWBURY: This government is proposing to ram through bills in this place this week in a way we have never seen before – in a way that every Victorian should be concerned about. We will have a short couple of hours of debate on one of the biggest spends this state has ever seen – certainly the biggest debt this state has ever seen. We are going to have a couple of short hours of debate on those bills, and the government is introducing a guillotine to kill debate on these important bills. Then they have proposed a government business program that speaks to bills tomorrow that have not been introduced into this place. What an outrageous line in the sand to draw – that the government will now be debating bills that Victorians have not seen. The reason why the opposition is proposing to omit those bills from the government program this week is because Victorians have not seen them.

One of those bills is the state taxation bill, with a new tax on rental properties, a new tax on schools, an outrageous tax on our kids, an outrageous attack on our kids, a new tax that was not even spoken about by this government – they did not even refer to it on budget day – that is going to rip the guts out of non-government schools. Every member on that side of the chamber should be ashamed of breaking apart a tax principle that has stood in this nation for almost a century. It is attacking non-government schools. I can see how quiet the government members are now, because they are ashamed of a new tax on non-government schools ripping open a century-long principle to stop a tax on non-government schools.

This Parliament should be ashamed. This government should be ashamed to be proposing to ram through a budget with almost no debate. When will the opposition be allowed an opportunity to speak on the budget-in-reply? Who knows? They will not even tell us. We will oppose the business program, and we will be seeking to stop the government from ramming through these outrageous measures that every Victorian should be worried about. This Parliament is in chaos.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (10:17): It is great to rise on the government business program, and what a strong week it would be if aspiring, wannabe leadership contenders of the opposition were not grandstanding and performing. I reckon that performance had at least a few hours of work – that was in the bathroom mirror this morning by –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is verbal diarrhoea. I would ask you to ask the member to return back to the motion at hand.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member to continue.

Tim RICHARDSON: Very touchy. The government business program is an important opportunity for people to speak on the appropriations. As we have seen over time, the take-note motion is an opportunity for members to contribute and, like every form over the past few years, for members across the Parliament to reflect on the budget. It is predictable what might be said and what will be put forward. I am optimistic that they will contribute to the second reading, because in the month of May we have had 25 second-reading contributions by the Liberals, and the Nationals have had 24. They are half the size of the coalition party, but half the contributions were by the Nats. The member for Gippsland South has had nine, so of the 24 he has had nine contributions, and Cindy McLeish, the member for Eildon, has had seven extraordinary –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Manager of Opposition Business on a point of order. Make it succinct, please.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a debate on the government business program. The member should not embarrass the Premier for not having spoken on second readings yet. That is embarrassing. It is unfair to embarrass the Premier like that.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! We are talking about the business in front of the house.

Tim RICHARDSON: It is relevant when we are talking about time and guillotining to reflect on the contributions that are made around the Parliament. A really important thing to consider is the contributions that are made by members across the Parliament. The member for Gippsland South and the member for Eildon – their backs are sore carrying that team over there, which is a really interesting thing in itself, so keep up the good work. But maybe others might want to jump up and speak on the appropriation and what that means for their communities – and on the take-note motion.

This is a strong agenda, not one that is divisive or destructive. This is a strong agenda by the government, getting on with supporting Victorians. After criticising the legislative program that we had with previous government business programs, now they are saying, 'Oh, there's too much detail to get our heads around, too much to digest.' I mean, you cannot have it both ways. Get on board, contribute on behalf of your communities and stop filibustering and blocking this. I will leave my contribution there to give the member for Brighton his time to continue to grandstand and the member for Sandringham his moment to get up and speak on the second reading, and we wish the member for Sandringham well.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (10:20): R-E-S-P-E-C-T – find out what it means to us, a bit of respect from the government for this chamber, for the non-government members of this chamber and for the people of Victoria. R-E-S-P-E-C-T – have a bit of respect. Government members say this budget is so wonderful and that it does such a good job – well, be proud of it. Give people time to actually speak on it, instead of bringing in a government business program that will reduce this to a farce and reduce the opportunities for government members, let alone non-government members, to actually speak on the appropriation bills and to speak on the other bills that the Leader of the House has put into this.

The Victorian Future Fund was announced in last year's budget. What has the government been doing all this time, to now bring in the legislation, first read it today and plan to have it passed by tomorrow night? What is it that the government did not have organised to be able to provide this to this Parliament and to be able to provide this to the people of Victoria so that they can understand the legislation and actually have a bit of a say on it? There are billions of dollars of taxpayer funds being managed – supposedly – in this Victorian Future Fund Bill 2023, and the government wants it passed by tomorrow.

If the government is so concerned about the ability to actually debate this and get its good budget through, which they keep talking about, go back to the old arrangements. Come in on a Tuesday and do the budget and then have Wednesday and Thursday sittings. Give us a bit more time. Give everybody the opportunity to speak on the budget. But no, no, no, that does not fit in with the government's media program, does it? It does not work with the media program. 'We want to put our budget in. We want to go out over the next couple of days and sell the budget and then come back next week and absolutely rush it through with complete contempt for the Parliament and complete contempt for the people of Victoria.'

If the government has got nothing to hide, then it will bring forward a business program that gives this Parliament and the people of Victoria ample opportunity to debate these bills. Four different pieces of legislation – and we get one day to debate two of them. This is because the government is so unorganised, so chaotic and so out of ideas it really does not know what it is doing anymore. You would think after eight years in government it might actually have got an idea. You would think that they might have worked it out, but no. 'Here we are. We're into our ninth budget now, and we're still not quite sure. We're still rushing things through.' We do know why they are rushing things through. The Leader of the Nationals belled the cat before: the government does not want to talk about this budget; they want to bury it – because they are responsible for the greatest debt this state has ever faced. We saw in the *Age* last week that Victoria has the greatest debt of 17 like states right around the world. We know that this government is responsible for more debt than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined, and we know that this is a yoke around the neck of all Victorians.

That is why this government wants to get on and debate this and rush it through, so that the people of Victoria do not actually have the opportunity to understand what it is about. This government has lost control of the agenda here in the Parliament, it has lost control of the budget and it does not want the people of Victoria to know any more about it. We deserve the opportunity in this Parliament to fully scrutinise legislation. Now, whether it is the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023, whether it is the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 or whether it is the egregious State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023 – which is going to be slugging Victorians with a jobs tax, with a schools tax, with a rent tax and with a debt tax – this is a government that has completely lost control. I mean, the rent tax – fancy introducing a rent tax at a time when housing affordability is out of control and when there is a rental crisis, and yet the government is introducing another rent tax.

It is no wonder they want to rush through these bills. It is because the government wants to hide what it is doing. This is a government that has completely lost control of the parliamentary agenda. We have seen that through this year. We have had multiple motions being debated to fill in time – something we have never seen before in my eight years in the Parliament previously, but we are filling in time because this government is arrogant, it is out of touch and it is out of ideas.

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:25): I am proud and excited to stand and talk about our government business program. There seems to be a bit of uppity and highness across the floor over there. They are very uppity, very excited. On this side of the chamber we stand together as a team. We are excited to stand together as a team, and we are very excited to discuss our program that we are bringing forward this week. I am aware that it was two but now one person was briefed on the bills that we bring before the house today, so to say that the member for Brighton did not know about the bills and has not been briefed is not correct. I believe that is not correct, and I believe three members across the chamber have also been briefed on those bills. But we will agree to disagree on that. We will agree to disagree.

Roma Britnell interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for South-West Coast is very audible.

Belinda WILSON: We will agree to disagree. We are talking about a number of very important bills in this house: the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023, the Victorian Future Fund Bill 2023 and of course the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023. It is an agenda that continues the Andrews Labor government's track record on delivering for all Victorians, and that is something on this side of the house we are very strong to talk about. That is because we had an election six months ago, I believe almost to the day, and the people of Victoria got to speak about who they wanted to be in this place and to represent them. They chose 56 people on this side of the house to represent them, and we stand here proudly as the members to represent them in this state.

I want to acknowledge the importance of this place and our collective responsibility to the people of Victoria. I am honoured to be able to partake in debate, and just like previous Parliaments, here we engage in debate. We love to listen to what we get from across the other side. But we also like to strive to be informed and make the decisions that shape the future of our great state, and we are really proud to do that. I would like to assume that what brings us all to this place is a desire to contribute and to make a difference to our communities and to indeed stand before this place, and I am very proud to be part of this Victorian government, because we are forward thinking and we have got a very strong agenda ahead of us.

The bills before us this week particularly encompass areas of economic significance, and the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023 aims to amend our state's taxation with reform addressing issues that have emerged in recent years, ensuring fairness and equality for all Victorians. This bill is a testament to the government's commitment to fostering a strong, resilient economy that supports Victorian households and of course their businesses too. The Victorian Future Fund Bill 2023 is another pivotal piece of our legislation.

James Newbury: Have you seen it?

Belinda WILSON: Yes, I have. The bill establishes a fund designed to secure the long-term financial security and prosperity of our state by responsibly managing our resources and investigating strategic initiatives by which we can all bring a brighter Victorian future. This establishment of the fund underscores our government's commitment to prudent financial management and a forward-thinking policy delivering for all Victorians in a fair manner. I just want to say that I think this is an incredible program, and I am proud to be part of this government.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (10:29): I rise to support the Manager of Opposition Business's amendment to the government business program this morning. What we are seeing from this government time and time again is a lack of respect for this place. We have just heard from the member for Narre Warren North about the duty we have in this house to the people of Victoria, and that duty extends to properly scrutinising legislation, understanding the legislation coming before us. We cannot do that if the people of Victoria do not have an opportunity to look at the bills coming before them – putting on the program the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023, as the government intends to do, without putting that

out for the public to look at, without looking at how that will impact those directly affected by the legislation.

The Manager of Opposition Business spoke to the rent tax that is included in that legislation and spoke to the fact that there is a school fees tax in that legislation. 110 schools or 160,000 schoolkids will be affected by this legislation, and not one of them has been consulted. Not one stakeholder has been consulted on this piece of legislation. To guillotine debate at the end of today and to not allow this place to properly speak to and scrutinise the appropriation bills is a complete disrespect to this house and the people who elected us to come to this house. This place, unlike what the member for South Barwon said before about the government determining what happens in this place, is the people's house, and it is our responsibility to properly go through legislation and allow everyone to have the opportunity to have their say.

We have heard from the manager of government business time and time again that we could have had 2 extra hours today – so generous of the government to allow us 2 extra hours to debate what will be a huge spending budget, a budget that sees us go further into record debt. At a time when this state is on the precipice when it comes to its finances, we are not even allowed or permitted the opportunity to speak in detail to the bills before us, whether that is the appropriation bills or the bills coming in tomorrow, the Victorian Future Fund Bill 2023 and the state taxation bill.

As my colleague has spoken to, the future fund is not a new idea. It is not a something that the government thought up in this budget and suddenly needs to put in place. In fact we know that bank accounts have been established. We know the money that needs to go into them. But apparently we need to rush that through this place, rather than properly look at how that will be constructed or what the future fund will be able to do with the deposits put in there; it has to be rushed through. For those opposite to say we were afforded a briefing at 4 pm on a Friday afternoon before a sitting week on –

Danny Pearson: Do you have other things on at 4 o'clock on a Friday?

Jess WILSON: No, I attended the briefing, but thank you very much for checking in.

Danny Pearson: Did you have other things on? Did it interrupt your lunch?

Jess WILSON: I was there for the briefing. Unfortunately, many of the questions we asked in that briefing were not answered. The detail was not there, particularly, when we looked at this new school tax coming into place, what the guidelines will be around those 110 schools that are going to be targeted by this government so that school fees will go up for hardworking Victorian families – hardworking parents that are doing everything that they can and making the choice to send their kids to an independent school, taking pressure off the state system. Those independent schools that this tax is going to be thrust upon in the coming weeks do not even know what is coming; they have not seen this legislation. What we need to understand from this government is – it is 110 schools today – what does the legislation provide? Are there going to be more schools in the future? How big is the hit list? How far does that extend into the future? Who else are you going to go after in the future?

This is a government that time and time again comes into this place and, for a process that usually would take weeks when we are afforded the opportunity to speak to our constituents to make them understand the ramifications of state taxation bills and the impact of the budget, rushes legislation through this place with complete disrespect for what this place is intended to do to ensure that people have their say. It is ramming it through. So I stand here today fully supporting the amendment to the government business program.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the House has moved a motion to set a government business program for this week. The Manager of Opposition Business has moved an amendment to the motion to omit some items and to change the completion time of others. I will first put the question on the first part of the amendment. Because the amendment seeks to omit the words '7.00 pm on 30 May', the question is:

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

Those supporting the Manager of Opposition Business's amendment should vote no.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (53): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Daniel Andrews, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (32): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Sam Hibbins, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, Ryan Smith, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER: I will now put the question on the second part of the amendment. Because the amendment seeks to omit a paragraph, the question is:

That the words be omitted.

Those supporting the Manager of Opposition Business's amendment should vote aye.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (32): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Sam Hibbins, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, Ryan Smith, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Jess Wilson

Noes (53): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Daniel Andrews, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Question defeated.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (53): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Daniel Andrews, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer,

Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (32): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Sam Hibbins, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, Ryan Smith, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Cambodian Rural Students Trust

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:46): We often say in this place that education really makes a difference to so many people's lives, and it was a pleasure to host students from the Cambodian Rural Students Trust in Parliament just last week as they attended and visited Australia and Melbourne for the first time. I want to particularly pay my respects to Aviv and Jessica Palti and the Palti family for setting up the Cambodian Rural Students Trust and for the great work that they do. A shout-out to Sokal, Doeb, Lita and Phanich, who came for the first time, but particularly to Tola, who I have been sponsoring for a number of years now. It was great to actually meet him in person and see what a great difference the education has made for him.

Caulfield South Primary School

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:46): Speaking of education, I also want to give a shout-out to new principal Rohan Cooper at Caulfield South Primary School. We have been advocating for a while to get some stability at the school with a new principal, and we wish Rohan Cooper all the best.

Cystic Fibrosis Community Care

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:47): Finally, it is not often that you get roses, but I was very fortunate to receive a bunch from Lisa Silver from Cystic Fibrosis Community Care. They do a fantastic job. They are located in Carnegie in my electorate. And particularly during National Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Month, the cystic fibrosis campaign since 1965 has been doing a fantastic job raising awareness for the cause, and I thank them for their work.

St Albans electorate teachers

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (10:47): I rise today to thank the incredible teachers in my electorate of St Albans, and in particular I would like to congratulate a number of teachers who have received recognition for their long-serving careers. Congratulations on 40 years of service to Sally Jones and Ian Young from St Albans North Primary School, Kenneth Griffiths from St Albans Heights Primary School, Leanne Johnstone from St Albans Meadows Primary School and Ian Narracott from Cairnlea Park Primary School. And finally, a big congratulations on 55 years of service to Steve Crockford. Steve is the principal at St Albans Meadows Primary School. He is passionate and dedicated to the public education system. Of course combined there are 255 years of service.

We are absolutely indebted to our school teachers and principals in the electorate of St Albans. They have dedicated their time, their passion and their commitment to making sure that our little learners get the best start and to shaping generations of young people. The Andrews Labor government will always support our teachers and our school community, because we know how integral they are to our

communities and, most importantly, to the students' journey. I thank all of the teachers, in particular those who have served for many, many years, for their service.

Merriwa Grove

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:49): I recently became aware of the Victorian government's decision to close down Merriwa Grove in Cobram. Merriwa Grove is an accommodation centre for men with varying mental health needs. Families of some of the 20 men who call Merriwa Grove home have begun to contact me. They are very anxious, and they are very concerned about the welfare and the future of their loved ones. The question that urgently needs answering is: what are the plans for the accommodation moving forward? My understanding is that the staff have been given termination letters from 27 June, just around the corner – so this is real; this is really happening – and clients have been told they have till 30 June to move on.

I met last week with a service provider who is prepared to take over the lease and prepared to manage Merriwa Grove for six months or longer to give an opportunity in an appropriate time frame to cater for the transition of these clients. This has been dumped on residents at very short notice, and I am extremely disappointed that the Victorian government has tried, under the cover of darkness, to close this much-needed accommodation down. These men need certainty in their lives, not the rug pulled out from under them, and I am concerned that the government for Melbourne talks the talk about supporting mental health, but they need to be up-front and talk to us about what their plans are to close this down – or rebuild or whatever they are going to do, but at least talk to us and communicate with the clients and their families rather than having closure by stealth. It is another example of the government saying one thing in Melbourne and doing the complete opposite in the regions. We want some answers now.

Ashwood electorate schools

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (10:50): It was great to welcome the Premier down to Ashwood High School a couple of weeks ago when we had a look at the fantastic new STEAM and research centre that is nearing completion. A huge thanks and shout-out to principal Dr Brett Moore, assistant principal Meg McLellan and executive assistant Donna Mineo, as well as the terrific student captains Sebastian Millan, Carol Yuan and Stephanie Millan for showing us around. I was delighted to drop into some of the classrooms with the Premier and see all the hard work the students are doing. That school is really a testament to the work that our teachers and our hardworking education staff do every day.

While on the topic of my local schools I also want to acknowledge the fantastic work our youth advisory committee is doing. The Ashwood youth advisory program is an initiative we started last year for the Mount Waverley electorate and have continued this year. The committee is made up of a terrific group of students from schools across the electorate, including Ashwood High School, Mount Waverley Secondary College, Salesian College, Avila College and Huntingtower School. I would also like to acknowledge the 13 students on the committee: Lily Shields, Melita Davis, Tharul Perera, Daniel Liang, Jocelyn Seager, Stanley Lu, Thomas Maguire-Nguyen, Abel Ebi Joseph, Yunai Lutfi, Fatema Sajid, Wesley Pryor, Sarika Pandher and Jagraj Pandher. It was a pleasure to meet with them, and I tell you what: the future is bright when these kids come and take over the office – and we can listen to a lot they say.

Country Fire Authority Yea brigade

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:52): A lot was happening in Yea at the turn of the previous century. The Yea CFA was established in 1901 and has continued to support the community in so many ways. Although 20-odd years late, I was delighted to present the centenary plaque to the brigade captain Stephen Bennett at their awards dinner on Saturday night. John Aldous, a long-time friend, was awarded CFA life membership and 40 years service. Steve Bennett was also awarded life membership and 30 years service. Mick Wern was recognised with his 55 years service, and I am really not sure I believe that because he cannot be that old – but then maybe he is. Corey Bennett, a young member of

five years, was awarded CFA firefighter of the year for a bunch of reasons, including having attended a number of training programs. Great job, Corey. Ray Allen and Ian Byrne posthumously received an upgrade to their standing service awards. It was great to have their families in attendance.

Yea bowls club

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:53): Having identified the need for a green, on 29 October 1898 the Yea bowls committee was formed, land was given by the shire to develop a green and things were off and running. By 1900 the club was well away, with ladies officially being admitted to play by 1919, although they already were. I was disappointed I could not attend the celebratory event for their 125th year, which followed the President's Cup. The club's history on their centenary was put together by Anthony McCarthy and Muriel Perry, and that has now been updated accordingly. It is a lot of effort to keep a club going for so long, and I congratulate all for their work.

Kooweerup Regional Health Service

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (10:53): We came from near and far to celebrate the centenary of Kooweerup Regional Health Service. The day brought insight into the history, beginning as the fallen soldiers memorial hospital, the journey, the service iterations, the challenges along the way, the myriad of programs and their reach – early parenting, community midwifery, youth hub, primary and community care programs, residential aged care, acute care and respite. The reach into the community through prevention and early intervention services is extraordinary as well. Connections abound – it is a fibrous network of golden threads. So much more than a service, it is the absolute beating heart of Kooweerup and district. The amazing staff and volunteers are gold – professional, dedicated, hardworking, visionary, socially minded, compassionate, active and super caring, who at their core want us to be well, healthy, supported, connected, nurtured and strong. Thank you – you have navigated us through some of the most challenging times in our history and continue to provide excellent care to patients, clients, participants, their families and our community. A big yay to the organising committee, who have truly excelled; CEO Noni Bourke and her remarkable team; board chair Patrick Nolan and members; the ladies auxiliary, volunteers extraordinaire; the men's shedders; the youth hub crew; students from the secondary college band; the myriad of supporters; and the very chatty MC Gary King. It was a highlight to meet Dr Hewitt, who has delivered so many babies and is a local icon. The service and all within are highly regarded, remarkably respected, trusted and loved. (*Time expired*)

Polwarth electorate public housing

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (10:55): I rise again in the house this morning to raise the parlous state of public housing, the management of public housing and the way that we treat some of the most vulnerable families and people in the state of Victoria. I refer specifically to my own electorate of Polwarth, where I received distressed phone calls yesterday from community housing workers at the local neighbourhood house and other places, reporting to me that the housing services in my community of Colac Otway are now by phone – they are only available for people if they book online and if they are prepared to wait 2 or more hours on a phone. This means that for the 356 government housing properties in the Colac region, the most vulnerable people, who often do not have access to the internet or a mobile phone, are left having to go and seek support from the local library, the local community house, the Salvos and others in order to book an appointment just so that they can raise issues, such as safety issues in their own home, the availability of hot water and heating and other basic essential services. There is almost zero coverage now in my electorate to look after people who are in the most vulnerable state. This is a terrible situation. It comes on top of the fact that this is a government that claims to have an ambition of 12,000 new public housing houses, but after three years it has only delivered 74 homes to the people of Victoria.

William 'Bill' Ford

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:56): I rise with sadness to acknowledge the life of William 'Bill' Thomas Ford, president of the Monbulk RSL sub-branch, who passed away suddenly on 7 May

2023. A much-loved grandfather, father to Michael, Steven and Jeff, and devoted husband to Sue, who passed in 2017, Bill was the true embodiment of community spirit, going out of his way to assist others in need. He enlisted in the Australian Army in 1969 and served as a nurse and then assistant medical instructor. Upon his discharge in 1975, Bill worked as a theatre nurse and then in medical sales. He eventually gave up full-time work to care for his terminally ill wife Sue. Upon Sue's passing, Bill devoted himself to the RSL, ensuring he was always available to help those who needed his support. A true gentleman, Bill's sharp wit and dry humour made every conversation with him entertaining and interesting. At his memorial service many recounted Bill's generosity with his time and skills for anyone needing support. From fighting the Ash Wednesday fires to saving his next-door neighbour's life to comforting the bereaved when they had lost their loved ones, Bill was a pillar of the Monbulk community. During the storms of June 2021, Bill worked tirelessly through the night and days that followed with the Monbulk Emergency Management Group, keeping those without power and damaged homes warm, fed and safe. He was often found volunteering at Monbulk's Open Door Pantry emergency food relief service, also assisting anyone needing dietary or health advice. Medicine, health and caring were clearly Bill's life calling. Vale, William 'Bill' Ford. Thank you for all you did for your community. You will be missed by so many.

Aunty Faye Lynam

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (10:58): I rise today to pay tribute to my very special friend, elder Aunty Faye Lynam, a wonderful Yorta Yorta woman, who sadly passed away on 12 May. It is a great loss to our community. Aunty Faye dedicated her life to better health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal communities, not only making a difference locally but also across the state. For over 30 years Aunty Faye was a foster carer to many children who came in and out of the youth justice and child protection services. She sat on numerous boards and was an adviser on youth justice issues that impacted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth. Aunty Faye was a tireless advocate for the rights and wellbeing of Aboriginal people and her contributions were immeasurable. She was there for all of the community, regardless of race, culture, faith or circumstance.

Aunty Faye was from the stolen generations. She shared her heartache, the trauma and the tragic circumstances she had faced. Her strength, courage and her determination to make a difference inspires me every single day. We became very close friends, and we loved to spend time together. She had a profound impact on me. Like many, I will miss her love, warmth, affection, kindness, her words of wisdom and encouragement and her infectious laugh. 'Go for it, my darling,' she would say, 'I am so very proud of you.' Aunty Faye was loved by so many in the community. She was well known and so respected. She was always so proud to do her welcome to country. That is something I know will be sorely missed. She was a loving wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, and my thoughts are with her husband Uncle Greg.

Armstrong Creek aquatic centre

Darren CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (10:59): The Liberals want to deny families in Armstrong Creek an indoor, all-year-round aquatic centre. Victorians love their sport, and that is why this government is getting on with delivering the first ever regional Commonwealth Games. Nine sports will be hosted in the Geelong region in 2026, including aquatics. We are building three outdoor pools in Armstrong Creek for the games. After the games they will be transformed into an indoor aquatic centre, multisport courts and green open space. Before the election the Liberals wanted to deny my community of Armstrong Creek any swimming pool at all. Now they want to deny families an all-year-round, indoor community pool as a part of the games legacy. The council already decided to close the outdoor pool at Kardinia Park during the winter months, seemingly because of the cost to heat it every day. Now the Liberals want to saddle the council with the expense of maintaining three additional outdoor pools in Armstrong Creek, leaving families out in the cold during Geelong's cold winter. No-one develops a love for swimming while shivering. We will not let this happen. Armstrong Creek's families deserve an indoor, all-year-round swimming pool. They deserve it, and we will deliver it.

St Joseph's School, Sorrento

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (11:01): I recently had the pleasure of speaking to students at St Joseph's primary in Sorrento. I spoke to the 3, 4, 5 and 6 year levels on their topic, 'This term of change'. Previously in term 1 students had been asked to explore the theme of participation, especially when it comes to service in their community. I was pleased to join these impressive young locals to discuss how we can effect change through this place and the varied professional experience I have had through my life. I want to thank their principal Monica O'Shannassy for welcoming me to her wonderful school.

Mornington Peninsula citizenship ceremony

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (11:01): I recently had the opportunity to join other representatives from the Mornington Peninsula, including the member for Mornington, in welcoming our newest Australian citizens. This was an exciting time for many families who were formalising a longstanding and dedicated commitment to making Australia their home. I want to congratulate our new Australians and welcome them to our community.

Southern Peninsula Youth Hub

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (11:02): Last week I had the opportunity to see the construction and to inspect ongoing works at the Southern Peninsula Youth Hub, which will be located at Olympic Park Reserve in Rosebud. The hub will include mental health support, Indigenous support and programs, LGBTQI+ support and programs, youth leadership and support services, employment and education assistance, recreation and art spaces, classrooms, meeting spaces and workspaces. I look forward to seeing the progress of this important project for the southern peninsula.

McKinnon Secondary College

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (11:02): It was a real treat recently to see McKinnon Secondary College's year 12 theatre studies production of Mary Zimmerman's *The Secret in the Wings*. The subject matter was at times a bit heavy and at times a bit quirky, so it took a lot of skill for the students to present, but each and every one of them succeeded with flying colours and delivered compelling performances. Congratulations to students Ashley Blutman, Lani Hammam, Yvette Lipovetsky, Lena O'Hanlon, Bella Rubenstein, Aziz Sharipov, Hugo Tran, Tom Wever, Meirav Berger and Stefanie Panagiotopoulos; a big shout-out to the staff who were supporting them, production coordinator and director Lucy Angell and AV technician Michael Birkett; and another big shout-out to year 11 student Lulu Elliott, who operated the lighting. Congratulations to everyone on an amazing production.

As members of this house have heard me say many times in the past, McKinnon Secondary College is an outstanding school which I am proud is in my electorate of Bentleigh. It has been well supported by our government over the years, with the construction of the senior school centre at the main campus and then the stunning new east campus, which really has marked the next, exciting chapter in McKinnon's continuing history, now under the leadership of new principal Michael Kan. I look forward to continuing my work with McKinnon and all the schools in the Bentleigh electorate to ensure that students have a first-class education.

Richmond electorate public housing

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (11:04): Right now in my electorate of Richmond dozens of newly refurbished public homes in the Atherton Gardens, Collingwood and North Richmond public housing towers are sitting empty. Some residents have told me that some of those apartments were renovated in 2019 and have been empty ever since. On some floors five out of 10 apartments have been sitting empty, and there is a whole block of public homes that are empty on Egan Street in Richmond. We are in the worst housing crisis in our lifetime. Right now there are 120,000 people in Victoria desperate for a public home, but this government has abandoned public housing. Their plan is to demolish 1100 public homes and their plan is to build a total of zero new public homes.

If this government was serious about housing people in need, it would not allow refurbished homes to sit empty while people sleep on the streets. It raises some really serious questions about this government's plan for public housing. What is this government's plan with these vacant homes? Why are they sitting empty in the midst of the worst housing crisis in our lifetime? And is this government's plan to slowly get rid of public housing tenants and hand the land over to private developers, like they have done time and time again?

Janette 'Jan' Mary Kennedy

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (11:05): I would like to take this opportunity to celebrate the life of Janette Mary Kennedy, Jan to all her friends and comrades, who, sadly, passed away last Friday. The saying goes that behind every good man is a great woman, and nothing could be truer than that of the wife of Cyril Kennedy, a past member for Waverley in the other place. Jan was a force to be reckoned with. She was always a voice for the marginalised, the weak and the unloved and would always have her voice heard. Jan was a community-minded woman with a passion for social justice. Jan started her career as a nurse and was a proud trade unionist, joining at the age of 17. She spent her career working in the health sector as a maternal and child health nurse, looking after the newest babies in the east.

Jan, with other volunteers, founded the Waverley Community Health Centre in 1975 to provide counselling services to those who needed it in the community. She stayed involved and on the board of management for many years. Waverley Community Health Centre grew and became Link Health and Community, a service that currently operates in the eastern suburbs. She was Labor's candidate for the seat of Bennettswood at the 1992 state election. She was passionate about advancing the rights of women, both within the party and more broadly in our society.

I was fortunate to meet Jan when I attended my first ALP branch meeting at Waverley West back in 2012. Jan was always there with great advice and encouragement, and she was always committed to the cause. Jan contributed so much to our community, especially in the spaces of community health and women's rights. The legacy of her hard work will continue, and Jan will be missed by all. Vale, Jan Kennedy.

Committee for Gippsland

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (11:07): Recently I met with Committee for Gippsland CEO Tony Cantwell to hear about the advocacy priorities in Gippsland they are working on for our communities. With Gippsland due to reach 346,000 people by 2036, we need a project delivered to support growth, jobs and opportunity. The Committee for Gippsland are working to leverage our greatest strengths – our agriculture and primary production sector and our highly skilled workforce – to ensure that we have the best opportunity to meet the challenges ahead. Gippsland produces more than \$15 billion in gross regional product, including more than 1.9 billion litres of milk, annually. They know we need projects like the new West Gippsland Hospital delivered, upgraded intersections in Drouin and Warragul, better roads in Trafalgar and Yarragon for our heavy vehicles, and real jobs in West Gippsland and the Latrobe Valley – like in our timber sector, which is so vital but is now decimated. Thank you to the Committee for Gippsland and Tony for hosting my national colleagues and me. I look forward to continuing to work with Tony and his team.

Presto electorate LGBTIQ+ health services

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (11:08): I rise to update the house on some important work being done in the Preston electorate through the transgender and gender-diverse people in community health initiative. This initiative is funded by the Victorian Labor government, and it has three key components. Firstly, it provides specialist health services directly to trans and gender-diverse Victorians through two clinics – one operated by Ballarat Community Health and one operated in Reservoir by our local Your Community Health. Secondly, it runs a statewide training program through Thorne Harbour Health that increases the capability of GPs and other healthcare professionals

across the state to provide safe and inclusive gender-affirmative care. And finally, it provides a peer navigation service that helps clients get the care they need and ensures that the program as a whole is led by and co-designed with our trans and gender-diverse community.

The Minister for Health and I recently joined the team in Reservoir to hear directly about their work, which has included thousands of appointments across primary care, counselling and peer navigation and hundreds of specialist appointments through their partners at Austin Health. I would like to thank Kent Burgess, Keira Leike and Professor Jeffrey Zajac for their leadership of the program. I understand that the minister knows Professor Zajac well from up her way. I would like to thank the peer navigators and note that the team do their great work in a very challenging environment in which demand continues to exceed supply and in which historic discrimination and current discrimination continue to affect health outcomes for trans and gender-diverse Victorians.

Sunbury electorate infrastructure

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (11:10): I am absolutely delighted that this government is getting on with our commitment to building the Sunbury multideck car park. Major construction of this outstanding project will begin on 20 June. This is a critical and important project for my community and for the Sunbury town centre. It is a partnership between local, state and federal governments. What it will do is of course provide more parking for shoppers, for traders and for commuters. This is a project that we have been planning for quite some time now, and it is a critically important project to make sure that the Sunbury town centre continues to grow, to thrive and to develop.

Speaking of thriving and developing, I am delighted of course that we are making significant progress with the Sunbury Road duplication project. This is about a safer, less congested major arterial road. We are adding additional lanes, a shared user path, signalised intersections and a whole lot more to improve safety and ensure that we are able to get the local community home safer and sooner. It builds upon this government's strong and proud record of delivery in schools, community facilities and sporting precincts as well. We will continue, as we have always done, to get on and get things done.

Jin Hamza

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (11:11): Jin Hamza, a year 10 student at Lalor North Secondary College, recently completed work experience with me. I would like to read out her insights, albeit an edited version due to the standing orders time limits.

'As a young person, I always dreamed of experiencing what it would be like to enter parliament and meet influential figures. It seemed like an unattainable goal. However, through my work experience I have seen the inner workings of an electorate office and Parliament. I had the privilege of meeting both the Premier of Victoria and the Minister for Education.

'What struck me the most during my time in parliament was the welcoming atmosphere that made me feel valued and listened to. During my work experience, I had the opportunity to ask numerous questions to Lara, Bronwyn's adviser. However, Lara never made me feel as though I was asking too much. On the contrary, she appeared delighted that I displayed an interest in such matters. As I left Parliament at the end of the day, I didn't depart empty-handed. Instead, I carried home a wealth of intriguing information that I eagerly shared with my family.

'One captivating and memorable aspect I have learned and deeply appreciated is the remarkable level of freedom enjoyed in Australia. Having come from Syria, a country where freedom and democracy were non-existent, it is truly remarkable to witness the abundance of freedoms available in Australia.

'My time spent in Bronwyn's office was an eye-opening experience. I was given a diverse range of responsibilities, allowing me to acquire valuable skills and personal growth. I thank Korey for his guidance and making me feel comfortable. I learned how to cultivate confidence and improve my socialising abilities. Furthermore, my exposure to the inner workings of politics provided a unique perspective.' *(Time expired)*

Exford Primary School bus crash

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (11:13): At approximately 3:45 pm two weeks ago today the Exford school bus, carrying 45 children and a bus driver, was involved in an accident with a truck in Eynesbury. All the kids were from Exford Primary School. Fourteen students and the bus driver were transported to hospital with serious, traumatic injuries. The other kids were treated at the scene. Four children remain in hospital today. I want to extend my thanks to the bystanders, some passing tradies, for supporting and removing many kids from the bus. The Exford school principal Lisa Campo and assistant principal Craig Wilson and all the staff went into action immediately. They were amazing. To Phillip Coloca, principal at Eynesbury Primary School, and his staff that supported at the scene, thank you. Of course to all the parents and families that arrived to assist and support and continue to deal with such a traumatic event, our thoughts and wishes are with you. To our amazing first responders – police, fire, SES and ambos – thank you very much. To all the hospital staff at the Royal Children's and Sunshine hospitals, thank you. For all the support from the respected agencies, the surrounding schools and of course the Melton communities in fundraising, providing food, clothing, flowers and gifts, thank you very much. A special mention to Superintendent Michael Cruse for his calmness, leadership and professionalism: thank you.

It was great to go out to Exford Primary School last Friday with the Premier and the Minister for Education just to share some time with the amazing school community. Finally, to Lisa, Craig, teachers, support staff, students and families of Exford Primary School, our thoughts and support will always be with you. Take care.

Reimagining Your Moonee Ponds Creek project

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (11:14): I rise today to update the house on the progress of the Reimagining Your Moonee Ponds Creek project. Representing Minister Shing and Minister Pearson, the member for Pascoe Vale and I joined the mayors of Merri-bek and Moonee Valley along with Wurundjeri elder Uncle Andrew Gardiner and representatives of Melbourne Water and Greater Western Water to plant the first of 40,000 new shrubs along the banks of the creek bed earlier this month. Once a concrete drain, this part of the creek between Oak Park and Strathmore is being restored to a natural state, giving us a cooler and healthier environment where native animals and biodiversity will be able to thrive.

The project will also deliver more open space, improved paths for cyclists and walkers and a new bridge to improve active transport connections in the area. This \$10 million project showcases the transformation that can be achieved when agencies and levels of government work together and listen to local communities. I thank the Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek for their dedication, work and advocacy over so many years, which have transformed this beautiful place. The creek holds a special place in my heart: it is where we played as kids, and I love taking my kids there now. It is an important space for habitat and biodiversity and a significant cultural place for our First People. Only Labor is doing what matters. It will introduce planning controls on 12 key rivers and creeks, including Merri Creek and Moonee Ponds Creek, and a Green Links fund to support revegetation, create wildlife corridors, restore the natural environment and protect our precious waterways for generations to come.

*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*

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (11:16): I rise today to speak on the Integrity and Oversight Committee's report, *The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate*. Today I would like to refer in particular to the excellent minority report within that overall report and commend my colleagues the Deputy Chair and member for Sandringham and the member for Rowville on this minority report, which is quite telling and quite important.

This committee, on behalf of the Parliament – the Integrity and Oversight Committee (IOC), which I will refer to as ‘the committee’ – are required to appoint an independent auditor to conduct a performance audit of Victoria's integrity agencies at least every four years. However, this minority report notes that this is the first performance audit of its kind in Victoria. Now, in compliance with the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission – or IBAC – Act 2011 and the Victorian Inspectorate Act 2011, the performance auditor is required to determine whether these agencies are achieving the objectives effectively, economically and efficiently. This minority report reveals and seeks to disclose some of the significant challenges throughout the performance audit process. Indeed there were two reasons why this minority report was tabled, and it is really that the adoption of the performance audits was particularly challenging. The first is the inability of the performance auditor to do what the law and the committee required, and second, the inadequate legislative framework that underpins the performance audit process. This report really demonstrates – and it is so important and so vital because, principally, there was a misrepresentation of the auditor's capacity to undertake the audit – that their final reports contained in the majority report are not independent.

Now, in the context of this committee process leading into this inquiry it is important and worthwhile to note that the make-up of the parliamentary committee, the IOC, was dominated by members of the Andrews Labor government and that their conduct throughout was particularly unbecoming and really questionable. This is precisely why this minority report exists. Indeed this gave rise to the extraordinary and explosive letter sent by outgoing IBAC Commissioner Robert Redlich, former Justice the Honourable Robert Redlich. He wrote to the Speaker and the President of this Parliament accusing the Andrews Labor government of revenge attacks. Robert Redlich wrote to the Parliament's Presiding Officers in December last year, raising serious concerns about potential misconduct of Andrews Labor government MPs. In his commentary, Robert Redlich noted:

What is most concerning is that it appears that the Chair and majority of the IOC Audit Sub-Committee seemed intent on casting IBAC in a negative light for what we can only assume were political reasons relating to the work undertaken by IBAC.

Mr Redlich also alleged that members of the Integrity and Oversight Committee, presumably Labor members, had leaked to the media to gain some political advantage. This is astonishing and shocking. It is wrong. I quote Mr Redlich further:

These leaks seem designed to put IBAC in an invidious position as they often relate to confidential operational matters to which IBAC is not able to publicly respond. This ongoing problem has meant that IBAC must be quite selective as to what it can disclose to the IOC ...

This was an extraordinary letter sent by the former head of IBAC to the Parliament. It obviously was intended for all members of the Parliament and indeed the public to see. It is extraordinary that so far it has been kept secret, although it was leaked to the media, so the public has been able to see that there are significant scrutiny and integrity issues in the Andrews Labor government. What are they hiding, and why are they so intent on hamstringing the oversight and integrity bodies of this state? It is wrong, and it should change.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee*Report on the Appointment of a Person to Conduct the Financial Audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office*

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (11:21): I am very happy to speak on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's *Report on the Appointment of a Person to Conduct the Financial Audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office*. We know that this role particularly is one of the very important checks and balances in Parliament. Certainly we expect, and there are, elements in place to ensure the appropriate rigour with the undertaking of this role. As a former member of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, I understand the weight of responsibility. Obviously this committee has a number of statutory responsibilities, including this particular appointment. I should thank all the members of the committee for their hard work in this process, because I know that it has to be done very carefully, but also I would like to thank the secretariat – Dr Caroline Williams, executive officer; Dr Krystle Gatt Rapa, lead analyst, public accounts and audit, and Jacqueline Coleman, administrative officer – because I know that it is also very important to make sure that the reporting process is done in an expedient way and a thorough way.

When we look at the parameters here, I know that the committee has to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest. There are many other elements as well, but I am just pointing out some of the most perhaps significant ones that one would be concerned about making sure are taken seriously and adhered to. In terms of the selection process, we can see on 3 February 2020 the committee commenced a public tender process to appoint an independent auditor to undertake the financial audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office. PKF's tender was successful, as set out in the committee's report 126, tabled on 23 April 2020. But anyway, that is just to ensure that, as you can see, appropriate governance, checks and balances are undertaken and that public tender process is adhered to.

Further, when we look at the purpose of the financial auditor's role as specified in the proposed contract, the independent financial auditor's role will be to conduct an audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office's financial statements in the 2023–24 financial year, review and provide an audit opinion on VAGO's performance statement, and form an opinion as to whether the financial statements of VAGO present fairly the financial position of the office as at the end of the financial year and its financial performance and cash flows for the financial year in accordance with applicable accounting standards and other mandatory professional reporting requirements. I could go on there, but I am just giving the chamber a sense of the incredibly important elements of the financial auditor's role. Further to this, there are expectations which must be adhered to in terms of the time lines and key deliverables. For instance, prior to the commencement of the financial audit the independent auditor must provide an audit plan to the committee and VAGO for comment, preferably by 1 July 2024. These elements must be strictly adhered to for obvious reasons when we are looking at the management of funds and the objectivity with which they are evaluated as part of the parliamentary process as well.

In coming to the recommendation I should also say, because that is perhaps the core element of this report, the committee recommends that:

In accordance with section 79 of the *Audit Act 1994* (Vic), the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly appoint Mr Kenneth Weldin of PKF Melbourne Audit and Assurance for a period of 12 months:

to conduct the financial audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office for the financial year ending 30 June 2024;

in accordance with the Agreement for the Provision of Services for the Financial Audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office ...

and there is a fixed fee remuneration which is contained in the report as well. I know it is easy in the busy passage of parliamentary processes sometimes for these elements which may seem a little on the drier end of the scale to be overlooked, but I think it is very important for us to pay due attention to them in this chamber and to be sure that the correct processes have been undertaken. I believe that we

can see by the manner in which this report has been delivered – on the balance of probabilities I would say – that those recommendations have been adhered to, and in fact we see a quality report in front of the chamber. So on that note I thank you.

Integrity and Oversight Committee

The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (11:26): I am delighted to rise and contribute on *The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate*. Like my colleague the member for Evelyn I also want to focus on the minority report because as we know, with corruption at an all-time high, it is certainly more important than ever to ensure that performance audits and independent opportunities are accurate and represent the proper findings of what is going into these reports. Continued interference with the auditor and the appointment and the ability of the auditor to do their job should be a massive concern to all Victorians, and this minority report has certainly drawn those things out.

There is not a day that goes by that this government is not exposed to yet another scandal or embroiled in a mess, whether it was red shirts way back when, when the government admitted to roting, or in the 58th Parliament when the Speaker and Deputy Speaker disgraced themselves with their second residence allowance that did not even exist. More recently we have seen contract procurement rorts into the Health Education Federation. They were awarded a contract with ‘favourable treatment’ or ‘privileged access’. So these examples remind us that the anti-corruption bodies must be allowed to be free and unimpeded to access and obtain information and expose the corruption and recommend sanctions and refer individuals to the police. The report shows, and I quote from the report:

In March 2022, the Chair of the Committee received a letter from Paul Allen, Partner at Callida ...

who was the auditor.

Mr Allen referenced several issues such as the auditor’s inability to attend on-site visits, the departure of key staff who possessed requisite legal knowledge and their difficulties accessing operational information. Mr Allen concluded:

We believe the constraints raised by IBAC and the VI –
the Victorian Inspectorate –

make it highly improbable that we will be able to obtain sufficient appropriate evidence to enable a reasonable assurance audit conclusion to be provided, for all audit criteria.

This is a polite way of saying they were blocked from doing their job. We know what happens with people who do petty crime, criminals who start shoplifting early. If it goes unchecked, it gets worse and worse and worse. As I say, we first saw the red shirts and the money got handed back, so there was that admission there. Then there was the hotel quarantine, where they did not recall what took place. Now this week we see the Premier-in-waiting, the Deputy Premier, is now overseeing these ghost shifts that never actually existed. Workers are getting paid two or three shifts a day. Let us hope that we get to the bottom of this corruption and this scandal; that is why we have IBAC, that is why we have these bodies to try make sure that we can get to the bottom of what actually goes on.

This minority report demonstrates conclusively that the more corruption that is allowed to go on, the more corruption is accepted. In the words of the Premier, ‘The standard you walk past is the standard you accept.’ Clearly this report demonstrates that the whole Andrews government is happy to walk past this behaviour. Also in the report:

On Thursday 6 October 2022, the Chair of the Subcommittee issued an email to the auditor instructing them to act in a particular way. Dustin Halse MP wrote to the auditor expressing the “Committee’s clear directions to Callida”.

This is quite astonishing further interference that is going on in directing the auditor. Also in the conclusion it says:

It is important to reiterate that the purpose of writing this Minority Report is to contextualise the process of the performance audit.

This goes to the heart of the scandals that we have seen and other scandals that will be seen going forward. I certainly see the wheels are starting to get shaky on that big red bus.

Emma Kealy: Hit a pothole.

Tim McCURDY: Yes, I think it might have hit a pothole, member for Lowan, and it might need a realignment. But when we look at the auditors and these reports, Victoria certainly does deserve better.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the Appointment of a Person to Conduct the Financial Audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (11:31): I am surprised that those opposite have not been talking about the *Report on the Appointment of a Person to Conduct the Financial Audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office*, because this important paper which has been presented to the Parliament is about who audits the auditors. It is a great question: who audits the auditors in Victoria? Well, I can tell you it is Mr Kenneth Weldin from PKF Melbourne audit and assurance for at least a period of 12 months following the 30 June 2024 Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) report.

I am so pleased to speak on a report which has been delivered in this year and this Parliament. This report was of course delivered this month, in May of 2023, and it was delivered by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. I would like to thank the chair of the committee Sarah Connolly, the member for Laverton, for her work; the deputy chair, who always holds us to account, Nicholas McGowan from the other place, North-Eastern Metropolitan Region; Michael Galea of the other place; Acting Speaker Hamer, you get a gig on PAEC as well, and I thank you for your efforts and contributions in this space, always; the member for Yan Yean, my Labor colleague, who sits next to me; Bev McArthur, who has been making waves all across the media recently, from the other place, in Western Victoria; Danny O'Brien, who I am sad not to see in the chamber at the moment, is always a contributor on the committee; and Dr Tim Read is mentioned in this report but has recently left this committee and been replaced by Ellen Sandell, the member for Melbourne. I see the chair of PAEC walk into the chamber right now, and I hope you appreciate the contribution that I am making on this very important report on the *Appointment of a Person to Conduct the Financial Audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office*. Welcome, member for Laverton.

Of course PAEC has statutory obligations. One of its responsibilities is the appointment of the auditor to conduct these financial audits of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office. Parliament relies on the important information that the Auditor-General provides, but we need to make sure that the accounts are right in that office. Members here will be very excited – and if anyone is watching at home, I know they will watch the PAEC hearings coming up this Friday – to learn everything we can about the budget that has been presented this year.

The secretariat for PAEC do an amazing job. Dr Caroline Williams, the executive officer, is always there to provide terrific advice and, in these circumstances, help to identify appropriate people to undertake the audit. Dr Krystle Gatt Rapa is the lead analyst, public accounts and audit; and Jacqueline Coleman is our administrative officer. But there are so many other people within the parliamentary staff that do a fantastic job on making sure we get the right information, and then we can present these great findings to the Parliament. I want to thank the previous financial auditor Mr Steven Bradby, also an audit partner at PKF Melbourne, who undertook the role from 2019 to 2023, so up until the end of this financial year. That means that they have done a fantastic job in being reappointed for this role for 12 months under a new auditor from the same company.

There are a number of matters that they must attend to, including meeting the Australian auditing standards and professional reporting guidelines. They must comply with the Audit Act 1994 in Victoria. They must also comply with the relevant compliance obligations of the standing directions of the Minister for Finance from 2018. The auditor will meet with the VAGO staff and the VAGO audit committee to discuss, clarify and ensure that they can resolve any issues or findings in an early and timely manner.

Unfortunately, I am almost running out of time. I would like to speak on this important topic for so much longer than I have the opportunity to, because 5 minutes is really too limited a period of time to talk about the audit of the auditors. Of course this report will be tabled –

James Newbury: Extend his time.

Mathew HILAKARI: Extend time – that is so generous, member for Brighton, across on the other side of the benches. Of course this audit will be tabled on 14 August 2024, but there are a number of points before that time where hurdles must be met. Acting Speaker Hamer, I know you and I will be so excited to read the report on the Auditor-General's office in the upcoming years. I thank the house.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Report on the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (11:36): I rise to again make a contribution on committee reports. I have previously spoken on Integrity and Oversight Committee reports, so today I want to in particular focus on the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee's *Report on the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022* but will also cover off some more points on these integrity reports. I would just like to begin by outlining the importance of the work done by the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, which plays such an important role in our democracy in ensuring that Victorian legislation complies with the rights and freedoms that we all enjoy in Victoria.

As raised previously by the member for Sandringham, the government brought forth the bill while the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee were still reviewing and inquiring into the bill. Conventionally it is the case that parliamentary counsel appears before the committee and certifies that there is nothing irregular with the bill that would encroach upon rights or freedoms in the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and other matters. While the subject matter within the bill – now an act, having gone through both houses and been given royal assent on 9 May – is largely administrative, making minor and technical amendments to a number of acts, and parliamentary counsel did indeed provide a certificate to the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee on the bill before it was considered, it is nevertheless interesting how the bill was brought forth for debate without the full scrutiny of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I do not want to make a mountain out of a molehill, but it seems important to me that this now act, in its bill stage, should have been fully scrutinised before it was put forth to Parliament to ensure that our rights are protected.

On rights, cutting across to the integrity reports, I must also note that the 2023–24 Victorian budget last week revealed funding cuts to the Parliamentary Budget Office, the Auditor-General, the Victorian Inspectorate and the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner, showing a government hell-bent on starving independent integrity agencies of proper funding – independent agencies that have been a thorn in the Premier's side for years.

Delving deeper into this report on the Statute Law Amendment Bill, indeed the now Statute Law Amendment Act makes minor amendments to the Housing Act 1983. On this point, I want to reflect on the housing crisis in my electorate of Mornington and across Victoria as it relates to the Housing Act. The committee made a number of recommendations for amendments to the Housing Act 1983, listed in items 3.1 and 3.4 of schedule 1 of the Statute Law Amendment Bill. They were administrative – minor revisions and amendment recommendations – but important nevertheless. More broadly, the Housing Act talks about issues and changes in terms of Homes Victoria and about creating housing stock.

On the Housing Act, public housing and homelessness are a major issue in my electorate of Mornington and on the peninsula. Since the Premier first formed government over eight years ago, the number of public housing homes available on the Mornington Peninsula has actually gone backwards, with a net change of minus 13, with homes sitting vacant or being sold. To top that off, this Labor government are now planning to increase land tax for 860,000 Victorians, including many mum-and-dad investors. These increasing costs will undoubtedly be passed through to renters, so it is effectively a renters tax. Alternatively, many mums and dads already dealing with mortgages and many other costs may be forced to sell their rentals. Once they do so there is no guarantee these properties will stay as rentals, so we may have reduced rental stock, thus further putting pressure on renters. And a rental cap or freeze will not resolve this. This will push mum-and-dad investors even more into a position of having to sell, given all the costs they are already dealing with and the sacrifices they have made in the past – for example, through COVID-19 – in reducing rents for their tenants.

Recently, I also joined many locals at the Peninsula Voice forum in my electorate to discuss in particular ideas to resolve the ever-growing issues of housing and homelessness in Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula. It was great to see so many locals volunteering to come together to work on solutions using their experiences and ideas. There are up to 2000 people on the peninsula experiencing homelessness and over 27,000 empty or under-utilised homes, so one of the ideas I have been pushing for for years is a program to match those who can offer a home or a room with those who need one, with support for the person or family from local agencies, giving people some stable accommodation.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Report on the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (11:41): It gives me great pleasure to rise and contribute to this debate and speak on the *Report on the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022*, a report compiled by the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee (SARC), which indeed I have the absolute pleasure to be able to serve on in this Parliament. Statute law amendment bills are not necessarily the most enthralling things that we get to speak on and get to do in this place, but as the previous speaker noted, they are something that is incredibly important for making sure that legislation in this state continues to operate in the way that it should.

Firstly, I would like to just give a bit of a shout-out to the committee members. The chair, the member for Greenvale Iwan Walters, does an absolutely amazing job on SARC and, for a new member to this place, carries himself as well as I have ever seen any new member do. I would also like to acknowledge the deputy chair David Davis from the other place, who most certainly holds our government members on this committee to account in an incredibly robust fashion, I may say, which is an incredibly important function of Victoria's fantastic democracy.

I had the pleasure of speaking on this particular bill in this place, and this report has a number of key recommendations. In the other place, Jaclyn Symes, the Attorney-General, moved that the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022 be referred to SARC for an inquiry. As I said, this particular piece of legislation deals with minor amendments to several different bills, just to make sure that they continue to operate in the way that they should in Victoria's current environment. This report makes seven different recommendations, and without going through all of them in detail one by one, because I just do not have enough time to do so, essentially each recommendation includes a particular amendment to each bill. For instance, we have got the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 –

Roma Britnell: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, could we just have clarification on what is being discussed? Is this the committee report?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): Yes, it is the committee report on the Statute Law Amendment Bill, I believe.

Dylan WIGHT: Essentially the report has seven recommendations, which include a number of amendments to particular acts. And for those opposite: if you would like to read it, go ahead.

Bills

State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023

Statement of compatibility

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (11:48): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the State Taxation Acts 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 State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023.

In my opinion, the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023 (**Bill**), as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this Statement.

Overview

This Bill introduces a number of budget measures, and makes technical amendments to the *Duties Act 2000* (**Duties Act**), the *Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012* (**FSPL Act**), the *Land Tax Act 2005* (**Land Tax Act**), the *Payroll Tax Act 2007* (**Payroll Tax Act**), the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (**Planning Act**), the *Subdivision Act 1988* (**Subdivision Act**), the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* (**Taxation Administration Act**) and the *Valuation of Land Act 1960* (**Valuation of Land Act**).

Many of the amendments made by the Bill do not engage the human rights listed in the Charter because they either do not affect natural persons, or they operate beneficially in relation to natural persons.

Human rights issues

The rights under the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are recognition and equality before the law, the right to property, the right to fair hearing and the right to protection from retrospective criminal laws.

Recognition and equality before the law: section 8(3)

Section 8(3) of the Charter provides that every person is equal before the law and is entitled to the equal protection of the law without discrimination. Discrimination, under section 6 of the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*, includes discrimination on the basis of race, which is defined to include differentiation based on a person's nationality or national origin.

Clauses 27 to 33, 39 and 41 of the Bill increase the tax rate for absentee owners of land by 2% from the 2024 land tax year. Clause 39 of the Bill also lowers the tax-free threshold for absentee owners of land (other than trustees of trusts) from \$300,000 to \$50,000 from the 2024 land tax year.

The Charter implications of the original absentee owner surcharge provisions were addressed in the Statement of Compatibility accompanying the State Taxation and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2015. The Bill may engage the section 8(3) rights of natural person absentees because these amendments differentiate between taxpayers' liability on the basis of a person's nationality. However, any limitation on those rights would be reasonable and justified in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter because the amendments are directed to implementing the underlying purpose of collecting surcharge rates of land tax from absentee owners of land. Differential treatment of foreign natural persons is central to the policy intent, which is to improve housing affordability for Victorians and to fund vital infrastructure by increasing the cost of holding land for foreign persons in the Victorian residential housing market.

Right to property: section 20

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of his or her property other than in accordance with law. This right is not limited where there is a law that authorises a deprivation of property, and that law is adequately accessible, clear and certain, and sufficiently precise to enable a person to regulate their conduct.

Duties Act amendments

Division 1 of Part 2 of the Bill inserts provisions into the Duties Act to allow for the taxation of corporate collective investment vehicles (**CCIVs**) on an equivalent basis to the taxation of trusts under that Act. The right to property may be engaged by these amendments where natural persons are members of CCIV sub-funds and become liable to duty in that capacity.

Division 3 of Part 2 of the Bill replaces the current eligible pensioner exemption/concession with a new eligible cardholder exemption/concession. The right to property may be engaged by these amendments as natural persons may be required to pay duty or an increased amount of duty where currently an exemption or higher concession applies.

To the extent that people's property rights are affected by the above amendments to the Duties Act, any limit is in accordance with the law, which is clearly articulated, not arbitrary, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person taxpayers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly. Any deprivation of property arising from the payment of duty under the CCIV amendments is further justifiable since these provisions are anti-avoidance in nature.

FSPL Act amendments

Clauses 23 and 24 of the Bill contain amendments to the refund and cancellation provisions of the FSPL Act to expressly preclude refund/cancellation requests the basis for which is a ground of objection under the Valuation of Land Act. To the extent that natural persons may overpay FSPL on the basis of an incorrect valuation and do not pursue an objection under the Valuation of Land Act, the right to property may be engaged. Any deprivation of property arising from limiting the grounds on which a refund may be issued, or an FSPL assessment cancelled, is justifiable since those affected remain entitled to dispute FSPL liabilities under the Valuation of Land Act. Further, the measures are designed to prevent revenue leakage and promote certainty of revenue that funds Victoria's firefighting services.

To the extent that people's property rights are affected, any limit is in accordance with the law, which is clearly articulated, not arbitrary, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person taxpayers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly.

Land Tax Act amendments

Division 1 of Part 4 of the Bill inserts provisions into the Land Tax Act to allow for the taxation of CCIVs on an equivalent basis to the taxation of trusts under that Act. The right to property may be engaged by these amendments where natural persons are members of CCIV sub-funds and become liable to land tax in that capacity.

Clauses 27 to 32, 39 and 41 of the Bill increase the tax rate for absentee owners of land by 2% from the 2024 land tax year. Clause 39 of the Bill also lowers from the 2024 land tax year the tax-free threshold for absentee owners of land (other than trustees of trusts) from \$300,000 to \$50,000. These amendments affect natural persons who will be required to pay land tax at a higher rate, and from a lower threshold, than that which currently applies and as such the right to property may be engaged.

Clause 35 of the Bill temporarily lowers the tax-free threshold for owners of land (other than absentee owners and/or trustees of trusts) from \$300,000 to \$50,000 from the 2024 land tax year, for a period of 10 years. It also temporarily increases the rate of tax payable by those owners with total taxable land of \$300,000 or more. The right to property may be engaged as natural persons will become liable to land tax at a lower threshold where previously they were not so liable or will be required to pay land tax at a higher rate than that which currently applies.

Clauses 37 and 41 of the Bill temporarily increase the rate of land tax payable by trustees of trusts who own land with a total taxable value of \$50,000 or more from the 2024 land tax year, for a period of 10 years. The right to property may be engaged as natural persons may be required to pay land tax at a higher rate than that which currently applies.

To the extent that people's property rights are affected by the above amendments to the Land Tax Act, any limit is in accordance with the law, which is clearly articulated, not arbitrary, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person taxpayers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly. Any deprivation of property arising from the payment of land tax under the CCIV amendments is further justifiable since these provisions are anti-avoidance in nature.

Payroll Tax Act amendments

Clause 58 of the Bill corrects an omission in the Payroll Tax Act to specify the annual rate of payroll tax for the 2022–23 and subsequent financial years. To the extent that natural person employers will no longer be able to exploit a drafting error to avoid paying annual payroll tax, people's property rights may be affected. However, any limit is in accordance with the law, which is clearly articulated, not arbitrary, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person taxpayers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly.

Planning Act amendments

Division 1 of Part 6 of the Bill amends the Planning Act to clearly impose the Growth Areas Infrastructure Contribution (GAIC) on the certification of a plan of subdivision under section 35 of the Subdivision Act. To

the extent that natural person landowners can no longer use subdivision technicalities to avoid a liability to GAIC, the right to property may be engaged.

Clauses 102 and 103 of the Bill correct anomalies in the Planning Act to provide that, following subdivision of a parent lot, GAIC is apportioned to child lots on the proportionate area of the child lot to the parent lot, excluding land outside the contribution area. To the extent that natural person landowners may no longer be able to take advantage of technicalities in the apportionment provisions to avoid a liability to GAIC, the right to property may be engaged.

Any deprivation of property under these amendments to the Planning Act is justifiable since these provisions are anti-avoidance in nature. To the extent that people's property rights are affected, any limit is in accordance with the law, which is clearly articulated, not arbitrary, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person taxpayers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly.

Taxation Administration Act and Valuation of Land Act amendments

Clause 108 of the Bill amends the objection provisions of the Taxation Administration Act such that an objection to either of the two valuations on which a windfall gains tax (**WGT**) assessment is based will be taken as an objection to both relevant valuations. In addition, clause 109 of the Bill amends the Valuation of Land Act to provide that an objection to either of the two valuations on which a WGT assessment is based will be taken as an objection to both relevant valuations.

To the extent that natural person landowners will not be able to manipulate valuation objections to minimise their WGT liability, the right to property may be engaged. Any deprivation of property arising from these amendments is justifiable as they are anti-avoidance measures. To the extent that people's property rights are affected, any limit is in accordance with the law, which is clearly articulated, not arbitrary, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person taxpayers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly.

Clause 110 of the Bill includes amendments to give councils discretion whether to adopt any amended valuations that result from a WGT valuation objection. These amendments may engage the right to property in circumstances where a natural person landowner overpays council rates on the basis of a valuation which is later found to be overstated for WGT purposes, and the relevant council declines to issue an amended rates notice reflecting the revised value. Any deprivation of property arising from these amendments is justifiable as the purpose of the amendments is to ensure revenue certainty and promote efficiency for municipal councils by ensuring that that WGT objections do not place an undue burden on councils. Aggrieved landowners remain entitled to contest property valuations for council rates purposes under the Valuation of Land Act.

Right to fair hearing: section 24

The right to a fair hearing as protected under section 24 of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence or a party to a civil proceeding has the right to a fair hearing. The right to a fair hearing applies to both courts and tribunals, such as the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. Generally, the right to a fair hearing is concerned with procedural fairness and access to a court or tribunal, rather than the substantive fairness of a decision of a court or tribunal determined on the merits of a case.

FSPL Act amendments

Clauses 23 and 24 of the Bill contain amendments to the refund and cancellation provisions of the FSPL Act to expressly preclude refund/cancellation requests the basis for which is a ground of objection under the Valuation of Land Act. To the extent that section 24 of the Charter is engaged and limited by these provisions, I am satisfied that any such limit would be demonstrably justified. These amendments have been introduced to prevent landowners from using alternative pathways to the objections process set out in the Valuation of Land Act to contest land valuations for FSPL purposes and in particular to prevent the circumvention of the strict timeframes set out in the Valuation of Land Act. Any limit on the right to fair hearing by this amendment is justified as it is a revenue protection measure intended to prevent revenue leakage and promote revenue certainty. Aggrieved landowners remained entitled to contest property valuations for FSPL purposes under the Valuation of Land Act.

Planning Act amendments

Division 2 of Part 6 of the Bill abolishes the GAIC Hardship Relief Board (**Board**). To the extent natural person landowners will no longer be able to seek GAIC relief from the Board, the right to fair hearing may be engaged. However, I am satisfied that any limit would be demonstrably justified. These amendments eliminate unnecessary regulation and administrative burdens and promote government efficiency. Under the amendments, natural person landowners will be able to seek GAIC relief on financial hardship grounds from the Governor in Council instead of the Board.

Taxation Administration Act and Valuation of Land Act amendments

Clause 108 of the Bill amends the objection provisions of the Taxation Administration Act such that an objection to either of the two valuations on which a WGT assessment is based will be taken as an objection to both relevant valuations. In addition, clause 109 of the Bill amends the Valuation of Land Act to provide that an objection to either of the two valuations on which a WGT assessment is based will be taken as an objection to both relevant valuations.

To the extent that section 24 of the Charter is engaged and limited by these provisions, I am satisfied that any such limit would be demonstrably justified. These amendments have been introduced to prevent landowners from manipulating the objections process to minimise their liability to WGT. Any limit on the right to fair hearing by this is justified as a revenue protection measure intended to prevent tax leakage and avoidance activity. Aggrieved landowners remained entitled to contest property valuations for WGT purposes under the Taxation Administration Act, albeit that both relevant values will be reviewed.

Clause 110 of the Bill includes amendments to the Valuation of Land Act to give councils discretion whether to adopt any amended valuations that result from a WGT valuation objection. To the extent that section 24 of the Charter is engaged and limited by these provisions, I am satisfied that any such limit would be demonstrably justified. These amendments have been introduced to ensure revenue certainty and promote efficiency for municipal councils by ensuring that WGT objections do not place an undue burden on councils. Aggrieved landowners remain entitled to contest property valuations for council rates purposes under the Valuation of Land Act.

Retrospectivity: section 27

Section 27 of the Charter is concerned with the retrospective operation of criminal laws. It provides that a person has the right not to be prosecuted or punished for things that were not criminal offences at the time they were committed.

Payroll Tax Act amendments

Clause 58 of the Bill corrects an omission in the Payroll Tax Act to specify the annual rate of payroll tax for the 2022–23 and subsequent financial years. The proposed amendment is to take effect retrospectively from 1 July 2022 to confirm the annual payroll tax rates that apply for the 2022–23 and subsequent financial years.

The provisions being inserted into the Payroll Tax Act do not amend any criminal laws and therefore section 27 of the Charter is not engaged. In any event, the retrospective operation of clause 58 is necessary to correct a drafting anomaly by which monthly payroll tax is imposed but an annual rate is not specified for the 2022–23 financial year. Importantly, clause 58 of the Bill does not in practice operate to impose payroll tax retrospectively. For the 2022–23 financial year, employers are already under a legislated obligation to pay payroll tax on a monthly basis at the relevant rate. The amendments only affect the annual rate of payroll tax which is relevant to the annual reconciliation completed after the end of the financial year, i.e. after 30 June 2023 in respect of the 2022–23 financial year, and part-year reconciliations where an employer has not employed for the full financial year.

For these reasons, in my opinion, the provisions of the Bill are compatible with the rights contained in sections 8(3), 20, 24 and 27 of the Charter.

TIM PALLAS MP

Treasurer

Second reading

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (11:48): 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:

I am pleased to introduce this Bill, which amends the *Duties Act 2000*, *Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012*, *Land Tax Act 2005*, *Payroll Tax Act 2007*, *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, *Subdivision Act 1988*, *Taxation Administration Act 1997* and *Valuation of Land Act 1960* to ensure that these Acts remain consistent with their underlying policy intent.

This Bill delivers 2023–24 budget initiatives and amends several laws to ensure they support fair and effective revenue administration.

COVID Debt Repayment Plan – COVID Debt Levy

The Government's Covid Debt Repayment Plan, which aims to offset debt incurred assisting Victorians through the COVID-19 pandemic, contains a temporary and targeted levy that will apply for 10 years, expiring on 30 June 2033, with two components.

Firstly, the Bill will introduce a new payroll tax surcharge that will apply to employers who pay wages of \$10 million or more nationally. A rate of 0.5 per cent will apply for businesses with national payrolls above \$10 million, and businesses with national payrolls above \$100 million will pay an additional 0.5 per cent. The additional rates will be paid on the Victorian share of wages above the relevant threshold. This surcharge is expected to raise \$836 million in 2023–24 and is projected to raise around \$1 billion a year by the end of the forward estimates.

Secondly, the Bill will reduce the general rates land tax-free threshold to \$50,000. In addition, it will impose land tax surcharges and increase current land tax rates by imposing a temporary flat surcharge of \$500 on general taxpayers with landholdings between \$50,000 and \$100,000 and a temporary flat surcharge of \$975 on general taxpayers with landholdings between \$100,000 and \$300,000. Trust rates will increase in a consistent manner. For general taxpayers with landholdings over \$300,000 (and trust taxpayers with landholdings above \$250,000), land tax rates will temporarily increase by 0.1 per cent of the value of landholdings above \$300,000, in addition to the \$975 temporary flat surcharge. Following the conclusion of the applicable 10-year period on 30 June 2033, these changes will be reversed. It is estimated that the increased land tax rates will raise an additional \$4.7 billion in revenue over the budget and forward estimates.

Better business tax

To support the growth of the Victorian economy, the Bill will gradually abolish business insurance duties (which apply to public and product liability, professional indemnity, employers' liability, fire and industrial special risks, and marine and aviation insurance) by reducing the applicable duty rate by 1 per cent per annum over a 10-year period commencing from 1 July 2024. Duty on business insurance will therefore be abolished by 2033 and will result in the reduction of insurance duty revenue received over the budget forward estimates period by more than \$275 million.

To further support Victorian small businesses, the Bill will increase the payroll tax-free threshold from \$700,000 to \$900,000 from 1 July 2024, and subsequently increase further to \$1,000,000 from 1 July 2025. Around 6,000 businesses, who otherwise would have paid payroll tax, will stop paying when the threshold reaches \$1 million. More than 26,000 small businesses will benefit from the Government increasing the tax-free threshold to \$1 million. The Bill will also introduce a 'phase out' of the allowable deduction for payroll tax for businesses who pay wages over \$3 million. The *Payroll Tax Act 2007* (PTA) currently allows a deduction based on the tax-free threshold to be subtracted from Victorian taxable wages in determining the amount of payroll tax payable. The allowable deduction is adjusted on a pro-rata basis in accordance with the proportion of the employer's total Australian wages that are taxable wages and partly adjusted for employers who pay wages for part of a financial year. Under the 'phase out', businesses who pay wages between \$3,000,000 and \$5,000,000 will receive a progressively smaller deduction resulting in proportionately more payroll tax payable. Businesses who pay wages over \$5 million will not be eligible for the deduction in payroll tax on their taxable wages. This measure will commence from 1 July 2024 to give businesses time to adjust their operations to the new payroll tax framework and is expected to cost around \$62 million over the budget and forward years.

Revenue measures

The Bill will limit the existing payroll tax exemption applying to non-government schools to low-fee non-government schools as declared by the Minister for Education with the consent of the Treasurer. The PTA currently exempts from payroll tax, wages paid by not-for-profit non-government schools as defined by the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (ETRA), provided those wages are paid to people in relation to the provision of education within that school. In practice, this has the effect of exempting all non-government schools in Victoria from payroll tax. Under this budget measure, declared schools will be eligible for the exemption from payroll tax and non-declared schools would be liable to pay payroll tax and additional surcharges where their taxable wages exceed the tax-free threshold. This initiative will align the payroll tax treatment of high-fee non-government schools with that of government schools and ensure the benefit of this exemption only flows to schools that need support. Approximately 110 schools, or around the top 15 per cent by fee level, will lose their exemption. This measure is proposed to commence from 1 July 2024 and is expected to generate \$422 million across the budget and forward years.

The Bill increases the absentee owner land tax surcharge rate from 2 per cent to 4 per cent to align with the rate in New South Wales. The Bill will also decrease the minimum threshold for non-trustee absentee owners from \$300,000 to \$50,000. This means the surcharge will be payable if the total taxable value of Victorian land held by a non-trust absentee owner is equal to or exceeds \$50 000. There will be no change to

the minimum threshold for trust taxpayers. These measures ensure that foreign property owners continue to contribute towards the provision of government services and infrastructure in Victoria, to the ultimate benefit of all Victorian property owners. This measure is expected to generate around \$1.2 billion in revenue over the budget and forward estimates.

Support measures

To support those impacted by builder insolvencies, the Bill will provide the Commissioner of State Revenue with the discretion to extend the existing land tax exemption for principal places of residence under construction or renovation by up to an additional two years effective from the 2024 land tax year. The *Land Tax Act 2005* (LTA) currently contains a principal place of residence exemption for land which is unoccupied and contains a residence which is under construction or renovation. The current exemption applies from the commencement date of construction or renovation and is available for a maximum of four tax years after the year in which construction or renovation commenced. This measure, commencing the day after Royal Assent, will provide the Commissioner of State Revenue with discretion to extend the exemption period by up to an additional two years where further time is required to complete construction due to builder insolvency. It is estimated the extension of the principal place of residence exemption will reduce land tax revenue by approximately \$2.4 million over the budget and forward estimates.

The Bill will introduce a number of land tax and transfer duty relief measures to provide further support to families providing housing to family members facing severe disabilities. Firstly, the Bill amends the *Duties Act 2000* (the Duties Act) to increase the special disability trust (SDT) deduction threshold from \$500,000 to \$1,500,000 for transfers of dutiable property to the trustee of an SDT, but only where the property is to be used as the principal place of residence of the principal beneficiary of the SDT. Secondly, the Bill will introduce an exemption from duty for transfers of property from immediate family members for no consideration to a qualifying person with a disability which is to be used as the principal place of residence of that qualifying person. Currently, duty exemptions are available to families who establish an SDT for the purposes of providing accommodation and housing to family members who suffer from a severe disability. However, costs and complexities associated with establishing and operating an SDT have been onerous and prohibitive for some families. This measure will provide a similar duty exemption, without the requirement to establish an SDT, provided the qualifying person with a disability meets certain residency requirements and the dutiable value of the property does not exceed \$1,500,000. Thirdly, the Bill will also introduce a land tax exemption for land used as the home of an individual eligible to be the beneficiary of an SDT, even in the absence of an established SDT, provided there is no consideration or rent provided. The duties exemption and the land tax exemption will apply on the basis that the person with a disability meets the impairment and disability conditions of the beneficiary requirements of an SDT under the *Social Securities Act 1991* (Cth) or *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986* (Cth) and meets other PPR exemption criteria. Collectively, these measures will assist people to provide long-term housing solutions for immediate family members with severe disabilities and are expected to reduce tax revenue by approximately \$5.4 million over the budget and forward estimates.

The Bill will assist pensioners and other concession card holders by increasing the land transfer duty exemption and concession threshold from \$330,001 and \$750,000, to \$600,001 and \$750,000. Accordingly, a full exemption from duty will be available for dutiable property that is below \$600,000 rather than \$330,000, provided that an eligible pensioner acquires an interest of 25 per cent or more and satisfies a residency requirement. Separately, if an eligible pensioner purchases a share or an interest in a property, the exemption and concession thresholds are currently assessed against the dutiable value of the fractional interest of the eligible pensioner, rather than the dutiable value of the whole property. The new measure will therefore be aligned with the first home buyer exemption and concession and improve fairness by assessing eligibility on the total value of the purchase, rather than on the fractional interest of the eligible pensioner. The proposed amendments are to have effect to contracts entered into from 1 July 2023.

The Bill will also introduce a new land tax exemption for land protected by a conservation covenant entered into with Trust for Nature, commencing from 1 January 2024. A conservation covenant is a voluntary legal agreement made between a private landowner and Trust for Nature that binds the landowner as to the development or use or the conservation of land subject to the covenant. The new land tax exemption will therefore support landowners to protect the conservation value of the land and is estimated to reduce land tax revenue by approximately \$3.1 million over the budget and forward estimates.

General taxation amendments

The Bill makes several amendments to Victoria's laws that will clarify their operation, correct drafting defects and remove anomalies that disadvantage taxpayers.

Corporate collective investment vehicles

The Bill will amend the *Duties Act 2000*, *Land Tax Act 2005* and *Payroll Tax Act 2007* to address the corporate collective investment vehicle (CCIV) reforms recently made by the Australian Government. CCIVs

were established as a new fund management entity, intended to be an alternative structure to the existing trust-based management investment scheme to increase the competitiveness of Australia's managed fund industry and attract foreign investment. A CCIV is a company limited by shares, thus a single legal entity with all assets, liabilities and businesses of a CCIV assigned to one or more segregated sub-funds. Each sub-fund has its own set of members, who are at law shareholders of the CCIV, however the sub-funds do not have separate legal personality and no trust relationship is created between the CCIV and the members of a sub-fund in respect of the property held in that sub-fund. As CCIVs are brand new entities, existing Victorian taxation legislation views a CCIV as a single legal person and the sole legal and beneficial owner of all land across the CCIV's sub-funds.

The Bill amends the *Duties Act 2000* and the *Land Tax Act 2005* to deem each sub-fund of a CCIV as equivalent to a separate unit trust scheme for duties and land tax purposes. Under this approach, CCIVs would be regulated and taxed as if they were trustees; property of the sub-funds would be treated as trust property, and the members of each sub-fund would be treated as beneficiaries/unit holders. Consequential amendments to the *Duties Act 2000* will also ensure the principle that each sub fund is deemed to be equivalent to a unit trust scheme is carried throughout each Act. The Bill will amend the *Payroll Tax Act 2007* to exclude amounts paid or payable by a CCIV to its corporate director as wages for payroll tax purposes. This is intended to prevent payroll tax from applying to payments from the CCIV to its corporate director.

Fire services property levy

The Bill amends the refund and cancellation provisions under the *Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012* (the FSPL Act) in response to the Victorian Court of Appeal case of *Valuer General (Vic) v AWF Prop Co 2 Pty Ltd* [2021] VSCA 274 (the AWF Decision). The refund and cancellation provisions under the FSPL Act allows collection agencies to refund or cancel payments for mistakes, such as duplicated payments or mathematical errors. In the AWF Decision, the Ararat Rural City Council sent notices to an operator (being the lessee of land) with Capital Improved Values calculated on the assumption that the wind turbines connected to underground foundations were fixtures forming part of the land. The Court subsequently held that the fixtures did not form part of the land and should be excluded from the hypothetical fee simple estate to be valued by a valuation authority for FSPL and rates purposes. Following the AWF Decision, several wind farm operators have made refund requests under the refund and cancellation provisions in respect of historical FSPL paid. However, these provisions were not intended to provide a person aggrieved by a valuation with an alternative avenue to dispute amounts paid if they were otherwise too late to lodge an objection under the *Valuation of Land Act 1960* (VLA). Accordingly, the Bill will amend the refund and cancellation provisions to expressly carve out overpayments/errors, the basis for which is a ground of objection under the VLA. These amendments will ensure consistency between the refund and cancellation provisions in the FSPL Act and will adequately reflect the policy intent of the statutory scheme.

The Bill will make a minor amendment to the PTA to correct the omission of annual payroll tax rates being in place for the 2022-23 financial year and subsequent financial years in respect of regional employers and bushfire relief regional employers. The Bill will therefore amend the PTA by inserting the words 'or any subsequent financial year', in clause 1 of Schedule 1. This amendment will ensure that the annual payroll tax rates will apply for the financial year commencing 1 July 2021 continue to apply for the 2022-23 and future financial years, as was always intended.

Growth areas infrastructure contribution

The Bill abolishes the Growth Areas Infrastructure Contribution (GAIC) Hardship Relief Board in line with the recommendations of the Commissioner for Better Regulation. Section 201TE of the *Planning and Environment Act* (PE Act) empowers the Governor in Council to, on the recommendation of the Minister for Planning, grant a reduction of or exemption from GAIC liability in exceptional circumstances. The Bill will amend this to include financial hardship as an exceptional circumstance, which will provide an alternative means for landowners to seek relief from GAIC liability.

The Bill also closes a loophole in the GAIC provisions of the PE Act and its interaction with section 35 of the *Subdivision Act 1988*. The current framework enables developers to excise land for public purposes early and prior to GAIC being triggered, with the result being that GAIC liabilities on these parcels are never realised to state revenue, or are imposed on local government and other government agencies. Use of the section 35 loophole means that councils and other acquiring authorities were acquiring land with a GAIC liability on title which becomes a financial risk for them. This amendment introduces a new GAIC event, being the certification of a non-statement of compliance subdivision to ensure that any GAIC liability on land which is subdivided through section 35 of the *Subdivision Act 1988* is paid prior to transfer to an acquiring authority. This removes the financial risk and burden from councils and other municipal authorities and provides that GAIC continues to apply to all land within the contribution area on a broad hectare basis, as intended by GAIC policy.

The Bill also amends the PE Act to prevent GAIC from being apportioned from a parent lot to any child lot wholly outside the contribution area, where the parent lot is partly inside and outside the contribution area. This can lead to the apportionment of GAIC to a child lot that is not within the contribution area, or allocate a child lot that is partially outside the contribution area with a greater GAIC liability that it should otherwise be liable to. To prevent this unintended outcome, the Bill will amend the PE Act to provide that GAIC is apportioned to child lots based on the proportionate area of the child lot to the parent lot, excluding land outside the contribution area.

The Bill rectifies the unintended consequences of an earlier amendment to the Duties Act which aimed to close a loophole relating to acquisition of economic entitlements. This had the effect of triggering a GAIC liability at the time a person enters into an agreement with a landowner where the profits of the development of the land are split, but the title to the property remains with the original landowner. This brought forward the requirement to pay GAIC much earlier in the development cycle, and while a triggered liability can be deferred, it attracts interest from the time it is triggered, resulting in a higher liability than would have ordinarily been incurred. The Bill ensures that acquisition of economic entitlements becomes an excluded event. The Bill also includes a range of minor and technical amendments to ensure the Act is consistent with changes that have occurred in recent years to the Duties Act. Collectively, these amendments to GAIC will come into operation on the day after the day on which this Act receives the Royal Assent.

The Bill will also amend the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* and VLA to clarify the scope of objections lodged to valuations of land used in an assessment of Windfall gains tax (WGT). The WGT was legislated in the WGT Amendment Act and will come into operation from 1 July 2023, which will apply to land subject to a rezoning decision that results in a land value uplift of more than \$100,000. Value uplift is calculated as V2 minus V1, where V2 relates to the capital improved value in a post-rezoning supplementary valuation undertaken by the Valuer-General Victoria (Valuer-General) and V1 relates to the capital improved value in a pre-rezoning valuation of the land. Under the current WGT regime, landowners may object to either or both valuations and the Valuer-General can only consider and adjust a valuation which the owner has objected to. An owner could therefore manipulate the value uplift on which WGT is calculated by objecting to only one of the valuations. Changes to the amendments to the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* and VLA in the WGT Amendment Act are proposed so that an objection to either V1 or V2 is taken as an objection to both V1 and V2. This would empower the Valuer-General to consider grounds of objection for both valuations and adjust either or both as part of determining the objection's outcome, if appropriate. In addition, the VLA is proposed to be amended (via the WGT Amendment Act) to give councils discretion whether to adopt any amended valuations that result from a WGT valuation objection. This ensures councils are not required to issue a secondary rate notice every time that a WGT objection leads to an adjusted value, such as in cases where the adjustment is minor, or substantial time has elapsed before the amended notice of valuation is issued. These amendments are proposed to take effect from the day after Royal Assent to be in place when the WGT commences on 1 July 2023.

I commend the Bill to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:48): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (11:49): I move:

That debate be adjourned until tomorrow.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:49): This is outrageous. It is outrageous that the Treasurer would bring a tax bill into this chamber that no Victorian has seen – this bill is hot because it has just come off the photocopier – and move that the bill be considered tomorrow and guillotined tomorrow. It is a bill that does a number of things. It is a long bill. It is an 80-page bill of new taxes to be imposed upon Victoria, and I note that one of them that is particularly egregious and has been received so incredibly poorly by the community is the new tax on non-government schools. In fact I know of a number of schools that will be making comment at some point. Their view is they will be made insolvent by these new taxes, and I do not say that lightly. They are going to talk about that publicly. They are going to talk about the fact that these new taxes are going to make them insolvent. This government is going to make non-government schools insolvent with this new set of taxes.

This package of measures is something that we have never seen before – that Victorians have never seen. Victorians have not seen what is being proposed in it, and the Treasurer has wandered into the chamber and said ‘Not only, Victoria, have you not seen it, we refuse to give you time to consider it’, despite the fact that only last year the government did the right thing – I will give them credit; they did the right thing – and they allowed the Parliament to consider these budgetary measures for two weeks, as would normally be the case. So why this year is the government hiding these measures from the community? Why are they hiding it from the community? Because they know how dangerous these measures are. They know the impact of these measures, and as I said, I only spoke to one.

There are a number of measures that are going to cause absolute havoc in the community. One of them that I mentioned was the new tax on schools, the new tax on kids – taxing kids! – overturning an almost 100-year principle in this nation that schools, benevolent institutions, are not taxed. This government is now proposing to overturn that principle, and we know that that will not be the end of where these measures go. This is only the start, and every member of this place should be aware that these new tax measures on schools are not going to end here. This is the thin end of the wedge. If you have a child who goes to a non-government school, any non-government school, you should be worried; if you ever want your child to, you should be worried. This is a debate about whether or not these state tax measures are given the time in this place to be considered by Victoria.

Pauline Richards: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is a procedural debate, and as such we should stick to the rules of procedural debates.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): Manager of Opposition Business, you were straying into debating the bill, and I ask you to talk about the procedural debate.

James NEWBURY: The sentence, Acting Speaker, that just came out of my mouth was that this is a debate around whether this bill should be given time to be considered by the Victorian community. That is exactly what the procedural motion is about.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): Yes, and in the previous 4 minutes you had been talking about the content. I ask you to talk about the procedural motion.

James NEWBURY: Acting Speaker, with respect, no member raised any concern at any point in my debate, so therefore I would ask you to rule that point of order out of order.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): No. I have ruled on the point of order, and I ask you to come back to the procedural debate.

James NEWBURY: The Treasurer has moved to ram through a set of new tax measures in one day – ram through and guillotine them. Fortunately we now know Victorians have seen what the government is doing in this place. We know that Victorians can now see the government for what it is and its tactics in this place for what they are. You cannot introduce such punitive, nasty measures that are going to hurt people – they are going to hurt children; they are going to send schools to the wall – and not allow the community to see them. We oppose the government’s measure to do that. We oppose it, and we certainly will be voting against the government trying to ram this bill through.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (11:54): Acting Speaker, I will just give you the guarantee that I will actually stick to what we are talking about and not argue with you. The members opposite would argue over winning a million bucks in a lottery, I think. It is just amazing to hear people so sidetracked with their own issues – here we go.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member, despite his own contribution, has clearly strayed from the motion, and I ask you to bring him back to it.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): The member for Frankston shall speak on the procedural motion.

Paul EDBROOKE: Thanks very much, Acting Speaker. We know that those opposite are distracted by their own issues. We know they are distracted by people in their party telling Indigenous Australians they should be thankful. We know that they have got their own issues. But that is not an excuse to hold up government business. I might remind those opposite that the good people of Victoria voted this government in with one more seat in the lower house. They are confident that we can do the job. Sometimes that job is not doing what is pretty, sometimes that job is not what people want to hear. That job is really hard, and it is about hard decisions. Part of what we are talking about in this government business program debate is that bills like the tax bill, which those opposite are talking about at the moment, are very, very important bills to talk about in the government business program.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, with respect, this debate is not the government business program debate. It is a debate about whether the government should be ramming through a bill in one day, which we oppose. It has nothing to do with the government business program. It is about the government ramming through new tax laws in one day.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): The member for Frankston shall continue and will restrict their comments to the procedural motion.

Paul EDBROOKE: Thank you very much. We know we are talking on a motion, but it does talk about the government business program debate because it is part of that. We know, as I said, those opposite are very sidetracked. We had the member for Brighton just talk about how this new bill will make all schools insolvent.

James Newbury: I didn't say that.

Paul EDBROOKE: Well, that is what I heard: 'Why are we taxing kids?' These are the people that took the EMA away – the education maintenance allowance. To hear that rubbish from that side is just –

Members interjecting.

Paul EDBROOKE: And he cannot hack it. He just cannot hack it.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a tight procedural debate around whether or not the government can ram through a bill in one day. It has nothing to do with any political points that the member is unsuccessfully trying to make. It is about whether the bill should be rammed through in one day.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will rule on the point of order. It is a procedural debate. It would be appreciated if you could stick to that. However, I did listen to the Manager of Opposition Business's lead speech, and it was going somewhere outside it, so please stay within the realms of the debate at hand.

Paul EDBROOKE: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. With that, I will take it that you are advising us that it has been a wideranging debate and we should, on this side of the house, be able to touch on things that the opposition have touched on, like school funding and like their history of taking away the EMA and closing schools –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is outrageous. I would say to you that this is a tight procedural debate. I note your comments earlier, but I think that in the spirit of the order of the house that the comments of all members should be somewhat closer to the motion at hand.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I would encourage the member to stay within the realms of our current time frame.

Paul EDBROOKE: Thank you for your advice on that, Deputy Speaker. Look, it is obvious that those opposite are up and about. They are a bit angry. They know that this is something they should be voting for. They know that this motion should go through. They know that by pausing things in this house the government needs to stand up and waste their time like this, arguing about things we should

be moving on with. With that, we can see that they would rather hear more from themselves in standing up and interrupting other speakers than actually hearing other people's opinions. I mean, that was voted out very, very well at the last election. We have got the Treasurer in here at the moment, a person who I think has done the hard yards over the last few years and who has put through an amazing bill that is responsible, as it is a way forward for Victoria – and many states are going through this at this stage. While those opposite want to obfuscate and obstruct to ensure that we pass this debt on to further generations, we on this side of the house will not.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (11:59): This is a fairly simple debate. We are debating the period of adjournment of debate on bills – it is absolutely simple. We have had a practice in this house for a considerable period of time that allows us two weeks to go out to consult. I have some history here from quite a long time ago. The first example of a disagreement about the period of adjournment actually was in 1932. This is when the government proposed one week and the opposition at the time asked for two weeks. We have had fairly solidly since that time acceptance in this house that the adjournment period for debating bills is two weeks. We come in here, and when you lose that one day – it is 13 days, and we expect it to be 14 – it is one day less, and as happens so often, when we are out engaging with stakeholders, which is what our role is, they do not always get back to us within that time. It depends on the complexity of the bill and the availability of people.

So it is very often that we come into this place to debate the second reading and we do not have all of the consultation back, because we know that that is what they need. That is a fair thing to be doing; that is the right thing to be doing. The occasions when this time has been truncated to one day or to the same day have been times that have been negotiated; they have been times when there has been an urgency. These typically in my time have been around council matters, when councils are appointing a monitor. The government moves to appoint a monitor or administrators, and this goes through very quickly with our agreement. The Leader of the House works with the Manager of Opposition Business and we agree, because we know when those things are urgent.

It seems that the acceptance of longstanding procedures and processes is being absolutely thrown out of the window by the government – the traditions that we have had here. Last sitting week we were absolutely appalled to think that we were given six days to do the consultation – that was absolutely staggering to us. But then to find out that we have the bill that we are debating at the moment – the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023 –

James Newbury: We haven't even seen it.

Cindy McLEISH: We haven't seen it, and we are expected to debate it tomorrow. We are expected to go out and get feedback from all of the stakeholders that are concerned – and there are a lot of stakeholders, because we know this government are absolutely having to look under every rock for money because they are broke. So they are having to impose taxes on taxes everywhere. It is one thing for the Treasurer to flag publicly the sorts of taxes that might be included in this bill, but it is another to go through clause by clause and have a look at the absolute detail, because you are guaranteed there will be gremlins there that the Treasurer has not raised with the public – absolutely there will be gremlins there.

We need time. We do not just need today and overnight to consult with the stakeholders to get their views, we need further time. It tells me of the arrogance of this government when they are looking to truncate the period of adjournment of the debates that we would normally expect not to 13 days, not to six days, which was not confected outrage – we were horrified last week at six days – but, as we hear now, to overnight. It is extraordinary.

A member: It's the end of the world as we know it.

Cindy McLEISH: It is almost the end of the way that procedure and debate has happened in this chamber for a very long period of time. The government have no regard for anybody else but themselves. It is not about Victorians, it is about them. We have this government business program

that has been all mucked up, so the Treasurer has no opportunity to actually bring this in to get it debated and through to the other place before 30 June. He does not have the time, so he has to now do what he is told and give it one day, and that puts everybody behind the eight ball. It is grossly unfair, and it is something that I hope that we do not have to argue again but that I am expecting we are going to be arguing again very shortly, because this government is one of the most arrogant and, this term, the most disorganised that we have seen. The program is all over the place. They are not organised. They really need to get their act together.

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (12:04): I am delighted to participate in today's procedural debate. The heavy-lifting member for Eildon strikes again – her stats are right up there – but we are going to have to talk about what we are doing today, and I support that we get on with debating the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023. I want to thank the Treasurer and his ministerial office for the work that they have been doing to bring in this bill, which is to amend the Duties Act 2000, the Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012, the Land Tax Act 2005, the Payroll Tax Act 2007, the Planning and Environment Act 1987, the Subdivision Act 1988, the Taxation Administration Act 1997 and the Valuation of Land Act 1960 and for other purposes.

I come from a regional community, and I come here to do the work. I come here to do the work for my community. I leave my family, I leave my kids – I am missing the year 9 social tomorrow night, but they will be right – because I want to do the work here for my community and this state, and debating this bill is about doing the work. We know there are constitutional requirements in this state to allow the other place to look through this as well, to have scrutiny and to have the opportunity to debate this bill, and that is what we are doing today. We are moving forward and governing for Victorians and bringing debate on rather than messing about with procedure. We are not compromising the members of this place. This is my fifth budget, which I am really proud of, with some really great things for my community, delivering on all our election commitments in full for Ballarat and for the electorate of Wendouree, and I will be talking about that at length because I am going to get 15 minutes on my feet in the budget take-note motion. Every single person in this house will be given that opportunity.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, it is a very narrow procedural debate. I ask you to bring the member for Wendouree back to the matter at hand.

Sarah Connolly: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, we have been sitting here now for quite some time watching the opposition consistently interject with irrelevant points of order. The member was being entirely relevant to the procedural debate here before the house this afternoon. Can I suggest she just keep on getting on with it. You are doing a great job.

James Newbury: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, I have heard the point of order from both previous members and I would say it is a tight procedural debate. Though I am sure that we are all looking forward to the member's contribution on the take-note motion, this is not the take-note motion. I ask you to bring the member back to the question.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is a tight procedural debate that has become somewhat less tight since we started. The member to continue, please, on the procedural debate.

Juliana ADDISON: Absolutely. I referred to the former speaker, the member for Eildon, talking about history. Maybe we need to go back to ancient Rome for a bit of history about filibustering, about trying to obstruct and about trying to frustrate process rather than actually getting on with the job. When we heard the commentary in another procedural debate earlier from the member for Gippsland South, describing chaos and things that are out of order –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this debate is in no way in relation to the question before us, and I would ask you to bring the member back, again, to the question.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member to return to the procedural motion.

Juliana ADDISON: It is clear that we are getting on with the business of governing. It is clear that we are getting on with the business of wanting to move forward with bills in this house. I am not going to waste any more time. There is enough filibustering going on; there is enough frustrating of the process going on. I will be supporting the Treasurer and supporting people in this chamber to get on with the state taxation bill.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (12:08): This is a very, very narrow procedural debate, and it is something that we perhaps have not heard applied appropriately from members of government who have spoken to this. We are absolutely aggrieved that there is such a large taxation bill that has been brought before the house today to be debated again in this house tomorrow. This is not the government's house, this is the people's house. The traditions and customs of this place mean that we usually have 14 days before debate is brought on, and the reason for that is so that we have an opportunity to go back to our key stakeholders, to talk to industry leaders and to talk to people who will be impacted by the legislative changes put forward by the government to understand what the implications will be. This is usually undertaken over a two-week period because that is fair. That is fair for people who are not used to reading through very detailed legislation which involves a number of significant changes to the taxes that they will pay and that will impact on their household budget and will impact on the number of people that they can employ. It will have far-reaching impacts for individuals and for families, and that is why we are opposing this position of debating this bill in just one day.

I note the comments from the member for Wendouree that we are messing around with procedure.

Roma Britnell: Such disrespect.

Emma KEALY: I think that is entirely disrespectful, I agree, member for South-West Coast. It is so disrespectful to people in the community who elect us to be here. They elect us here. They have an opportunity to put it on –

Juliana Addison interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Wendouree!

Emma KEALY: It is an opportunity for every Victorian to give their point of view and perspective about legislation before this house so that as members of Parliament we can properly represent the people who elect us and put us in this place. It is not about ramming through brand new tax laws that are going to hurt businesses, hurt schools and hurt families and just say, 'No, this is the government's business. We can do whatever we want. We don't care what you think. We don't care what you say. We don't care what the impact will be on you. We want to just barge on and do what we want to do and only give one day's notice to do so.' For the member for Wendouree to think that this is fair is, absolutely, disrespectful to everybody in her electorate of Wendouree, because it will have an impact on people who voted her in here. This is –

Paul Edbrooke: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a very narrow debate. It is not time to pass judgement on other members of Parliament from the opposite side.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for South-West Coast will come to order. Member for Lowan, I ask you to keep your comments on the procedural motion.

Emma KEALY: I fully believe that every single piece of legislation that comes through this place should be retained in place for 14 days so that we can make sure we are properly representing all of the people, the businesses and the communities across the state of Victoria. I do not believe that bringing in legislation with only one day's notice before we debate it in this place, legislation which introduces a new tax on schools, introduces a new rent tax, introduces a new job tax – this will have far-reaching implications for every single Victorian. There is absolutely no way in any democratic society that putting forward such a complex piece of legislation that will have such far-reaching impacts on every

single corner of the Victorian community should be debated with just one day's notice. Look at just the report that we have got from the Treasurer; the summary report is seven pages. It is a complex bill. It is not a straightforward bill where there are only a couple of little changes here or there – a full stop, a grammatical error – this is a barrage of new taxes which are going to be unleashed upon Victorians.

I urge the government to reconsider their position and not put this bill on the Parliament of Victoria with just one day's notice. We need to ensure that our community groups, our businesses, our families, our schools, people who own apartments and who are providing really important low-cost rentals for the community and everybody can have their say on this, not just the members of government. Because being a representative within this place is far more than just speaking up for yourself. You have to speak up for all Victorians. *(Time expired)*

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (54): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Daniel Andrews, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (32): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Sam Hibbins, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, Ryan Smith, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

Debate adjourned until tomorrow. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 31 May.

State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023

Appropriation

The SPEAKER (12:18): I have received a message from the Governor recommending an appropriation for the purposes of the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023.

Victorian Future Fund Bill 2023

Statement of compatibility

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (12:19): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Victorian Future Fund Bill 2023.

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 *Victorian Future Fund Bill 2023*.

In my opinion, the *Victorian Future Fund Bill 2023*, 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

1. The purposes of the Bill are to establish the Victorian Future Fund as a statutory trust account within the Trust Fund under the *Financial Management Act 1994*.
2. The Bill also:

- amends the *Duties Act 2000* so that the fund manager is a “qualified investor” under that Act;
- provides parameters for money to be credited to, and applied from, the Victorian Future Fund;
- sets out a framework for the administration of the Victorian Future Fund, including the appointment of a fund manager; and
- outlines auditing and reporting requirements that apply to the Victorian Future Fund.

Human Rights Issues

No Charter rights are impermissibly limited by the Bill.

Clause 10(1) of the Bill enables the Treasurer to appoint a person to manage the Victorian Future Fund.

Clause 11(2) of the Bill requires the fund manager to give the Minister or Secretary any information that the Minister or the Secretary reasonably requires to comply with reporting obligations in respect of the Victorian Future Fund.

Clause 12(2) of the Bill requires the fund manager to give the Treasurer or the person carrying out an audit any information that the Treasurer or person reasonably requires in carrying out the audit.

The Victorian Future Fund reporting obligations are set out under Clause 11(1) and include information on the Fund’s opening and closing balances, details of contributions made to the Fund, and details of payments made from the Fund in the financial year. As such, the information requested by the Minister or Secretary is unlikely to include any personal information.

Even if the fund manager is required to provide personal information in response to a request from the Minister, Secretary or Treasurer (for example, relating to its employees), in each case the request must be made reasonably (and not arbitrarily) and must be lawful in accordance with the Bill. Additionally, the fund manager and its employees would reasonably expect that some limited personal information would be requested by an auditor or otherwise recorded, and that they may be identified in publicly available documents, including in the Department’s report of operations.

Accordingly, no person’s privacy is either unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with because of any of the provisions in the Bill. As such, in my opinion, the right to privacy in section 13 of the Charter is not limited.

TIM PALLAS
TREASURER

Second reading

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (12:21): 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 Future Fund was announced in the *2022–23 Budget* as part of the Government’s debt stabilisation strategy.

The purpose of the Fund is to help manage the fiscal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and deliver positive outcomes for Victorians by reducing the debt burden on future generations.

Contributions to the Fund from the upfront proceeds received from the VicRoads Modernisation Joint Venture, and any additional contributions made to the Fund in the future, are invested to receive a financial return. Over the long term, this investment return is expected to exceed the State’s cost of borrowing, meaning it improves the State’s fiscal position more than simply paying down debt would.

This Bill seeks to establish the Victorian Future Fund as a Trust Account and clearly define its purpose, which is to provide funding for reducing the State’s debt.

The establishment of the Fund in legislation is an important step to providing certainty regarding the governance and purpose of the Fund, which will support the State’s credit rating agencies with assessing the impact of the Fund for credit rating purposes. Legislating the Fund is also aligned with the practice of equivalent funds in New South Wales and Queensland.

I commend the Bill to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:21): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (12:21): I move:

That debate be adjourned until tomorrow.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:22): This is a dark day for democracy – a dark day for democracy. I am sure that no Victorian could have believed that the government and the Treasurer would try and ram through a second bill on the same day and guillotine it within 24 hours. This is a very dark day for democracy, and not just for democracy but for our system of Parliament, our system of government. For 100 years it has been a tradition not only of this place but of other places around this country and internationally that parliaments have the right to consider bills put before them, that people have time to consider – in our case that Victorians have the right to consider – what is being proposed by a government, and every government should want that to be the case. Why wouldn't you want your community to look at what you are doing? Why wouldn't you want to allow more than one day so that your community can look at what you are proposing to do and consider it, so that stakeholders can be part of that conversation, so that members can consult with their community and stakeholders and can come back into this place, because this is the people's place, and they can represent those views in the chamber – they can put those views in this chamber. But that is not the case here.

We have seen a slow degradation of systems of integrity in this place, and we have seen it just now. We have seen it this morning with two instances of a government trying to ram through the most egregious changes – in the previous case, taxes being imposed on Victorians without giving the opportunity for Victorians to see it. As I said on the earlier bill, the bill was still hot because it had just been photocopied, and the government is trying to ram it through this place without Victorians having the chance to see it. I am up on my feet speaking in relation to the timing of a bill before having even had the opportunity to see it. This is outrageous. We have seen in recent weeks a degradation of the traditions of this place, the systems of integrity. Because that is what this is about – this is about government having respect for the community and showing a level of integrity in the way they do business, in the way they do government. This motion seeks to, within 24 hours, introduce a budget measure and not show it to Victorians in a reasonable time that they can take to read it, in a reasonable time for stakeholders to consider it.

This particular bill that we are debating – as to whether or not 24 hours is a long enough delay – is a significant bill around a potential future fund and billions of dollars. It is only reasonable that the Parliament and the community understand what checks and balances are in place. I think every Victorian, when it comes to taxpayers money, their money, would want to know that there are adequate checks and balances in big spending measures – or in this case a particular fund that the Treasurer has oversight of. What are the checks and balances? Who would know, because no-one has had the time to read the bill.

We have seen over recent weeks a speeding up of the time in which governments are ramming bills through this place, and the Victorian public have figured it out. They have seen what the government is doing in this place. It is outrageous that the government is now pushing through bills without even allowing Victorians time to read them. And this is the second time today – first on the state taxation measures, which introduce a set of punitive taxes, very punitive taxes that are going to hurt renters and that are going to hurt schools, and now we see this future fund bill. What are the checks and balances on this bill? Who would know.

The coalition certainly does not support the degradation of integrity in this place. It certainly does not support the way that the government is ramming through bills and guillotining them – guillotining them day by day in a way we have never seen before. This is a disgrace. We will call it out, and we will vote against it.

Vicki WARD (Eltham) (12:27): I want to firstly make it very clear that we are not a government who are ramming things through willy-nilly. We are actually a government who are steadfast on getting things done – and getting things done when they need to be done. The people of Victoria want a government that will actually act in the interests of Victorians and get things done. This is why we have been elected three times, because we get things done in this state.

Those opposite want to throw things around about being arrogant. There is a difference between being arrogant and actually doing what you say you are going to do – actually sticking to your guns and making sure that you get things done, and this is what we are doing on this side of the house. So we can have lots of comments about trying to ram through and have lots of faux outrage, but it is important for this government to get on with it. People of this state want us to get on with it. They want us to develop the agenda that we were re-elected to undertake in November last year, and this is what the Premier has committed to do. It is what everybody on this side of the chamber has committed to do. Every day we are working towards our outcomes, our goals and our achievements on behalf of the people of this state.

The Victorian Future Fund is something that is going to be terrific and important for our state. There is opportunity for us to discuss this. We have a lot to do. This is a busy government with a busy agenda that really wants to get things done, and I would suggest to those opposite, as we have had to suggest to them before, to get on with actually getting things done, to get a part of the energy that this government creates, to be a part of the achievements of this government, to get on with it and to let things happen.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (12:29): I rise to also oppose – and to support the Manager of Opposition Business in the position of opposing – this procedure. The bill cannot be put through with just one day when we have had for a very long time the respect of the people – that is why we are here – to be given the opportunity for consultation. I stood in Parliament last week talking about the disrespect of not having consultation with our communities who elected us to be here. I have seen the period of time go from 14 days, which we were doing for almost a century, to 10 days, last week six days and now one day.

The member for Eltham had the audacity to say it needs to be done, but this Victorian Future Fund was in the budget last year, a whole year ago, so what have you been doing for a year that this could not have been organised? What is the point in this legislation coming to the Parliament today and being voted on tomorrow – very important legislation that looks at using responsibly the funds given to Victorians from the sale of their assets, their land sales and their registration of their licensing?

Why is it that this government is so disorganised? Well, that is probably just the exact reason it is. We saw the manager of government business this morning introducing the wrong bill and having to rescind it and read it again because she had got it wrong. We constantly see this place in chaos because they are changing things before they even know what they are doing. They are guillotining tonight – never done that before. We have always had time for debate until this government. Now, they are not a new government trying to find themselves and get their feet under the table, they are an old and tired government and now a chaotic government and one that is running out of puff and running out of things to put to the Parliament. We saw the upper house go home early like kids from school because there was nothing to talk about. So this government has run out of things to do.

That is why we are seeing bills coming into this Parliament disrespecting the normal respect we should be giving to the community, who are the experts on many of these things and who will be affected by the changes that these substantial bills will make in Victoria. Yet we give them no time – no time. They have not actually been allowed to see this bill until today. The communities that will be affected by these changes in legislation are not being given the time to read it. There are two bills here. That is two bills in one day that we going to ask them to put their heads around – things that will affect Victorians.

This is a very tired government. It is a government who promised things that they could not deliver and now is having to tax Victorians to try and find some money to fix their debt and still will not reduce it. We have got kids being taxed, education being taxed and rental properties being taxed – people who cannot find a roof over their head having to be taxed. This is the most extraordinary budget we have ever seen. And these bills will be given one day of discussion through our community. It is a complete sham. But we have seen now, like I said when I stood up last week when we had six days to debate a bill because the government had run out of things to do, they have to put things in in a rushed manner. And there is no question. It is definitely ramming things through. It is not getting things done that matter. It is a fact that they have stuffed up so badly the debt is extraordinary, and we are having to tax kids to actually get through. No wonder there is not an expert out there who is saying this is a good budget, except for the member for Frankston, who said about the last bill that it is ‘an amazing bill’. Well, if more taxes are amazing, I do not think that is a quote I would be too proud of.

But they say we are wasting time – wasting Victorians’ time. Is it a waste of time to show people respect, to give them the ability to make comment or to say, ‘Please, just listen to the experts, you are making a big mistake here,’ and give them that opportunity to feed it back to us, the members of Parliament who represent them and who they voted in here, and not ignore them as this government do, who now have decided they know everything? They do not need time for consultation, they do not need any discussion and the Parliament is to be used simply to ram things through. That is the trend we have seen. We have gone from the respectful 14 days to 10, to six, to one and to no time for any reasonable person to digest a bill, or these bills, which are quite complex and large. To have a guillotine just means no debate; that is what it means.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (12:34): I rise to speak in this debate. Firstly, I just want to remind people that in November last year we were voted in by the Victorian public to look after them and support them for a third time. So we are going to get on and get things done, and we are doing what matters. We will continue to do that.

I want to contribute by just referring to some of the facts about sharing the bill with the opposition. Last Friday Shadow Treasurer Brad Rowswell, the member for Sandringham, was provided with a copy of both the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023 and the Victorian Future Fund Bill 2023 – on Friday morning – and was encouraged to pass them along to his colleagues. I do not know whether Mr Rowswell did that. The coalition was also offered a briefing on both bills, and a mutually agreed suitable time was arranged for Friday afternoon. Brad Rowswell, Roma Britnell, Jess Wilson, Ann-Marie Hermans and Nick McGowan were all present.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member to use proper titles.

Steve McGHIE: The Greens were also provided with both bills and attended a briefing on Friday. So it seems to be more than one day, as has been suggested today. Maybe weekends do not count. The other thing is that bills are not made public until the second reading, and that is happening today, but the government in good faith shared the bills and offered briefings to all members prior to this. Whether they took that up only they can speak to, but I doubt that they did. There is no departure from the practice of debating the budget bills in the first sitting week after budget day, and this ensures debate occurs as soon as possible.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on the tight procedural question, the member has strayed. The member would know that last year these bills were given two weeks for the community to see, and this year they are being given one before they are being rammed through, so a little bit of fact would not go astray.

Ben Carroll: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member for Melton is being very factual, highlighting the number of briefings that have been provided to the opposition parties. He is completely on the procedural motion, outlining all the detail that has been provided to date, and I urge you to rule this point of order out of order.

Bridget Vallence: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, if the Andrews government thinks that one business day for members of Parliament to be able to consult with their stakeholders and communities is enough –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Evelyn knows a point of order is not an opportunity to debate. The member will resume her seat. This procedural debate has been relatively tight, which is very pleasant. I encourage the member for Melton to continue on the procedural debate.

Steve McGhie: I have only a short bit to go. This seems to be clearly time wasting by the opposition to prevent the Shadow Treasurer from being up on his feet and doing a budget-in-reply. We would encourage them, rather than wasting time here in Parliament today with this ridiculous process that they are carrying on with, to allow this to move on and try and get the Shadow Treasurer to actually come into the chamber and speak to his budget-in-reply.

Sam Hibbins (Pahran) (12:37): The question before us here in this motion is for the bill that has been second read today to be debated tomorrow and be voted on tomorrow instead of the usual two weeks, and the answer simply is no, regardless of the merits of either of the bills that are being rushed through today. The government has been at great pains today to assert its control over the house, far beyond what is reasonable, far beyond what is the practice I think of any other Westminster parliament. We have got no time for non-government business. We cannot even have a non-government business bill put on the notice paper. We have not had, historically throughout this whole time they have been in government, any amendments to bills. Now we are going to have no time to actually consider a bill, let alone let the community consider a bill. In previous debates, when the member for Richmond has sought to introduce bills, the government was at great pains to talk about due process: ‘Governing, you have got to do everything with due process’. Apparently now due process for a bill gets you a briefing on a Friday, introduction on a Tuesday and debate on a Wednesday. That is not due process. That is absolutely appalling.

I have got to say one thing the government actually does have control over is the sitting days of the house. It is entirely within their power to arrange sitting days and arrange their legislative program to allow for the much-vaunted due process that they so revere over there – I know when it comes to legislation – to allow due process with legislation. They have not done it in this case, and there are a number of serious concerns with this bill that I am sure the community would want to have a look at and see addressed. How does this bill relate to the government’s privatisation agenda? How will this bill relate to the pressure the government is putting on land sales and the revenue raised from land sales? You just need to look at the Auditor-General’s report into land sales. Now it is going to be in legislation – when you are setting monetary targets for land sales; this is now going to be baked into legislation, putting pressure on governments to sell off land instead of considering it for community uses, using it for other purposes such as housing.

There are also concerns around just how this money is going to be invested. Will it be invested in fossil fuels? There are a number of massive questions over just this piece of legislation, so the idea that we should have it introduced here, after a briefing on a Friday, on a Tuesday – the general public have not been able to see it – and then have a debate and a vote on a Wednesday is an absolute disgrace, and it should not occur. We will not be supporting it.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (54): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Daniel Andrews, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbones, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (32): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Sam Hibbins, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, Ryan Smith, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

Debate adjourned until tomorrow. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 31 May.

Victorian Future Fund Bill 2023*Appropriation*

The SPEAKER (12:45): I have received a message from the Governor recommending an appropriation for the purposes of the Victorian Future Fund Bill 2023.

Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023**Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023***Second reading***Debate resumed on motions of Tim Pallas and Mary-Anne Thomas:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:46): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

Never in 160 years in this place has the opposition been denied an opportunity for a budget-in-reply. In 160 years the opposition has never been denied the opportunity for a budget-in-reply. The government has confirmed to me that the opposition would not be provided a 30-minute budget-in-reply without interruption. In 160 years we have never seen a government deny an opposition the right to an uninterrupted 30-minute reply to the budget. What have we seen today? We have seen a government that is trying to ram through new taxes through this place without providing them to Victorians to consider – taxes on rental properties, taxes on schools and taxes on kids. Now we have a government that is proposing to deny the opposition a budget-in-reply. We have a Parliament going into a lunch break in just over 10 minutes, and the government advised the opposition that the opposition could have 10 minutes for a budget-in-reply. What a disgrace. What an absolute disgrace – a 10-minute reply to the budget. Every single member on that side of the place should be ashamed of themselves, absolutely ashamed. No member in 160 years has seen a parliamentary tactic of this nature. 160 years – that should tell every member of this place something. I would say to every Victorian and every media outlet, who I know are watching, the government is denying the opposition the opportunity for a budget-in-reply.

I move that the debate be adjourned because the opposition should not be denied the right to an uninterrupted reply to the budget. It is essential that the opposition be given a right to represent their communities, to represent them on the issues that are contained in this budget and to talk about the historic levels of debt in this budget and the punitive taxes that are going to hurt segments of the community in ways that we have never seen before. The opposition should be entitled to that right. They should be entitled to give a full reply to the budget. I have never seen this before. I know I am only a second-term member, but I have never seen this before. I know that the father of the place has never seen this before. No-one has ever seen an opposition denied the right to a reply to the budget. Never, ever has anybody seen in it 160 years – denied the right to a budget-in-reply.

The government advised me that the Shadow Treasurer would be given 10 minutes before lunch – take it, take it: 10 minutes before lunch. That is what you get, 10 minutes before lunch – outrageous, absolutely outrageous. Ten minutes before lunch – I mean, what is this? This Parliament has been turned into a chaotic joke. This is a joke. How dare the government not allow Victorians time to consider bills, consider taxes that are being imposed upon them or give the opportunity for the opposition to reply to the budget. Is that where we are in this Parliament, that the government is refusing to give the opposition time to reply to a budget – something that nobody has done in 160 years? No wonder the media are reporting that the government is in chaos. No wonder the media is reporting it – no wonder. Victorians know it; Victorians have seen it. Victorians now know it. The least this government can do is allow the opportunity for the opposition to reply to the budget.

We sat here and listened to the Treasurer – a Treasurer who did not talk about his school taxes in his budget, did he? He kept that hidden, didn't he? We sat here and gave him the courtesy, as we should, of hearing his 30-minute speech on the budget, and the least the government could do is offer the same opportunity to the opposition.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (12:51): Can I just begin by saying I am under no illusions whatsoever, unlike the member for Brighton, that anyone is watching this right now. What we have seen from those opposite has been a complete waste of time that could have been given over to the Shadow Treasurer. The Shadow Treasurer was here, ready; he was pumped, he was primed. The media were all here. So what is going on? What are the opposition doing? What has the Manager of Opposition Business been instructed to do? Has he been told to silence Brad? That is how it looks – that is exactly how it looks.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a tight debate as to whether the opposition should be entitled to a budget-in-reply uninterrupted. The Leader of the House is embarrassed at gagging the opposition from that right, but it is not an opportunity to be talking about these other matters.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Manager of Opposition Business knows that points of order are not an opportunity for debate. The Leader of the House to continue on the procedural motion.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Thank you very much, Deputy Speaker. I need to correct a few of the many mistruths that the member for Brighton has said. At no stage have we said that we are gagging the opposition from speaking to the budget or indeed the Shadow Treasurer. That is obviously what always happens, and the full half-hour would have been used. However, what those on the opposite side have deliberately chosen to do today is frustrate debate at every possible turn. They have done that, and one can only conclude that it is now a deliberate strategy of those who are worried about the tenuous leadership of the member for Hawthorn, because the member for Sandringham is being denied the opportunity –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the Leader of the House is defying your ruling. The government is clearly gagging the opposition from a right to a budget-in-reply, and I would ask you to bring the leader back to that question.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I have also ruled that points of order are not an opportunity to debate the question. The minister to continue on the procedural motion.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: It is completely nonsensical to argue that we are trying to gag the opposition. They have done this to themselves –

A member: Deliberately.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Deliberately. We have heard a lot from a number of members on the other side today, but have we heard from the Leader of the Opposition? No. Have we heard from the Shadow Treasurer? No. What is going on? You cannot manage your own business –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a tight debate. On three occasions now I have tried to raise this point of order with you. Clearly the Leader of the House is straying and trying to hide from the fact that the opposition is not being provided an opportunity to a budget-in-reply.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! This procedural debate is varying on both sides.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: To say that the opposition have been denied the opportunity of a budget-in-reply speech is wrong – it is absolutely wrong. What we have seen today has been an attempt by those on the other side to frustrate the legitimate business of the house at every turn, and they managed to get their timing wrong. They stuffed up their timing, which now means that we have to have yet another procedural motion, another waste-of-time motion, because they will not let Brad speak.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Correct titles, Minister.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: We will be back after question time to continue this nonsensical procedural motion designed to stop us from hearing from the Shadow Treasurer. Why? The Manager of Opposition Business, we have heard a lot from him today – way too much, some might suggest. So what is going on over on the other side? Why are they in so much chaos? Why can't they even deliver a budget-in-reply contribution at a time when the media were there, pumped and primed to see it, to be able to report on it, to see Brad Rowswell on his feet, the member for Sandringham in all of his glory. They have actively opposed him.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I remind all members to use correct titles.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:57): It is clear that the government is getting pretty fired up by a chaotic budget, a chaotic Parliament, a Parliament that is in absolute chaos. I read with interest today in the *Herald Sun* from Shannon Deery that the government is in absolute chaos and they could not manage a chook raffle.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member is entitled to speak without noise.

David SOUTHWICK: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I came in here today trying to give the government the benefit of the doubt and was hoping that we would have a government business program that would allow us, as we have had by precedent for 160 years, to have a proper address from the Shadow Treasurer, a budget reply, and we have seen the chaos. We have seen the last-minute changes. We have heard the fact that the Shadow Treasurer has been given 10 minutes – not 30 minutes, but 10 minutes – to give a budget reply. Clearly the government has something to hide in a shocking, shocking budget, a budget that has taxes like we have never seen before – a schools tax, a rent tax. We have seen so much in terms of taxation, but we have also seen a government that is trying to put things through without giving it the normal time that we have had time and time again. This is a horrible government, a chaotic government, with a dud budget that they are clearly trying to hide.

We heard the manager of government business say that the opposition clearly messed up their times. I would like to remind the manager of government business that it was only her colleague, the member for South Barwon, that clearly said, 'We are the government, and we control this house. We control

the government business program.' Well, clearly not, if the government are swapping and changing when they bring things on, bringing last-minute bills to the chamber, withdrawing bills at the last minute. The manager of government business introduced a bill today, and then she had to retract the bill and had to reintroduce it. This is a government that is in chaos. This is a Parliament that is a mess. This is a Parliament that is a joke, and the government could not manage a chook raffle. We have a broke budget, a broke state, thanks to this government.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Eureka is warned.

David SOUTHWICK: They have clearly got something to hide, because they will not give us the 30 minutes that we deserve to hold this useless government to account.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Mordialloc.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (13:00): Thank you.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The time for lunch has arrived. The member will have the call when we resume.

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

Business interrupted under resolution of house of 18 May.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Schools payroll tax

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:01): My question is to the Minister for Education. In the middle of a cost-of-living crisis the minister now has the power to charge a new tax on schools. When will the minister publish the list of schools that will be taxed?

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (14:02): Government schools in this state have long paid payroll tax, and now we are ensuring the wealthier schools do the same to pay their fair share. The vast majority, around 85 per cent, of non-government schools will not be affected by this change, and we will continue to deliver substantial support for all schools across all of our sites. I am not going to go into the detail of this legislation, because it is currently before the house.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:02): Nazareth College in Noble Park North charges fees of around \$1700 per term. Will the minister guarantee that this school will not be subject to the school tax?

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (14:03): I would just like to reiterate for the house that education received \$4.9 billion out of the most recent budget for early childhood, primary schools and secondary schools. That goes across our low fee paying schools and our government schools, and we will continue to support those schools that need the assistance with growth.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on standing order 58, this is an important question in relation to a particular school in Noble Park. The minister was asked whether that school would be subject to the government's new hit-list tax, and I ask you to bring the minister back to that question.

The SPEAKER: Manager of Opposition Business, I ask that you do not use points of order to repeat the question. The minister was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Natalie HUTCHINS: I remind the house that the legislation to facilitate this is currently before the house, and this government has a long history of being able to differentiate between low fee paying independent schools and high fee paying independent schools. Once the legislation and the regulations are through this house and the other house, we will be working with the sector to determine a list.

Ministers statements: First Nations policies

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:05): I am pleased to rise in this National Reconciliation Week to share with the house our government's investment in meaningful change for First Peoples – for First Peoples by First Peoples, that sense of self-determination that runs right through all of our policy decisions and the work of this government, most recently of course in last week's budget. Just prior to the budget I was very pleased to be at the MCG with Uncle Michael Long, not only an Essendon champion but a champion Australian and such a strong and passionate leader of First Nations Australians. His Long Walk some almost 20 years ago when he asked for then Prime Minister John Howard to listen and do more and do better was a profoundly important moment then, and as we approach the 20th occasion on which that walk will be conducted, he will be back again walking to Canberra at the end of this year. I think he will get a very different response from the Labor Prime Minister in office now than he perhaps did way back then.

But as important as that occasion was to come together and reflect on Michael's leadership and the leadership of so many other First Nations Australians, it was also fitting just a few days later to bring down a budget with the biggest ever boost for First Nations supports. Of particular note, we are making sure that Aboriginal child protection is run by Aboriginal people, and also advancing treaty, truth and justice, leading our nation and getting this done – not being divided by this and not being overwhelmed by it as a challenge, but instead seeing it as a critical opportunity to do more and do better.

We all know that in health, in education, in early years and in every area of public policy, if we engage with Aboriginal people and listen to them, then we get much better outcomes, not just for Aboriginal people but for all of us. We all pay the price of failure in dollars and in other terms. That is why the Voice is so important. That is why I will be voting yes, and I hope all honourable members will do the same.

Schools payroll tax

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:07): My question is to the Minister for Education. Will the minister guarantee that donations and school fundraisers will not be included in the criteria to tax a school?

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (14:07): Isn't it interesting that those opposite want to get up and only talk about education when it is the most wealthy schools in this state? Yet their policies are about putting HECS on kinders and schools –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this was an important question and an important clarification in relation to the new hit-list tax, and I would ask you to bring the minister back to this important question. I will not repeat the question, but it was an important question, and I would ask you to bring the minister back to the question.

The SPEAKER: Minister, I ask you to come back to the question that was asked.

Natalie HUTCHINS: The changes before the house are totally related to payroll tax. That does not go to the additional fees that are charged on buildings and so forth that the opposition are alluding to.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:08): What criteria is the minister using to determine which schools are subject to the school tax?

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (14:08): There is legislation before this house. We will have regulations that come out of that legislation, and that is when we will put together the list that is going to be affected by this.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Malvern is warned.

Ministers statements: property tax

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (14:09): I am pleased to say that as part of the 2023–24 budget the Andrews Labor government will deliver landmark reform to abolish stamp duty for commercial and industrial properties, boosting business growth and expansion. Removing up-front costs on commercial and industrial buildings will make it easier for businesses to get established and of course to thrive, boosting economic activity and growth. It means that a retail business can be more confident about moving to a new location or a logistics company requiring additional warehousing space will have fewer barriers to expansion. The cumulative increase in the size of the Victorian economy as a result of these reforms is up to \$50 billion in net present value terms. Paul Guerra from the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry described it as:

... landmark and generational productivity reform which businesses across Victoria will welcome.

He added:

This is exactly the type of progressive tax reform that is required to free up stamp duty charges which will accelerate building upgrades, stimulate investment in commercial property and free up more capital.

Brendan Coates from the Grattan Institute said:

Major state tax reforms are few and far between in Australia, which is what makes Tuesday's Victorian budget very, very significant.

The Property Council of Australia said that this landmark reform 'delivers a potentially huge long-term gain'. Transitioning away from stamp duty has been recommended of course by numerous reports and reviews over the years. While those opposite argue and infight, only the Andrews Labor government is getting on and delivering this nation-building reform.

Housing affordability

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:11): My question is to the Treasurer: will the Treasurer guarantee that rents will not increase because of the government's land tax hike on low-value investment properties?

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (14:11): I thank the member for his question. Certainly this government has recognised that throughout the pandemic there was a lot of distress within the community – distress that actually required government action. We have put \$31.5 billion into rebuilding this community and making sure that communities remained whole and that businesses were in a position to take the opportunities of the economic upswing. The changes that we have put in place are measured, modest and targeted to those areas where there is a capacity to pay within the economy. To be very clear, over the last 10 years property prices have appreciated by 84 per cent on average, and that really does tell us that there has been a great capacity to pay for certain landowners. On a property value, for example, of \$650,000 – with capital improvement value let us call it \$1.3 million – that equates to about \$75,000 per year in capital appreciation, capital gains. Certainly as a government we recognise that we need to –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, standing order 58 requires the Treasurer to be direct, and the question asked whether or not the Treasurer would guarantee that rents would not increase because of his new tax. I would ask you to bring him back to that question.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Manager of Opposition Business not to repeat the question in his points of order. The Treasurer was being relevant to the question.

Tim PALLAS: Thanks very much. It does give me a bit of clarity. I was not entirely sure what the question was, but now that I have heard it, I intend to respond to it. At the risk of taking the Shadow Treasurer through market economics 101, I will make the basic point that the price of rental accommodation –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Gippsland South is warned.

Tim PALLAS: is a consequence of the issue of supply and demand. At the moment of course, with rental accommodation in the metropolitan Melbourne market running at about 1.2 per cent vacancy, clearly we are in a position where it is a landlords market. And who as a consequence is suffering – well, it is tenants. Ultimately, from our perspective, we recognise that there is little capacity for pass on through pricing. And why is that? Well, if you look at essentially two comparable properties, both of the same value, both of the same quality, one with a mortgage on it, one without, they are not offered to the market at different prices because it is not the owner of the property who dictates the price, it is the market that dictates the price. I hope that this opportunity to be taken through market economics has enlightened the member.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:15): Does the Treasurer support the Greens' proposal for a cap on rents?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Eureka is warned.

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (14:15): So the blue–green alliance is in full display. I want to remind the member that this side of the house voted against the suggestion that we should be looking at that. Certainly from our perspective putting a freeze on prices would massively distort the market, as I have said publicly.

Ministers statements: First Nations policies

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (14:16): I rise today to acknowledge National Reconciliation Week and the theme for 2023, 'Be a voice for generations'. The theme asks all Australians to use their power, their words and their actions to create a better and more just Australia for everybody. It is a theme that truly embodies not only the words but most importantly the actions of the Andrews government in making Victoria a fairer, more just place for our First Nations communities.

Victoria continues to lead the nation in being the only jurisdiction to progress all three elements of the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*: truth, treaty and voice. Truth-telling is about understanding how yesterday's actions drive the unjust structures of today, as we clearly heard through the powerful testimonies to the Yoorrook Justice Commission recently. At the end of this year this Labor government will be negotiating this country's first ever treaty, and in doing so we will transform the relationship between the state and the First Peoples of Victoria with a focus on delivering better outcomes. The voice gives Aboriginal people a say in the decisions that affect their lives, and the benefits of this have been clear through the work of the First Peoples' Assembly in representing their communities in preparation for those treaty negotiations.

Of course all Australians will be asked to vote for a national Voice later this year – a really important decision – a question that effectively asks us to think about the nation that we want to be. Do we want to be big-hearted or do we want to be small-minded? Our nation-leading First Peoples reform agenda only happens through partnership and a deep, enduring commitment to change, a commitment that was backed up by a record investment in First Nations Victorians in last week's budget of close to half a billion dollars – which, it must be said, builds on another record from a couple of years ago from this government. This is not a cost. It is an investment in equity and better outcomes for First Nations communities.

Housing affordability

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:18): My question is for the Premier. We are reading now that the average renter is spending more than 30 per cent of their income on rent, but for low-income earners

it is more than 50 per cent of their income. Rents are now so high that it is driving renters into poverty, into financial stress. We need first aid because rents are going up all the time and people are haemorrhaging money. So will the government intervene now with a rent freeze in anticipation of a more considered strategy for housing?

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:19): I thank the member for Brunswick for his question, and I will make it clear at the outset that I in no way want to cast any doubt or aspersions on the member's genuine interest in these matters. They are serious matters and matters that the government has looked at very closely – that is, residential tenancy matters in broader terms; I will get to the specifics of his question in a moment. But I am obliged to point out that it is very hard to take people seriously when it comes to housing affordability, particularly those who are in rental stress, when fellow members of a particular political party have time and time again campaigned against and in fact actively disrupted and prevented the construction of additional social and affordable housing.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask the Premier to resume his seat.

Daniel ANDREWS: You cannot say one thing at town hall and another thing at Spring Street.

Tim Read: On a point of order, Speaker, I am sure renters around Victoria would like to hear the question answered rather than an analysis of federal politics.

Members interjecting.

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

Daniel ANDREWS: No, I had not got to federal politics just yet, but I will get to that in a moment. It is always good when you get a sup – I will have another go and get to the feds in a minute. What I was actually referring to was, for instance, back in 2017, City of Darebin Greens councillors stopping social and affordable housing in that local community. I could talk about the Yarra City Council, the many, many different examples of Greens-dominated local government –

Tim Read: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I will not repeat the question, but we have gone to another tier of government now. If the Premier is attributing the rental crisis to the Greens, he is giving us more power than I think we have got.

Daniel ANDREWS: The supply of housing is absolutely critical to the price that people pay for it. The member from Brunswick pointed out in his learned opinion renters would want to know this and renters would want to know that. I think renters would want to know who is actually on their side and who is pretending to be on their side, who has actually done some things – say, 100-odd amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act – and who is merely a commentator. Then when they get the rarest of gifts, actual control over policy and outcomes, and I admit that is not in this level of government but at local government and in the Senate in Canberra, they have actively, consistently, deliberately, maliciously constrained the supply of housing, particularly affordable housing. So I make it really clear to the member –

Ellen Sandell: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is deliberately misleading the house. I ask you to bring him back to the question, which was about rent freezes.

The SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order, member for Melbourne.

Daniel ANDREWS: The points of order are absolutely proportionate to the hypocrisy of some. Take as many points of order as you want, but you will not wash away the record of the Greens political party when it comes to affordable housing, whether it be public housing, social housing or affordable housing in a broader context. No-one on this side of the house is going to be lectured to about renting, about renters rights, about housing affordability, about supply by a political party that at every turn stands in the way of more affordable housing for the poorest in our community.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:23): During the pandemic this government implemented a freeze on rents, a very appropriate response at a time of considerable stress. I submit that we are now facing a time of considerable stress for renters. Why won't the government do the same thing again?

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:24): I am very pleased that the member for Brunswick has acknowledged that the government stepped in during a one-in-100-year event. Here was I, thinking that it was all because of the Greens political party. I think they have been out there telling the world that it was all because of them. So –

Sam Hibbins: It was.

Daniel ANDREWS: Oh, it was, apparently. Good on you, Sammy. What was that, Sammy, you were just telling us about the stories we tell ourselves? Was that what you interjected before? Goodness, story time is right – honestly.

There are some people who do, there are some people who get things done, and there are other people who sit in the cheap seats claiming credit for all that is good and running a mile from everything that is challenging. Anything good? It was only because of the Greens. Anything tough? You look around, cannot find them. This is a Labor government, and we will continue delivering for the most vulnerable and indeed every single Victorian. We thank the Greens for their commentary, but you have stopped more housing than you have built, and we will not be taking lectures from you.

The SPEAKER: I ask members to refer to other members by their correct titles.

Ministers statements: First Nations health care

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (14:25): This reconciliation week I rise to update the house on the Andrews Labor government's commitment to supporting the health and wellbeing of First Nations Victorians, including of course Aboriginal women and families. We know that Aboriginal Victorians continue to experience poorer health and face ongoing barriers to accessing culturally safe care, but in partnership with our Victorian Aboriginal health services we are changing that. We are committed to keeping Aboriginal health in Aboriginal hands, and we are backing in our commitment with more investment in services, real supports and meaningful reform.

As part of our \$153 million women's health package we are delivering a dedicated Aboriginal-led women's health clinic, and we will work closely with our Aboriginal health partners to ensure that this is a service designed by Aboriginal women for Aboriginal women. We will also deliver the state's first dedicated Aboriginal early parenting centre and build cultural safety into the foundation of all of our EPCs and our women's health clinics. To ensure the voices of Victorian women, including Aboriginal women, are embedded in our work, we are creating Victoria's first women's health advisory council. This is just a small part of all the work that is underway.

Just last week I joined our Aboriginal community health partners to sign the Aboriginal health and wellbeing agreement. This represents a significant change in the way in which we deliver health care here in Victoria. We also launched the *Victorian Aboriginal Cancer Journey Strategy* and affirmed the *Victorian Aboriginal Health, Medical, and Wellbeing Research Accord*, each a pivotal step towards true self-determination and health equity in our state. Real change takes real leadership, and when it comes to working hand in hand with our First Nations people, only an Andrews Labor government will deliver.

Transport infrastructure projects

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:27): My question is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. Mawson International has been stood down from Victorian rail projects following reports of corrupt ghost shifts. When was the minister first notified of this alleged illegal activity?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (14:27): I thank the member for his question, and the answer is late last week.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:27): What action has the minister taken to ensure there is no further illegal activity on projects that she is responsible for?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (14:28): I think there are some assumptions in that question that are worth going back a step on. As the member's substantive question went to, there were reports last week of matters across a range of rail sites across the state. Those matters are under active investigation, and of course we need to allow those active investigations to come to their conclusion, lest we cut across any other referrals that may need to be made to relevant agencies for further action and follow-up. But I did also want to make the point –

David Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, I ask if you could bring the minister back to answering the question. These illegal activities happened under the minister's watch, and I ask you to bring her back to answering the question. These are very serious illegal activities, and the minister needs to tell us what action she has done to ensure –

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The minister was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: As you indicated, I was directly answering the question that was raised by the member opposite. I appreciate he may want to make a theatrical scene about this. I am more focused on allowing the relevant agencies to do their work. We note that Metro Trains have taken action in terms of their role with this third-party supplier, and we await the outcome of the investigations.

Ministers statements: level crossing removals

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (14:29): Last week, level crossings 69 and 70 were removed in Surrey Hills and in Mont Albert. These were two of the most dangerous level crossings in the state, where two women lost their lives in 2016. Along with the member for Box Hill and the member for Sunbury, we were pleased not only to mark the removal of these dangerous and congested level crossings but also to open the brand new Union station, station 41 being delivered by the Level Crossing Removal Project – 70 level crossings, 41 new train stations transforming the metropolitan rail network.

We are getting great feedback from the local community. I am sure the member for Box Hill is getting a bit of feedback. I can share with him that an email I received says thanks for this 'amazing' project that:

... was all done on time and with such great committed attention and friendly staff.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Caulfield is warned.

Jacinta ALLAN: We are not stopping at 70 or 75 or 85. We are pushing on to remove 110 dangerous and congested level crossings, and as the member for Ringwood knows, that will make the Lilydale line level crossing free. As the members for Footscray, Williamstown, Laverton and Werribee know, that will make the Werribee line level crossing free. On the Frankston line the members for Caulfield, Bentleigh, Frankston, Carrum and Mordialloc know that by 2029 the Frankston line will be level crossing free. There are some who also have seen firsthand – they have not always supported these projects, but they have seen firsthand – the safety benefits, the congestion-reduction benefits and the more train services benefits that we bring to these projects. I also want to acknowledge the 3 million hours that are being worked across our projects by Indigenous Victorians

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Tuesday 30 May 2023

Legislative Assembly

2037

who are a big part of our Big Build. They are now and they will be into the future, thanks to the investment of the Andrews Labor government.

Constituency questions

Nepean electorate

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (14:32): (180) My question is for the Treasurer. The Labor government's proposed changes to land tax arrangements will hit my community on the southern Mornington Peninsula harder than most. These new tax arrangements are another example of this government playing the politics of envy and forcing aspirational Victorians to foot the bill for their economic mistakes. More than 26,000 properties in my electorate are now subject to land tax with a significant portion being long-term rentals, which are likely to see prices rise on the back of this tax grab. Make no mistake, this is a rental tax. Many in my community do not understand how punishing their success, suppressing their aspirations and forcing rental increases will address these issues. My question to the Treasurer is: how will punishing these hardworking families and driving up rental prices help to alleviate the accelerating housing crisis in Nepean?

Bass electorate

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (14:33): (181) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. What is the project status of our \$7.8 million investment on the Bass Highway corridor at Kilcunda, which seeks to add safe pedestrian crossings and a service road? We were all thrilled with the funding announcement this time last year, and it was cause for a big celebratory jump. It was a collective community effort, including from the Kilcunda Community Association, who were active and unwavering in their advocacy. The call to do something spanned years. Petitions were presented, letters written and all were on board. Kilcunda is a destination with breathtaking views, the rail trail and the iconic trestle bridge in its glory. Whales swim by and surfers catch waves. It also has the main access road to Wonthaggi through to Phillip Island. It is a freight route; it connects us to South Gippsland and the city. The volume of traffic continues to grow. The entire precinct I have previously described as a 'chaotic vehicle shemozzle'. Thank you, Minister. I really look forward to this update.

Murray Plains electorate

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:34): (182) My constituency question is to the Minister for Health. Can the minister please provide information to the community of Swan Hill and district as to when the construction of stage 1 of the Swan Hill hospital will begin. The clearing of the site has now been finished for several months, and questions are being asked as to when the construction will actually start. It would be appreciated if the minister could provide that information to the Swan Hill community.

Bayswater electorate

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (14:34): (183) Sixty million dollars is now fully funded for a massive upgrade of Boronia station. Funding is locked in and works are now set to start next year. I promised we would deliver a massive upgrade to our station, and I am absolutely stoked that the Andrews Labor government has delivered the funding needed to get on with delivering the biggest investment in Boronia in a generation. But it is not just an upgrade to the station, it is so much more than that. A big part of the works will deck over the southern rail trench closest to Woolies to create a new vibrant community heart, create lots of open space and connect Boronia up like never before. So my constituency question is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. The Andrews Labor government announced that works would start in 2024 and be completed in 2026, but I know the community is keen to know a bit more detail on those time lines and when we can expect to see those shovels in the ground. This truly is a game changer for our community, and it is something locals have called for time and time again. I am proud that we are also getting on with over 20 projects already delivered or being delivered as part of the Boronia revitalisation work, and this is the next big step in

backing in Boronia. Only Labor will deliver the upgraded station and infrastructure Boronia needs and deserves.

Rowville electorate

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (14:35): (184) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Minister, would it surprise you to learn that during the 59th and 60th parliaments I have raised the issue of road conditions in my electorate 44 times? In fact the only number larger is the 1571 constituents that have contacted my office to complain about the roads in their local community. Lysterfield, Wellington and Napoleon roads are dangerous and need to be fixed, and that is the end of the story. So my question is: when will the government announce a plan to fix the roads in the electorate of Rowville, when the Labor government has already slashed 25 per cent from the roads maintenance budget? You might have given up on fixing our roads, but the residents of Rowville and I have not, and we will continue fighting to have our roads repaired.

Monbulk electorate

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (14:36): (185) My constituency question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources and concerns the Andrews Labor government's recent announcement to introduce neighbourhood batteries in each of the local government areas captured within the seat of Monbulk. Minister, how will neighbourhood batteries support a more resilient network across the Dandenong Ranges? Energy resilience is an imperative issue across the ranges, with power outages a common occurrence. Neighbourhood batteries are an incredible initiative which enable the network to support more rooftop solar by storing solar-generated electricity during the day and discharging it during the evenings when demand is highest. This enables consumers to generate and consume more renewable energy locally and supports Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions and renewable energy targets. I would appreciate any further information that the minister could provide on the benefits of neighbourhood batteries for the people in my electorate, and I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community of Monbulk.

Melbourne electorate

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:37): (186) My question is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs. In March I got a heartbreaking email from Natalie, who lives in my electorate with her young son. She had just received a notice from her real estate agent saying her rent was increasing by \$200 a week. In just two years her rent has gone from \$400 to \$650. That is a 62 per cent increase or a more than 30 per cent increase per year. Natalie is desperate. She moved back to Melbourne in 2020, fleeing family violence. Now she cannot afford the rent increase and will either have to fight it or move her son again. In her email she told me, 'What really broke me was just knowing that they were allowed to get away with it, and that makes you feel isolated and alone'. Several kids in her son's class have already left school because they have been forced out of the city by the rent increases. Minister, why won't the government introduce a rent freeze to protect people like Natalie from unfair rent increases? We need action now.

Mordialloc electorate

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (14:38): (187) My constituency question is to the Minister for Education, and I ask when early works will get underway on Keysborough Gardens Primary School's \$5.34 million redevelopment – their stage 2 project. It was great to join principal Sherri Jenkins, more than 350 students and the wonderful school community of Keysborough Gardens to confirm in this budget the delivery of that extra funding. It will cater for 150 more students in this growing and thriving community. It will mean extra learning and play spaces and really deliver on all their stage 2 ambitions. So I give a big shout-out to the teachers, the education support staff and the wider community for all that they do. It was in 2020 that the Keysborough Gardens Primary School opened. If it was not for an Andrews Labor government and the building agenda we have for brand new schools, this would never have happened. We have seen it go from strength to strength under Sherri's

leadership, and we really thank and appreciate all the work that has been done to make this school absolutely outstanding and a leading school in our south-eastern suburbs communities.

Benambra electorate

Bill TILLEY (Benambra) (14:39): (188) My constituency question is to the Minister for Public Transport, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide information and do what matters to address the overcrowding on trains to and from Wodonga – other than last-minute buses. This is, simply put, a poor imitation of a joke, where tickets are sold with no appreciation of whether the train is already full and people are forced to stand or sit on the carriage floor, mostly, like some Third World service, for the up to 4-hour trip. How is this even safe? That only 96 of the 328 seats can be booked online beggars belief. Last Saturday at 6:55 am a train from the border was, after just four stops, close to full as it pulled into Wangaratta. More people boarded, most forced to stand. You then had to get buses put on at the next stop for the surplus passengers to get them to Melbourne. Cheap train fares were a great idea – in fact it was the coalition's idea – but surely it is obvious that remedies need to be made.

Narre Warren North electorate

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (14:40): (189) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. In my community of Narre Warren North people could not be more excited for the level crossing removal at Webb Street in Narre Warren. The boom gates have for a long time caused so much congestion all the way through Webb Street, disrupting pedestrians, traffic and many small businesses that operate in the area. My community knows how much of a difference a crossing removal can make. The recent completion of the Hallam Road level crossing removal has made such a huge difference to the traffic along Hallam Road, and I cannot wait to see the same happen at Webb Street. Now that the works have started on the level crossing, can the minister please provide an update on how the works are progressing? My constituents are very much looking forward to both the level crossing removal and the station upgrade.

Bills

Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023

Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (14:41): Before we broke for lunch I had one split second, so it is good to return to what was the occasion to filibuster the filibuster. We saw that from the member for Brighton, who tried to adjourn off debate at that time, and an extraordinary circumstance over the course of this morning, where we saw those antics and whatever their opposition strategy was, to play for time to block the member for Sandringham's moment in the sun. I do not know whether that is a bit of bayside rivalry or what is going on with filibustering and time, but the member for Brighton theatrically put forward that not in 160 years have we seen certain things. I do not think I can recall anywhere where a filibuster was done on their own filibustering. They got caught in an absolute circle where they were avoiding time and adjournment of this debate based on their antics. Rather than having the member for Sandringham have the full media gallery here – there were about 15 journo's that came in to see – we have got one journo at the moment and that is about it.

We might have missed the program, and the member for Sandringham's time, the 30 minutes. Now, I do not know whether it is so scripted, this speech, that the member for Sandringham can only give it in one go for 30 minutes and then cannot start again during that time, but the notion that the member for Sandringham was gagged was a bit extraordinary. As the lead speaker on the budget, he has got that time and that opportunity. We know that it has probably been practised about 140 or 150 times, and we are all on the edge of our seats to see how it will be done. I just cannot believe that the member for Brighton was filibustering his time. I mean, the member for Sandringham was pacing through the

chambers, he was pacing out near the coffee stand, he was waiting for his moment. This is his moment in the sun, the time to shine, and the member for Brighton would not let him have his go. We know it is fanciful that he is not a leadership contender. We know that has been put forward, in his own words, but we really know the truth. This is the moment in time. This is when you get broadcasting ready to send the program straight through – send through the video and the audio as quick as they can, and get it up on Facebook and get the grabs out as soon as possible. I think some of the antics and the opposition chaos that we saw this morning, some of the antics that were put forward, were really extraordinary and really disappointing to see. So hopefully there are no other antics with the bayside crew, where we see the member for Brighton frustrating this time, pushing out the opportunity for the member for Sandringham to make his contribution. Maybe it is a sense of some of the antics that we are seeing. We saw I think three or four procedural votes put forward, and those opposite, who have a woeful, woeful contribution on bills and second readings, are then trying to frustrate the Parliament and delay that further as well. So we lost, a bit like the rain delay in a cricket program, so much time this morning that could have been dedicated to those bills but instead was literally the member for Brighton trying to get his time in the sun. Maybe it is a bit of relevance deprivation, maybe a bit of jealousy that the member for Sandringham has gone from Opposition Whip and straight past him onto the front bench, and then – I mean, they do not bat too deep – gone straight to then having leadership aspirations, being on the ticket for leadership. It is absolutely extraordinary –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I think I know what your point of order is going to be, Manager of Opposition Business.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, as much as it pains me to make it, I would ask you to bring the member back to the question and note that he is now stopping his own members from speaking on the budget – his own members.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Manager of Opposition Business knows that a point of order is not an opportunity to debate. The member for Mordialloc will come back to the procedural motion.

Tim RICHARDSON: Thank you, Speaker. I am a bit confused. Maybe those opposite can give us a bit of an insight into what the point was of the procedural motion before the lunchbreak. What was the point of doing all of those antics and blocking the member for Sandringham? And will these be some of the antics that are put forward? Really, some of the procedural stuff that we want to understand is: is this just more form? Is this more time wasting? Is this more antics? Because that has really frustrated the time of the Parliament and for the contributions and it has had a massive impact on the program and the contributions that we will make during that time. So maybe a couple of the speakers that want to contribute to the debate on this procedural motion may put forward the reasons that they moved that forward. It sounds like they are wanting to rescind it now. They do not want to speak now that the opportunity is put forward. But they put it forward before lunch. The member for Brighton has obviously wasted and frustrated that time. It has been now 2 hours that we have wasted in that time and that journey. So we will see whether they then defend the procedural motion. Maybe they will rescind it – who knows.

Who will get up next? I mean, the workhorses of this area – it will be either the member for Gippsland South or the member for Eildon. They do the most debating on second-reading speeches. They literally are 40 per cent of those opposite's contribution, so maybe they will step forward and rescind the procedural motion and the time wasting and the ridiculous things that we have seen today. That is what we want to see. Give the member for Sandringham his time to shine. This is the moment. It has been practised a number of times. Let us get underway and see how he goes.

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (14:46): I stand in defence of the member for Sandringham. Member for Sandringham, I remember our old St Bede's College days. You were on the debating team if I remember correctly.

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair, member for Bentleigh.

Nick STAIKOS: I was only the timekeeper, but it gave me a front row seat to some of the best contributions you made. And I had my office clear my diary this morning because I wanted to sit here for the full 30 minutes to hear the member for Sandringham make his budget reply – I think it is his first budget reply. But we were heartbroken, absolutely heartbroken, by the antics of not only the opposition but the Greens in wasting the morning. Then it got to quarter of an hour to lunchtime and they realised: ‘Oh, no, we’ve truncated our own budget reply. What do we do?’ So we get this stunt. They have been saying all morning that they need time to consult with the community and with different stakeholders about the bills that have been introduced into the Parliament this week. But I would ask the question: who still speaks to this opposition? I mean, who on earth still speaks to this opposition? If you look at their recent state council meeting –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a tight procedural debate, and all the member is doing is taking away from his own colleagues’ time to debate the budget bill. I would ask you to bring him back to the debate.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The member for Bentleigh is to come back to the procedural motion.

Nick STAIKOS: The bizarre thing about this is I am speaking on the motion that has been moved by the member who raised that point of order. I mean, the chaos on that side of the house, even for the worst opposition in Australia, is absolutely extraordinary. As I said, they go around saying, ‘We need time to consult with people.’ Nobody talks to you. Nobody cares about what you think. You are the worst opposition in Australia.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask the member for Bentleigh not to refer to ‘you’.

Nick STAIKOS: Well, I am referring to the opposition. Nobody talks to this opposition. They are the worst opposition in Australia – probably the second worst; I think the WA Liberals give them a run for their money with their two members.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, again, this is now drivel, and I would ask you to bring the member back to this tight procedural debate instead of allowing him to continue with this drivel.

The SPEAKER: Order! Manager of Opposition Business, I thank you for your point of order. I ask you to state your points of order succinctly without elaborating. The member for Bentleigh to come back to the procedural motion.

Nick STAIKOS: Thank you very much for that guidance, Speaker. I am simply pointing out that nobody speaks to this opposition. Nobody cares what they think. They are a chaotic opposition. They are a rabble. I mean, that recent state council meeting was absolutely extraordinary.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the member has now defied your ruling on more than one occasion. I would ask you to ask him to stop defying your ruling and have him come back to the question.

The SPEAKER: The member for Bentleigh will come back to the procedural motion.

Nick STAIKOS: The opposition need to understand I am gagging to hear the budget reply, but I am simply reflecting on their tactics this morning that have delayed the member for Sandringham from giving his budget reply. I think you guys should hang your heads in shame for that, because I am sure the member for Sandringham has a cracker speech prepared. I have only got 1 minute left, but I will just say again that the state council meeting recently was absolutely extraordinary and just proved –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this is now the fourth time that I have had to raise this point of order. The member’s contribution is now outrageous. This is an outrageous and flagrant misuse of the chamber. I would ask you – this is now the fourth time.

The SPEAKER: Order! I understand your point of order, Manager of Opposition Business. The member for Bentleigh will come back to the procedural motion in the time that is left.

Nick STAIKOS: I reckon the so-called terrorists in the Liberal Party are happy with what I am saying, to be honest, but I will conclude. There are only 20 seconds left, but I will just say the opposition wasted the Parliament's time this morning. We could have heard the budget reply this morning. It was a wasted opportunity on their part. But I will say I am interested in sitting here and listening to the member for Sandringham give his speech.

Motion defeated.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:52): I rise today on behalf of the 6.8 million Victorians who are going to be paying more and getting less because of the budget handed down last Tuesday. Victorians should have a government that works for them, that makes their lives easier and that looks to create a better future for our children. Just last week I visited Highett Charcoal Chicken in my electorate, a fantastic local business, employing locals and feeding our community. In the last 12 months their costs have significantly increased. From spuds to chooks and the cost of cooking oil, their margins are getting tighter and tighter at the same time as their costs and government taxes are increasing. Like this local business, Victorians should hold hope for the future and have aspiration that their government will reduce their costs, not increase them. But instead we have a government that is trapping Victorians with the price of debt-fuelled spending and tens of billions in waste and government cost blowouts. Rather than reflecting the best of the Victorian people, this budget reflects the financial mismanagement and lack of credibility and integrity of the Andrews Labor government. This is not a budget that makes lives better but one that burdens Victorians with more debt, more taxes and cuts to promised infrastructure projects.

It is a budget that divides Victorians instead of uniting them. I say this at the outset: we on this side of the house believe in Victorians. We believe in everyone in this state, and we fundamentally believe in everyone having a genuine chance to get ahead. The government's budget divides. It is a budget premised on division and class warfare. It taxes aspiration. It taxes a fair go. It is a budget that punishes 6.8 million Victorians for trying to get ahead. If you are a family hoping to send your children to an independent school to give them the very best start in life, it will cost you an extra \$1000 per child every single year for the next decade. If you are hoping to invest in the property market, you will pay an extra \$1000 a year for the privilege, and you will go on paying an extra \$1000 every year for the next 10 years.

If you are a business wanting to grow and employ more people, you will be slogged with higher payroll tax. If you are looking to buy a new home and land package, you will be paying more because developers will be paying more in land tax. And if you are hoping for a pay increase, whether you are a nurse or a road worker or someone who works in an office, this budget increases payroll tax when the government's own Department of Treasury and Finance have demonstrated that lower payroll taxes result in higher wages. For tens of thousands of families across this state, the budget will cost them \$30,000 over the next decade at a time when they can least afford it. Just 18 months ago the Treasurer said in this house that:

... we have done a lot for Victorians by taking the weight off them in terms of the tax burden ...

But far from taking the weight off Victorians, the government's budget will increase costs for Victorians. Victorians are already paying the highest taxes in Australia, \$5638 per person – more than any other state in the nation. From when Labor were elected more than nine years ago, Victoria's tax take is set to double, and they have introduced nearly 50 new taxes.

This side of the house backs the dreams, backs the ambitions and backs the aspirations of 6.8 million Victorians, and we want them to get ahead. Let me be absolutely clear about this: we oppose the tax hikes in this budget. We oppose Labor's schools tax, we oppose Labor's rent tax, we oppose Labor's jobs tax and we oppose Labor's debt tax – all taxes on aspiration, all taxes on a fair go – because we

are for Victorians. Not only do we oppose Labor's school tax, but we will repeal it in government, and we will legislate a state debt cap. We will oppose these taxes every day that we are in opposition. We oppose them because they are unjust. We oppose them because they divide rather than unite Victorians. We oppose them because they are counter to productivity, counter to growth, counter to job growth and counter to a fair go. We say to millions of Victorian families: under the Liberal–Nationals you will be literally thousands of dollars better off every single year.

Victorians are paying more and more in taxes for one and only one reason – this government's approach to financial management. We on this side of the house understand a fundamental truth: government does not spend its own money. In fact it spends the money of 6.8 million Victorians, and every dollar spent by the government comes from taxpayers. It is money from everyday Victorians, and when governments borrow money it means 6.8 million Victorians are left to pay the bill. Last Tuesday's budget means Victorians will owe \$171 billion within the next three years. That is 25,000 bucks for every Victorian man, woman and child. That is \$22 million a day, each and every day, just to pay the Andrews government's interest bill. Under this budget Victorians will pay this year alone \$4 billion in interest payments on the government's debt, and this will increase to \$8 billion within three years – a doubling of interest payments in just three years. That \$8 billion could be used to employ 20,000 teachers, 17,000 maternity unit nurses or 22,000 police recruits for four years. But of course interest payments must be paid somehow, and as the budget demonstrates it is through higher and more taxes and broken promises.

The government will say debt-fuelled spending is an investment in the future, but let us take a look at what Victorians have gotten out of the government's debt-fuelled spending. They have got close to 50 new taxes, with more than half of these taxes directly affecting the property industry and making it more difficult for Victorians to own their own home. They have got \$30 billion in wasted spending due to infrastructure cost blowouts. They have got a health system where more than 79,000 Victorians are waiting for elective surgery, with some waiting more than 280 days for surgery, and it is a health system that spends less per person on public hospitals than any other state or territory in the nation except for South Australia. They have got an ambulance system that continues to call code orange orders because it cannot cope with the levels. They have got a public housing system where a record high 70,000 Victorians are awaiting a roof over their head and the security and the stability that that provides.

They have got a justice system that has the highest pending case load of any state or territory magistrates court, with more than 83,000 cases currently outstanding. They have got a public education system that makes Melbourne the most expensive city in the country to educate a child in the government system, costing an average \$102,807 per child from foundation to year 12. They have got a state that is trailing behind Tasmania, South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland on economic performance. They have got a state that has had its credit rating downgraded by international credit agencies not once but twice. They had the world's longest lockdown. They have got a Department of Families, Fairness and Housing that has child protection data which does not comply with the government's data quality standards. They have got infrastructure projects that the Auditor-General found to be based on business cases that do not fully support informed investment decisions. They have got a former IBAC Commissioner critical of the government, an Ombudsman critical of the government, a Parliamentary Budget Office critical of the government and Supreme Court judges and former members of the Court of Appeal all critical of the government.

Victorians are getting a budget that will see them pay more while getting less. This budget not only costs Victorians more; it demonstrates the failings of the government's own fiscal strategy. It cuts jobs rather than creates jobs. It fails to bring down debt levels. It fails to rein in public sector project cost blowouts, and it not only raises taxes but introduces new ones. If the government's fiscal strategy were a business, it would be subject to deceptive and misleading conduct investigations by the ACCC. That is perhaps an apt point, because this budget also speaks to the integrity of the Andrews Labor government. The government promised to build the Geelong fast rail, and this budget breaks that promise. The government promised to build the Melbourne Airport rail link, and this budget breaks

that promise. And to think that just a few years ago the Premier stated in this house not once but twice: 'we keep our promises'. The ACCC would have ample fodder; they would have an absolute field day. In his budget speech on Tuesday the Treasurer said this was a budget about economic growth and jobs, but none of this is true. The budget itself forecasts unemployment to rise. It forecasts slow economic growth. It forecasts an increase in taxes and an increase in debt. International credit agencies have already said the budget will maintain negative pressure on the state's ratings. I do agree with the Premier on one thing. He stated in this house that AAA credit ratings 'are not handed out to states gripped by economic mismanagement'. Economic mismanagement indeed; I could not agree more with the Premier. Victorians deserve better.

This side of the house understands that 6.8 million Victorians have less of a chance of getting ahead when they are faced with higher taxes due entirely to this government's debt-fuelled spending. No government in history has ever taxed their way back to prosperity, yet this government is increasing its take from Victorians' pockets and introducing new taxes. I say to the 6.8 million Victorians: there is a better way. The Liberal-National parties know in the heart of our DNA that higher taxes and debt-fuelled spending are not sustainable. We know that government does not provide a sustainable basis for jobs growth and investment. It is the 1200 large businesses across our state, it is the 570,000 small businesses in Melbourne and it is the 150,000 small businesses in regional Victoria that generate jobs, that generate investment in the productivity capacity of the state and that provide Victorians with the opportunity they need to get ahead. It is small businesses like Limoncello in the Sandringham electorate, a cafe in my area who have been serving coffee and community for the last 22 years, that give local young people the opportunity to understand what the dignity of work actually is by employing them. It is small businesses like Wine by Sam in Seymour, which pivoted during COVID and increased their partnerships and online sales capability while continuing to produce award-winning wines enjoyed by many. These are the engines of Victoria's economy, and they are being burdened by the taxes of this government, taxes caused entirely by this government's debt-fuelled spending.

The Liberal-National parties also know that the aspiration of 6.8 million Victorians, the aspiration of 2 million families in this state, cannot be as easily achieved when they are facing rising cost-of-living pressures: higher car rego costs, higher insurance premiums, higher costs for property investment, higher taxes caused by this government. Victorian families and businesses will only be able to get ahead when the state government gets its hands out of their wallets, they will only be able to get ahead when they have a government that understands where public money comes from – the public – and they will only be able to get ahead when we have a government of integrity and a government of accountability.

Now, the Liberal-National parties will restore integrity and competence to our state and to the budget. Instead of more waste, higher debt and new taxes, we need a real plan to ease cost-of-living pressures for Victorians, and that starts with responsible economic management from the state government. Instead of introducing more or increased taxes, we will focus on increasing productivity so that every Victorian gets bang for their taxpayer buck, reducing waste and cost blowouts on major projects, bringing debt under control and supporting the private sector to invest back into our state and generate the jobs growth that we need right now.

Instead of making life harder for Victorians, we will ease the pressure caused by this government's financial mismanagement and give Victorians the greater aspiration they deserve to get ahead. We will do more to encourage private enterprise and the jobs that they create for Victorians. This starts by cutting red tape on small businesses, curtailing the unsustainable growth of the public sector and creating incentives for more private sector investment. We will do more for frontline services by backing in and hiring the frontline doctors, nurses, teachers and social service workers that our community needs. We will do more to make our schools better by better supporting teachers, increasing academic standards and cutting bureaucratic red tape so teachers can actually focus on teaching. We will implement an immediate and comprehensive review of the state's taxation system. We will identify opportunities to prevent young people entering the rotating door of jail and work to determine how we can best deliver early intervention to prevent crimes from occurring. We will

improve transparency in the health system by properly releasing quarterly health service performance data to the public. We will repeal Labor's unjust schools tax and immediately legislate a state debt cap. We will live within our means, and fundamentally we will be a government that serves the people honestly and with integrity.

Ultimately the budget is not about those of us in this place but about the 6.8 million Victorians, the 2.5 million households, the 2 million families, the 128,000 teachers, the 125,000 nurses and the 1 million schoolkids who will inherit the decisions that we make today. And for all these people, the budget will make them worse off – worse off because of higher unemployment, higher taxes, higher cost-of-living pressures and slowing economic growth. The unfortunate reality is that for as long as this government is in power, every Victorian will continue to pay more and get less because this government simply cannot manage money. I say to every Victorian: you deserve better. You deserve a government that backs you and delivers value for money with your hard-earned taxpayer dollars. We on this side of the house will continue to do everything we can to hold the Andrews Labor government to account whilst offering the optimistic and propositional vision for Victoria that they deserve – one that is measured, one that is inclusive, one that is considered. We seek not to divide but to govern for every Victorian.

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (15:10): It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak on this bill, the budget – the Appropriation (2023–24) Bill 2023. We know that budgets are about choices, and I am very excited that this government has made some amazing choices, I like to think, for the electorate of Bayswater. I am so proud that since being elected this is now my fifth budget and that since being elected in 2018 the Andrews Labor government have delivered hundreds of millions of dollars of commitments across a range of portfolios – across education, health care, transport, cost-of-living relief and the things that matter most. Budgets are about priorities, and this government's priorities are about making sure that we support our teachers, we support our healthcare workers, we back in our schools and we build the roads and rail that Victorians not only need but voted for last November.

Of course we know last November's result. I was very pleased to have had a bold agenda. The government has got a bold agenda for Victoria, but I was very proud to have a bold and positive agenda for the electorate of Bayswater as well. The electorate of Bayswater includes suburbs like Wantirna, Wantirna South, Bayswater, Boronia, The Basin and Ferntree Gully, and I am so proud of the commitments that we took to the election last year in November. I was very pleased that those commitments were backed in by the community. This budget fully funds each and every single one of those commitments. Every time I have gone out to the community and every time the Andrews Labor government have promised to deliver something for the electorate of Bayswater – because that is my foremost, number one priority; my job is to represent the community of Bayswater – every time we have gone out and said we will do something, that is exactly what have done. We get on with it and we get it done. We have made important investments in previous budgets – important context about how this government has delivered not just in this budget for my local community but over previous budgets.

The Wantirna aged-care facility has some \$82 million and has 120 new aged-care beds to make sure people can age in place and age with dignity. On health care in previous budgets, we know we are expanding the Angliss Hospital, with major construction set to start later this year and early next year. That is providing more beds, more elective operating suites, better services and some additional parking too, which I know will come as a great relief to locals. And of course we have delivered thousands more healthcare workers to make sure people get the care they need. I will always be a champion for health care, and I will always be a champion for backing in our local healthcare workers in the electorate of Bayswater. Indeed this government is backing in healthcare workers right across the state. Those profound investments to upgrade Angliss, Wantirna Health and Wantirna Health aged care have been delivered. The expansion of the Angliss will soon be underway, with those early works done having been a measure in some of the previous budgets of what we are getting on with in the Bayswater electorate.

When it comes to transport in an old part of my electorate – I used to have the suburb of Heathmont; g'day to my Heathmont friends – we upgraded that station; we got the job done there. In Bayswater we removed two level crossings and we rebuilt the station, one of the first cabs off the rank when it came to level crossing removals. We have done dozens since then – legit, dozens since then. I think we are up to number 70 now of 110 level crossings to be removed. This budget continues to do that fantastic work of removing those dangerous and congested death traps. We heard from the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure just before in relation to the level crossings and the works that we are getting on with and the implications they have for each and every single line, obviously running more trains more often and, importantly as well, reducing that congestion for motorists. Particularly for Knox, which is obviously quite a car-dependent LGA, it is critically important to reduce the congestion. That is one of those investments where, after we see the Bedford Road level crossing removed, I believe in 2025 – happy to be corrected – it will be level crossing free from Ferntree Gully all the way into the city.

Paul Edbrooke: No!

Jackson TAYLOR: Yes, member for Frankston. Thankfully, we will see it free all the way from Ferntree Gully into the city. The Lilydale line will be level crossing free after we get rid of the Coolstore Road and Dublin Road level crossings. I believe there are some new stations at Ringwood East, member for Ringwood – excellent, member for Ringwood. That is his part of the world, and that is a profound investment. For my locals who use that part of the world to either commute or drive through, I know that is very welcome news to them. So this is a budget that continues to invest in our transport infrastructure and, importantly, continues to invest in the roads projects and the transport projects that Victorians voted for.

The North East Link is a game-changing project. I was just driving through it the other day, and I tell you what, that construction site spans suburbs. I talk about projects locally that span suburbs, like the green heart of Knox, where we are planting nearly 700,000 trees. We are planting nearly 2000 new trees over 6 kilometres – and new boardwalks and bike paths. I think there are three new wetlands, stormwater harvesting and irrigation management. It is all happening, and this budget delivers on that, but the North East Link project is, in a technical term, next level, I believe. It just keeps going – it takes you about 15–20 minutes to get through the construction zone – because that is what this government is about. When we make a commitment, we actually get on and we deliver it, and the North East Link is a great visible, tangible example of what that actually looks like. But ultimately we know that project is very well under construction.

The government will have a lot more to say when it comes to the Eastern Freeway package of works. That is going to completely overhaul the Eastern Freeway. We see all the works happening around Rosanna and Heidelberg to take those trucks off the road and the big tunnel project, with tunnelling getting well underway. Now we have the Eastern Freeway – we know it is a bit of a nightmare for locals and for me getting in. It is something that this government is absolutely mindful of, and that is exactly why we are going to expand the Eastern Freeway and save commuters up to 11 minutes on the Eastern Freeway – over 35 minutes in total across the North East Link, using the tunnels as well. It saves commuters time. It is a massive project and one of the game-changing projects that this budget continues to invest in and continues to deliver on, because that is what this government is about: roads, rail, education, health care and delivering on each and every one of our local commitments.

I have given a bit of a broader overview of the budget, of some of the larger investments – your level crossings; the North East Link; and of course the Suburban Rail Loop, backed in again. Those opposite still cannot stand it. It is something that we absolutely need and that has been called for by Victorians for years and years, and only this government is getting on and delivering it, with works underway. I remember not too soon after last year's election we were out celebrating the start of works for the Suburban Rail Loop. I believe the member for Bentleigh was there, the member for Mordialloc was there, the member for Ringwood was there, the member for Box Hill was there and the member for Glen Waverley was there. It was a really significant day to mark some of the construction of the

Suburban Rail Loop and a government that is absolutely not focused on talking about itself but focused on delivering for Victorians and delivering the infrastructure investments that we promised to the community, that we promised to Victorians.

I think it is fair to say I am happy to be accused in this place of loving Boronia. It is very true. If you did a search for 'Boronia station' in *Hansard*, I reckon I would come up –

Will Fowles: 150.

Jackson TAYLOR: 150? Member for Ringwood, please spare me! It would be more 400 or 500 times. I know politicians can sometimes be accused of exaggerating, but I love Boronia and I love the potential that the place has. It is a gorgeous, gorgeous part of the world. I tell you what, I know we all probably say it – and you absolutely believe it when you say that the part of the world you represent is the best – but I have got to say the rest of you are all wrong, because the Bayswater electorate and Boronia is the best part of the world. We are situated at the base of the foothills. We are 5–10 minutes away from the Dandenong Ranges; you can go to the Yarra Valley, another 10–15 minutes away; and if you really like, you can head 30–35 minutes into the city, if that is your thing, as well. So we are right –

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Jackson TAYLOR: Frankston is nice too. I will give you that, member for Frankston. It is a very beautiful community. And Victoria is the best state in this country, there is no doubt about that. But Bayswater is the best part of the world. On Boronia station, my next newsletter says:

Now arriving: \$60 million upgrade for Boronia Station.

This project will create a new vibrant heart of Boronia, increasing connectivity with new open space by decking over the southern railway trench.

For those of you watching at home – I am sure there are dozens, countless – the southern railway trench is closest to Woolies, and that is going to create around 8000 square feet of open space. We checked it on Google Maps. We measured – a very handy tool – 8000 square feet of open space. There were many who said it would never happen. There were locals who wrote it off who wanted to see it happen. But in this budget, after four years of advocating within this government, the needs of the Boronia community were recognised, with \$60 million fully funded in this budget. Again, I feel like this is a trend, a narrative: when this government says it will do something, when I say it will do something, we get on and we get that work done – so, Boronia station, \$60 million, fully funded.

Importantly as well, it is not just about the station. This budget also delivers on the Boronia revitalisation. The suburban revitalisation board we have got working in Boronia has already delivered or is delivering over 20 localised projects, and the member for Frankston knows only too well the value of a suburban revitalisation board with a good chair. I will leave others to comment on my abilities as chair, but I know the member for Frankston is a fantastic chair of the board in Frankston. We are getting on. We have delivered new murals, new laneways, new lighting and new streetscapes. We have delivered a breakfast program for people who need it most, linking them into important services. It is all happening. Boronia is absolutely a massive winner in this budget.

Maroondah Hospital, the new Queen Elizabeth II hospital, we are rebuilding from the ground up. I do love that when you say 'from the ground up' some people go, 'Well, you won't do it from the top down, will you?' Very good comment. It is fair. But that is exactly what we are doing. You can call it whatever you want – ground up, top down – Maroondah Hospital will never look the same again, with up to \$1.05 billion for planning fully acquitted in this budget to start that important work, working with the health service, working with the healthcare workers. I want to pay tribute to all the healthcare workers at Maroondah Hospital, Angliss Hospital and the Wantima aged care facility and every healthcare worker locally and across this state. This budget is getting on with delivering the planning funding to start all that important work at Maroondah Hospital. We are going to have two new six-storey inpatient towers, more beds, more facilities and obviously a new mental health hub, and that is

going to create 2500 construction jobs and we know lots of ongoing jobs. The Maroondah Hospital is set to be a massive, massive winner in this budget and of course is a massive winner.

We know that this budget funds the important work of the power saving bonus. That has been an absolute boon for locals. I know last time around my community had upwards of 90 per cent take-up. I am sure it will be much the same this time. This budget again delivers fee-free TAFE. There are over 70 free TAFE courses, making sure that locals and people right across this state can get the skills they need for the jobs they want, and we know that we made it even easier, expanding the eligibility criteria this time around.

We also know that during the last election one of the biggest things was our commitment, this government's commitment, to bring back the SEC. That was resoundingly endorsed by locals. I remember talking to a local when I was out there doorknocking thousands and thousands of doors, making phone calls and holding hundreds of mobile offices. I did not just do it during election time; I did it for four years, and I have already been out there doing the exact same thing again, because that is what a local member should be doing. That is my view of the world. In Bayswater I was even at a school function the other day and I asked the kids, 'Have you ever seen me at a local shopping centre or anything?' and they all raised their hands – poor kids. Out at the doors I spoke to someone who was not sure who they were going to vote for, but when we announced that we were going to bring back the SEC and deliver, with an initial investment of \$1 billion, government-owned renewable energy, they said that sealed the deal for them, that moment – a bold commitment, and only a commitment that this government could make. We know that those opposite are all about privatisation. Well, this government, this side of the house, is all about driving down power bills. Only Labor will bring back the SEC. Only Labor will bring it back, only Labor truly believes in renewable energy and only Labor will get us to net-zero emissions.

Of course we are also delivering free kinder, saving families up to \$2500 per child per year, a really profound investment that will change the lives of not just kids but families, with the hard decisions they have to make. Very quickly, in 48 seconds, there is \$1.2 million for the new Tormore Reserve pavilion. The container deposit scheme starts on 1 November. There is \$490,000 towards a new dog park and upgraded playground. People in Wantirna love the doggos. In fact all across Knox they love the doggos, and we are delivering a new dog park. Free degrees for nurses and midwives and over 2000 extra paramedics we have delivered since we have been in government. We are delivering over \$14 million for schools, including \$11 million for Bayswater South, \$2.1 million for St Joseph's and \$900,000 for Kent Park – in fact we have delivered over \$90 million to upgrade local schools since elected – \$2 million to upgrade Wally Tew Reserve pavilion, \$10,000 for Templeton Tennis Club, \$50,000 for Fairpark Reserve, \$100,000 for Knox Infolink and \$50,000 for Foothills Community Care. This budget gets on. It delivers everything in full, and the Bayswater community are up and about. They are very excited, and they should be – very good.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (15:25): It is with pleasure that I stand up today and offer my reflections on last week's state budget. My first message to the Victorian people is: this is the budget you get when a tired, incompetent and corrupt government runs out of excuses. This is a budget that confirms that our state is broke. It confirms that for Victorians life will be a whole lot harder as a result of this budget. And it also tells us that Victorians will pay the price for the incompetence of this government.

This budget confirms how regressive the government's approach is. Make no mistake: this is a regressive budget. The proposition from the government that it hits the higher end is nonsense. We know that it will affect people on low and modest incomes, and the government ought to stand condemned for attacking people who can least afford it, who have been through COVID and who are now being asked to pay the heaviest of prices for financial incompetence.

This budget is contradictory. It makes the case that it raises taxes to address the debt that was created, but it does not even achieve that end. The contradiction is that taxes go up, but so does debt. Taxes go

up, but so does interest. Taxes go up, and there is no improvement in employment numbers – in fact unemployment goes up over the forward estimates, not down. It is a budget of contradictions. It is punitive, the most punitive budget I think I have seen in years. It targets those, as I said, on low and modest incomes, and I will talk a bit about that.

This is a budget about risk. For all of the measures that the government has announced in this budget, with all of the consequences for higher debt, higher interest, higher unemployment, tempered employment growth and gross state product over the forward estimates, there is still a risk, as the ratings agencies Standard and Poor's and Moody's have pointed out. The government has not done enough. We have already faced two downgrades. We have the lowest credit rating of any state in the country at AA, and there is a risk that we will drop to A. If that were to happen, the interest bill that Victoria pays – and Victorians will pay – will go through the roof. It is a serious risk we face. So it is a budget of contradictions, a budget that is regressive, a budget that is punitive and a budget that is full of risk. Before I continue, can I pay tribute to my colleague the Shadow Treasurer, who outlined in a great deal of detail our concerns about this budget and our position on the way forward. I will talk a bit about that as we proceed.

Can I deal first with the measures that the government has announced in relation to businesses. The government relies on this absurd proposition that you tax your way to prosperity, that the way to attract investment is to tax it. For a business that may well want to invest in Victoria, that has a payroll of over \$10 million based in other states but wants to set up a small operation here in Victoria, the government has the absurd proposition that the best way to attract them is to tell them that they will now be subject to higher taxes. I do not understand the rationale for that, and I do not think Victorians do. Again I say this budget is regressive and I say it is contradictory, because who is going to pay for that – employees are going to pay for that. They risk losing jobs – jobs that will be lost and jobs that will never be created because of the government's absurd reasoning that you attract business by taxing it.

The government will aim to raise \$1 billion over each year of the forward estimates. Think about the reputational damage that is being done to our state by imposing these taxes of \$4 billion over the four years as part of some so-called COVID debt levy. Think of what is lost – think of the investment that is not made in Victoria, either by businesses here or by businesses who want to set up global HQs in Victoria and in Melbourne in particular but will not now because they all know that the worst place to do business in this country is in Victoria because of this government.

Not only do we face the prospect of businesses either dialling down their businesses or not deciding to invest in Victoria because of the payroll tax increases, but they are having to pay the price of gross incompetence by the Assistant Treasurer Danny Pearson, who has spent more time on his share portfolio than his ministerial portfolio and has now seen a 42 per cent increase facing businesses for WorkCover premiums in this state. Think about it: the government says payroll taxes affect only larger businesses, but WorkCover affects every business.

Do you know what we would rather do on this side of the house? We would rather be talking about reform of WorkCover so that we attract businesses by saying to them, 'You invest in safety in your workplace, you make your places of work safer for your staff, you get a better premium. You organise the nature of your workplace so that you minimise your premium. You're putting a premium on safety, and for that reason you get a lower premium.' That is what we want to talk about, because we know from our dealings and our experience in business, something foreign to those opposite, that that means a lot. Businesses are sensitive to all manner of costs, and WorkCover is among their highest costs. So if you can find a way to incentivise them, you attract business. But no, the government wants to slug them, all because a minister was completely out of his depth, totally distracted by his own share portfolio and did not see the disaster that was awaiting WorkCover. But it is no surprise. WorkCover is not the only agency that is deeply in the red: Homes Vic – in the red, Victorian Managed Insurance Authority – in the red, Victorian Building Authority – in the red. They are all in the red.

Danny O'Brien: CFA.

John PESUTTO: CFA. So there is no surprise here. Most government agencies are insolvent. Were they businesses, they would be wound up. That is the seriousness of the situation we face at the moment. So the government's idea that this is targeted to the top end of town and small businesses will not pay for it – they will. They will, because we know that small businesses depend, for supply, for customers, for patronage, on middle-sized and larger businesses. If those scale back, they pay the price, their staff pay the price and their families pay the price. So the government, to clean up its own mess, is going to punish people who had nothing to do with it, people we need to drive prosperity in this state; they are attacking them.

It does not stop there. We know about property taxes too. The government says that its land tax extension, lowering the land tax free threshold down to \$50,000, is going to capture, wait for it, the 'big end of town'. Well, let us see what it is really going to capture. It is going to hit people on low and middle incomes who invest their savings in their own choice of a nest egg. Let us remember, most people who have an investment property own only one extra property, and a third of all investors earn under \$100,000 a year. That is around one-fifth of the Premier's salary, and he wants to slug them for more land tax? That is unfair.

But it is actually worse than that, because the government's claim that this is something we need to do and these are people reaping profits from their land without actually paying a price. Let us understand, people make all sorts of choices about their retirement, and the nest eggs for their family. Some people put money in super. Some people put money in shares. It might be some other asset class that they put their money into. But do you know what, many people decide to put their savings into a piece of property because it makes them feel safe – they can see it, they can touch it. They do not want to rip off their tenants, they just want something that they know will give them an income stream when they can no longer work or if they get injured or if they suffer an illness that takes them out of the workforce and they cannot earn any money. And the government wants to tax them, these people: a nurse in Cranbourne or a firey in Melton. These are the people that have to pay for the gross incompetence of the government? Then what made it worse was the Premier last week saying that you can get a tax deduction. A message for the Premier: a tax deduction is not a reimbursement – someone ought to tell the Premier that – and it is not the driver of investment decisions, whether it is by private investors or corporate entities. They do not make decisions based on what tax deduction they can get. They want to know what income they can derive from an activity or an action. So it just goes to show the government does not even understand the nature of the reforms it is implementing.

Independent schools – I do not know where to start with this. Historically, governments federal and state have always stayed away from levying payroll tax on independent schools. Why – because we do not believe in taxing education in this way. Why – we do not believe in punishing choice. We respect that. That is a value that is core amongst the values we stand for on this side of the house. And it is not about affluent people who have all the money they could ever want; it is not about that. They will always be able to look after themselves. This is about the families who are struggling but make a decision to sacrifice so many other things in life that they could enjoy so they can put their hard-earned money into the education of their children. And this government wants to tax them for that, because we all know they are going to pay for it. It is a demonisation of choice. Again, the government adds insult to injury when it says, 'Well, government schools pay payroll tax.' Nonsense. Again, the Premier is displaying his complete ignorance of how his own government operates. Government schools do not pay payroll tax. It is an internal accounting treatment and does not lead to any net transfer of equity in the consolidated accounts of government. It stays within the system of government. So it is built on a lie. This attack on choice, on independent schools, is built on a lie.

We will stand with families, and I say as my second message to Victorians today: we will always respect your choice of where you want to send your children. We will support the education of your children. That is why the Shadow Treasurer today announced in his remarks earlier that we will oppose these tax measures. Not only will we oppose these tax measures, we will repeal this punitive tax on education – a tax on schools. We say to the sector, we say to parents and we say to hundreds of

thousands of students: we stand with you, and in this place, we are the only people who stand with you on this measure.

The budget also fails to address urgent challenges. What is the government doing on the Commonwealth Games? We have got councils all over our state, particularly those that are directly affected, asking for guidance on what they need to fund and on what they need to prepare for. There is nothing in the state budget about the Commonwealth Games, and now there is talk, not surprisingly, that the Commonwealth Games are in trouble. Well, it cannot be. The government needs to get on top of this, because nothing could do greater damage to Victoria's reputation –

Danny O'Brien: Another Jacinta special.

John PESUTTO: – that is right – than more controversy and more incompetence around the Commonwealth Games.

In health, we have seen the budget reveal the lie that the government went to the Victorian people with. It made commitments and in this budget has failed to meet them. It has failed to honour its promise to deliver on those commitments. Less than 8 per cent of what it promised is committed in this budget. And there are some other nasty, uncalled for surprises.

To timber families across our state let me say to you: we stand with you after how you have been treated. This government has treated them appallingly by not giving them any notice of what is happening, with no plan for the future of that industry and with no real plan for the support they will get as they struggle with the consequences of now knowing that they have six months to go in what was a six- or seven-year transition plan to take them through. They have got nothing to plan for, and they have no assistance from a government that is callous towards them and has just cut them adrift. These are families who are now vulnerable, and the government stands condemned.

There is so much more I could say, but I will finish with this. What Victorians needed from the government right now was a vision for our future. What is going to attract businesses either to invest here or that are already here – businesses that should come here or might come here if we create the right ecosystem for them? A vision for what our energy needs look like in the future and how we are going to meet them, not little announcements here and there, but a solid commitment and vision about how our energy needs are going to be met. With coal coming offline, we know, in the next decade and a half, what is the plan? The government has no plan for our energy needs. What is the plan to build trade and investment when the government slashes the trade and investment budget? What is the plan for tourism when it slashes by more than a quarter of a billion dollars money dedicated to promoting tourism in our state? It is a government that is out of ideas, it is a government that is out of puff and it is a government that is out of any real commitment to the Victorian people to deliver to them the government they should be getting but will not, because this government is tired, it is corrupt and it is incompetent.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (15:40): In rising I acknowledge the Treasurer's bill that he has put to this house, I acknowledge the address-in-reply that the Shadow Treasurer made and I also acknowledge the Leader of the Opposition's contribution. But I am not sure the Leader of the Nationals acknowledges the contribution – where is he? Where is the leadership of the Nationals? The member for Brighton earlier put out a tweet saying that Labor had abandoned the chamber, saying that we had abandoned the chamber to not listen to the Shadow Treasurer's contribution. But where is the Leader of the Nationals? That is the question.

Unlike the Leader of the Opposition, I rise to support the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 and the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 and to support the measures put forward by the Treasurer contained in the 2023–24 budget. In doing so I begin by acknowledging, commending and thanking the Treasurer as well as the Premier and indeed all cabinet ministers and their respective teams and departments for the work they put into delivering this budget. This is a budget that delivers

on every commitment we made at the last election to the Victorian people and to the people in my community across Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West.

Whilst I am a new member of this place and it is my first budget, I am very proud of the fact that the Andrews Labor government has not wasted a day since first being elected in 2014 in doing the things that matter for the Victorian people and for the people of my community. Whether it was ahead of the 2014 election, the 2018 election or the more recent 2022 election, Labor has continued to put forward a positive plan that is all about putting Victorians first, and in that spirit I am proud to be part of a Labor government whose 2023–24 budget has continued in the tradition of doing what we promised for the people of Victoria and the people of my electorate, a budget of real action that supports local employment, schools, transport, health and social justice outcomes.

Firstly, when it comes to supporting local jobs and the revitalisation of central Coburg, I commend the role this budget will play in continuing the state's work in this space. Building off the landmark Level Crossing Removal Project along the Upfield line through Coburg, the world-class new Coburg and Moreland stations and the \$6 million Coburg City Oval redevelopment, we will continue to play a key role in local Coburg revitalisation efforts through some of the following investments contained in the 2023–24 state budget: the \$17.8 million this budget has allocated towards building a new science and technology hub at Coburg High School, the \$11.9 million allocated over the 2023–24 period towards the construction of the \$22.5 million new Coburg Special Developmental School and the funding to commence planning for a new mental health and wellbeing local in Coburg as well as to deliver a new neighbourhood battery in the City of Merri-bek.

I was delighted to have hosted Treasurer Tim Pallas recently, on 31 March, along with over 100 local businesses and community leaders at the new Pentridge–Adina visitor and entertainment precinct for a very positive discussion around these and other record investments the Andrews Labor government has been making to kickstart and drive central the Coburg, Sydney Road and Upfield corridor revitalisation efforts. I was also very pleased to welcome the Minister for Small Business, who is at the table today, on a visit to Sydney Road in central Coburg to meet with local small businesses to talk about opportunities for local revitalisation, including with our multicultural community.

At the heart of these efforts about local revitalisation is investment in education and skills for local young people. We are building off the \$50,000 that was provided for Coburg High School master planning in the 2021–22 state budget by delivering a record \$17.8 million to deliver a new technology hub for Coburg High School in this budget. This funding will kickstart detailed planning and design work which will ultimately deliver stage 1 of the school's master plan by 2026, which will be a game-changing new double-storey technology building, creating space for 250 more local Coburg High students to ensure they are equipped with the skills they need for the future jobs and career pathways that they can aspire to. I was pleased to have recently visited the school with the Premier and the Treasurer as well as the member for Northcote and the member for Preston to talk about how this investment will benefit the school community for many years to come. In this regard I commend the outgoing school council president Cate Hall, school principal Brent Houghton, school captains Josh, Tabby, Ezzat and Monique, as well as the entire school community for their work and advocacy, who have helped secure this investment made possible by the Andrews Labor government's budget.

This commitment builds on Labor's previous investments to upgrade and modernise many of our local schools, but particularly our high schools, including the \$21.1 million for a new technology, science and arts three-storey building at Strathmore Secondary College, which is now open, which students are now benefiting from and which the member for Essendon and I recently visited to celebrate as well; the \$14.2 million for a new performing arts and technology facility at Pascoe Vale Girls College, whose construction I look forward to seeing being completed during 2024; and the more recent \$14.5 million commitment to undertaking major upgrades to John Fawcner secondary college, which I was proud to support along with the member for Broadmeadows. These investments, combined with Labor's expanding free TAFE rollout as well as our education plan for Merri-bek North, will help to

ensure that all local students are provided with the same chance to aspire, succeed and be supported through local secondary school and higher education options.

It is also at the primary school level that I welcome this budget's investments, including the provision of \$5.1 million towards the delivery of a new gymnasium and learning facilities at Pascoe Vale Primary School – which I was happy to recently visit to meet with school principal Anne Naughton – as part of the school's overall \$15 million major upgrade.

At the kinder and early years levels I am also proud of the investments we are making through this budget to deliver the Best Start, Best Life reforms, which will deliver free kinder for every three- and four-year-old across my community. These reforms will save local families \$2500 per year and provide a 15-hour per week program for four-year-old children and a 5- to 15-hour program for three-year-old children every week – amazing stuff.

I welcome the fact that these reforms are being accompanied by real upgrades for 11 local kinders across Merri-bek through a landmark \$10.7 million investment by the Andrews Labor government which will create a further 329 local kinder places over the coming years. In this regard I was delighted to recently open the new \$490,000 upgraded St Linus Anglican Kindergarten in Merlynston, one of many, many other local kinder projects that will be coming online over the coming years, including Turner Street kinder and Doris Blackburn kinder, which are also set to benefit from upgrades through this funding in the near future. I acknowledge the minister in the other place Ingrid Stitt for her work on this phenomenal program being rolled out.

This budget continues Labor's investments in road and rail projects so that Victorians can get home sooner and safer. This budget provides \$339 million towards getting the city-shaping Metro Tunnel project ready so it can be connected to the existing rail network as it prepares to open a year ahead of schedule. Metro rail will provide significant benefits to commuters in my electorate, and I was delighted to recently visit the tunnel construction site with many of my colleagues in this place. Taking the three busiest rail lines out of the city loop – including the Sunbury, Pakenham and Cranbourne lines, which will run exclusively through the Metro Tunnel – will allow for other lines to run more services, including those in my community. The Upfield line, for example, will benefit through 71 per cent more peak capacity and room for 45,000 passengers every week during peak periods. The Craigieburn line will benefit through 27 per cent more peak capacity and room for 54,000 passengers every week during peak periods.

Metro rail builds on the record number of other local investments and real action Labor has been taking since 2014 to improve local transport infrastructure, including via, as I mentioned earlier, the four world-class level crossing projects in Coburg, which have reduced congestion for 52,000 vehicles that utilise Bell Street on a daily basis, as well as those on Moreland Road, Reynard Street and Munro Street; the new landmark Coburg and Moreland stations, which are the catalyst for the ongoing Coburg revitalisation; the phenomenal new Upfield active transport cycling and walking corridor through Coburg, which has also created two MCGs worth of new open space and had over 3000 new trees and shrubs planted; improving services and introducing low-floor trams across local tram routes 1, 19 and 58; developing a major bus review for Melbourne's north to plan for a modern, faster, reliable and sustainable bus network across Merri-bek; and \$3.75 million to improve walking and cycling along the Upfield path between the Western Ring Road and O'Hea Street in Coburg. We have also invested \$11.9 million to remove, finally, the dangerous intersection and roundabout by installing traffic lights at the corner of Sussex Street and Gaffney Street – just where my electorate office is.

We have rebuilt the Merlynston station car park via the construction of 300 new car spaces along with a new secure bike Parkiteer, new lighting and CCTV. We are complementing this by completing the missing link of the Upfield bike path along Bain Avenue as part of a project which has now been delivered and we have now officially opened. \$4.6 million has also been delivered for the Glenroy and Coburg cycling link via Derby Street to improve safety for cyclists, pedestrians and motorists. Other actions include reducing speed limits along Nicholson Street, improving pedestrian safety at five

Sydney Road intersections, a new pedestrian crossing at Walhalla Street–Moreland Road and \$350,000 towards a feasibility study for a new crossing between Gaffney Street and Cumberland Road. Many of these initiatives were funded by the previous minister Ben Carroll, as well as my predecessor Lizzie Blandthorn, who did amazing work to deliver many of these commitments. I look forward to working on further improving local road safety outcomes over my term, including through the parliamentary inquiry into road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users following the COVID-19 pandemic and looking at how we can support transport workers across the gig economy and freight sector, many of whom have been diligently represented by the Transport Workers Union.

Following on from the pandemic, I am glad to see that this budget continues to invest in and support our health workers and broader health sector. Along with the introduction of free nursing studies, the Hospital Infrastructure Delivery Fund allocates funding towards hospitals across the north that my community depend on. There is the redevelopment of the Northern Hospital, with a new emergency department and inpatient tower to support growing demand for people across the north. Funding is also provided towards the refurbishment and expansion of the Austin Hospital's emergency department and short-stay unit – the member for Ivanhoe is in the chamber, I acknowledge – meaning more patients can be treated faster, including my community of Pascoe Vale. Funding is also provided to kickstart the biggest hospital redevelopment in Australia's history, with significant upgrades to the existing Royal Melbourne Hospital and Royal Women's Hospital in Parkville together with a new campus of both hospitals in the future suburb of Arden.

Locally I am delighted to say that funding has been provided so we can begin planning for a new mental health and wellbeing local service in Coburg that, once opened, will provide support and treatment for adults aged 26 years and older experiencing mental illness and psychological distress. I was pleased to recently welcome the Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas in a visit to my electorate, including to meet with the acting CEO of Merri Health Maryanne Tadic to discuss these and other local opportunities for my community in terms of health and wellbeing. I am also very proud of the record investment the budget makes into women's health, with \$63 million for 20 new women's health clinics, \$50 million for families to access fertility care and funding to help treat endometriosis and other women's health conditions.

Our sporting clubs play a major role in supporting local health outcomes too. That is why I was so pleased to see the budget make the provision of \$1.25 million to upgrade Cole Reserve in Pascoe Vale, which will go towards much-needed whole-of-oval drainage and flood proofing, as well as oval master planning and funding for women's and girls sport activations. I commend the work of these local clubs, including president Allan Chandler and Dean Leeds of the Coburg Districts Football Club and Jon King of the St Andrews Cricket Club, whose clubs are set to benefit from these upgrades, and I am looking forward to attending the Coburg Districts president's luncheon this coming weekend on Saturday to celebrate this wonderful news.

This budget delivers real action for the environment. The 2023–24 budget kickstarts investment into bringing back the SEC, driving jobs in renewable energy while also investing to protect Victoria and our local natural environment. An initial \$1 billion investment in the SEC will help deliver 4.5 gigawatts of renewable energy power, the equivalent of replacing the capacity of Loy Yang A. We will also invest \$12 million to develop new VET qualifications to support the creation of 59,000 future energy jobs, and we will also fund the business case for a new SEC centre of training excellence, one that I am particularly interested for my community to engage in. I am delighted by the funding that has also been provided to kickstart the rollout of the container deposit scheme across Melbourne's north, and I look forward to working with Tomra, who have been appointed to roll out the scheme locally. Funding has been provided towards 100 community batteries, including for my community across Merri-bek. As well, there is \$10 million towards a new protecting our waterways fund, which will help preserve and enhance my local creeks, including Moonee Ponds Creek, Five Mile Creek, Westbreen Creek, Edgars Creek and Merri Creek. I was pleased to recently visit the Reimagining Your Moonee Ponds Creek project along with the member for Broadmeadows, where we had the privilege

of planting the first trees as part of this landmark project that will renaturalise a 500-metre section of the creek, which will benefit local families and local wildlife.

This is a budget that also makes provision for social justice measures, including through helping Victorians with the cost of living. Whether it is through the \$250 power saving bonus, free kinder, free TAFE, motorist and safe driver discounts, the Victorian casual sick pay guarantee scheme or the Get Active Kids sports vouchers, the Andrews Labor government is continuing to support local families and households who need it most with the cost of living through the various measures contained in this budget.

I am also very pleased with the number of investments my local culturally and linguistically diverse communities and local community organisations have secured through this 2023–24 budget, including a new multicultural community facilities fund, which will benefit local Italian, Greek, Lebanese, Turkish and other multicultural groups; \$80,000 secured for 3ZZZ radio, Melbourne's longest running community ethnic radio station; \$40,000 to upgrade the Alevi Community Centre and \$120,000 to support the delivery of the Alevi festival over coming years; \$200,000 for the Newroz festivities; and \$120,000 for the Peace and Friendship Festival. Fifty thousand dollars has also been provided for Extended Families Australia to help volunteers support children and young people with a disability.

As I said at the outset, this is a budget that delivers on the things that we promised prior to the election for my community. It is a budget that is doing what matters for the Victorian people, and it is a budget that will continue to underpin this state's jobs and economic growth while building a better future by delivering on our election commitments.

In saying that, I particularly acknowledge the funding we have provided to rebuild a new science and technology hub for Coburg High School, a school that was sold and closed by the Kennett government when I was growing up locally. Now as the local member I am so proud to be standing here to say we are funding its rebuild and securing its future. I commend the bill to the house.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (15:55): I rise to make a contribution on the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 and the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 itself. In starting off, can I just express I think all Victorians' frustration that two of the parliamentary bills have only just been introduced into the Parliament and will be debated for one day. This morning there was a long time on procedural motions to have the house managed so that there are two guillotines to deal with the budget papers and two of those key bills, and that particularly the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023 will only lie on the table for one day before it is debated is just an absolute shame. But more importantly, it is a lack of respect for Victorians. The Andrews government was elected to govern for all Victorians, to come to this chamber, to come to the Parliament. I have said this a lot of times here: executive government is answerable to the Parliament, but that has been reversed under Daniel Andrews. By treating the chamber with disrespect, they are treating all the population of Victoria with disrespect – by coming in and having two bills lie on the table for a day, particularly the taxation bill, which we will be talking about more tomorrow, which brings in some really, really draconian and horrendous tax changes here in this particular state. So I am bitterly disappointed for all Victorians that the Andrews government would be so disrespectful to them about how this budget has actually been introduced and how it is being managed in this chamber.

I just do not believe the Leader of the House is actually up to running the house, because we have seen chaos after chaos after chaos.

Members interjecting.

Peter WALSH: It is not harsh. It is not harsh if you look at how it has evolved, particularly over this week but in other events over the last few weeks. The house should be able to be run for the best outcome for Victorians, to have constructive debate to get the ideas on the record about what people think about whatever legislation is before us. But we have a member that cannot seem to run the business of the house properly, and that is why the things that happened this morning did happen,

because there has not been the forward planning about how the house is actually run over that time. Only a Labor government could bring in a budget where taxes are up but debt actually continues to increase. There is more tax take on a whole range of things that we will talk about under the state tax bill tomorrow, but debt continues to rise as well.

A member: Nothing to show for it.

Peter WALSH: There is nothing to show for those tax increases other than more debt in this state. And the other thing: only a Labor government could bring in a budget that is going to take 4000 people out of the public sector but where the public sector wage bill actually goes up. That to me is absolutely illogical. Whoever did the arithmetic, whoever did that grand plan that will take 4000 people out of the state bureaucracy when somehow the bill goes up – it just does not make sense to me. That is not good business. That says to me we are going to have less people but individually they are going to be paid more. If you ask most Victorians whether they are getting value out of the public sector here in Victoria, particularly post COVID, they would say no, because a lot of people that come to my office come out of sheer frustration that they cannot get a permit renewed, cannot get a licence renewed, cannot get –

A member: Births, deaths and marriages is a disaster.

Peter WALSH: I was just going to say – cannot get a death certificate actually issued so they can do probate to wrap up a family member's estate. They just cannot get through the bureaucracy to get the paperwork done. We had the situation recently where we sent an email off to the appropriate person and we got an email back saying, 'I have done my quota of emails for today, and I'm not going to do any more emails till tomorrow.' We did get an email back where this particular person said 'I have answered my quota of emails for the day, and I'm not doing any more emails', so that –

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

Business interrupted under resolution of house of 18 May.

Matters of public importance

Government achievements

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

That this house notes the Andrews Labor government is delivering on its election commitments and doing what matters.

I call the member for Bentleigh. The member for Bentleigh is not in the house. The member for Bentleigh is not present, therefore the MPI lapses. The house will return to the appropriation bill.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, I have been in the chamber for a number of years now, but this is the first time I have had this situation occur. I seek your guidance or an explanation as to why this is the case. When a matter is listed, it does not necessarily require that person to be speaking. I just seek an explanation as to why the matter of public importance actually lapses simply because the member is not in the chamber.

The SPEAKER: I will refer you to *Rulings from the Chair*:

Where a member submits a matter of public importance, it is for that member to lead the MPI discussion, and should the proposing member not be in the House to take the call, the MPI will not be able to proceed, and the next item of business will be called ...

Therefore the house will return to the appropriation bill.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Gippsland South and the Deputy Premier will come to order! The Leader of the Nationals has the call.

Bills

Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023

Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (16:04): My recollection was that the Speaker had interrupted my budget response for the matter of public importance. Has someone stood up on the other side? What happened? No-one stood up for the MPI?

Danny O'Brien: No.

Peter WALSH: The member for Mordialloc took exception to my comments about the performance of the Leader of the House. Perhaps he might like to retract those comments about the Leader of the House and how well the job is being done in here.

Before we broke to do the MPI that is not happening, I was talking about how only a Labor government could put taxes up but increase debt, only a Labor government could decrease the public sector by 4000 jobs but actually increase the cost of the salaries of the public sector.

So if you go to the specifics of the budget and what particularly impacts on regional Victoria that other members will also talk about, one of the hottest issues in regional Victoria is the issue of the standard of our roads or the condition of our roads, and the fact that they are appalling. We have seen an increase in the road toll in recent years when it should be going down. Some of those accidents can be attributed to the condition of the roads. Some to other particular reasons.

A member: You're wrong.

Peter WALSH: There is an interjection that I am wrong. With the woman on a motorbike that hit a big pothole north of Shepparton before last Christmas, that was an issue where the condition of the road actually led to that tragic situation for that particular woman.

So with the issue of road funding, if you look at it, since 2020 the road maintenance funding here in Victoria has been reduced by 45 per cent. If you look at this latest budget, it is \$702 million down to \$441 million. You cannot fix the roads if you do not have the money to fix the roads. The Premier in waiting has made some comments that over the next 10 years there is actually more funding there for roads. What people say to me is 'We've got a pothole now', 'We've got a big part of the bitumen that is all broken up', 'I've just smashed a tyre' or 'I've just broken a rim'. 'Oh, yeah, but we're going to fix it in nine years' time, so that's all right.' You cannot say that you have got money in nine years time to fix the road when the roads actually need to be fixed now.

If you go to the regional development budget, it is an absolute crying shame for regional Victoria. Since 2020 the regional development budget has gone down 80 per cent. This year it has gone from \$211 million back to \$106 million. You would remember that when the Liberals and Nationals came to government in 2010 we had a \$1 billion regional development fund. That drove jobs, drove projects, drove lots of great things in regional Victoria. When the Andrews government was elected in 2014, they had the ability to spend the rest of that money for all the things that they wanted to do, but now there is effectively no money for regional development in Victoria. There is no money to actually help a business relocate out of Melbourne to the regions. There is no money for a business in the regions to actually grow and increase employment in the regions and create economic activity in the regions.

Over the last few years we all know how challenging it has been for our agriculture sector, our food and fibre sector, with exports. We have seen the bans on imports into China on our wine industry and our barley industry and the challenges that the meat industry has had getting product into China. The global and trade investment is the way that state government can actually work with industry, work with exporters to grow new markets, to diversify our markets. I think with a bit of hindsight most people realise that we had an over-reliance on the Chinese market and we needed to diversify our markets. To actually cut the trade and global investment budget by 60 per cent over the last two years is not the way you diversify and grow your markets into other countries. That I think is a huge mistake by the Andrews government. There should be more money invested into the trade and global investment area. It is not a large amount of money, but when you talk about the value to export industries, particularly to agriculture, to the food and fibre sector, it is vital that that budget actually goes up so we diversify our market base and you have the opportunity to get those new markets for our exporters.

One of the things that Victoria used to have is a department of agriculture – a standalone department of agriculture. Unfortunately now the department of agriculture, or Agriculture Victoria, as it is called, is a small department down the end of the corridor in a larger department. Over the last now nine years of the Andrews government, the agriculture budget has been cut and cut and cut, and that has continued. Under this current budget there is a 34 per cent cut to the ag budget – \$687 million down to \$454 million. What a lot of people do not realise is that in that agriculture budget one of the key areas is biosecurity and the work that is done to protect the state from a whole range of pests and diseases. The most recent one that comes to mind to everyone is the outbreak of varroa mite in Newcastle and New South Wales and the work that was done by the Victorian apiary industry and the department here to keep that out of this state. You cannot keep cutting the budget to the department of agriculture, you cannot keep cutting staff, and expect us to maintain our biosecurity into the future.

One thing that was in the budget or was announced the day before the budget that I think is just an absolute tragedy is the closure of the native timber industry. The native timber industry has absolutely been to hell and back under this government. Since 2014 they have been persecuted by green terrorism, by green litigation, and there has not been any protection from the Andrews government. VicForests particularly, on behalf of the native timber industry, have been tied up in the courts year after year and have spent an absolute fortune trying to defend themselves against green terrorism. The fact is that the Premier announced a number of years ago that the industry would be phased out by 2030. To bring that forward –

Danny O'Brien: Without warning.

Peter WALSH: without warning, by six years by effectively a leak to the *Herald Sun* and then two ministers going to Gippsland to tell the industry, ‘Shut up shop now. You’re going to be closed down by 31 December this year,’ I just think is wrong. We are going to have a government that is broke that is going to, effectively, borrow more money to put Victorians out of work to import more timber. The demand for timber is not going away. The demand for construction will continue. The demand for our good hardwood for flooring, for furniture, for doors, for window frames, for stairs – all those high-value things in a house – will continue, but that is going to come from overseas. That is not going to come from Victoria, and we are going to lose those Victorian jobs. I just think the timber industry has been so hard done by.

One of the last two things I want to finish on is that at the moment we are paying \$10 million a day in interest on Labor’s record debt. By the end of the forward estimates Victorians are going to be paying \$22 million a day in interest. That is just wasted money on a debt that has been created through a lot of bad decisions that have been made. \$30.7 billion in major cost blowouts in this state now is just poor management. I come back to roads. That \$30 billion, if it costs a million dollars to reform a kilometre of country roads, would do 30,000 kilometres of road, so how could the minister for major infrastructure projects waste so much money on cost overruns that would effectively rebuild the

majority of roads in Victoria? If you took the length of VicRoads roads in Victoria, that would do a very, very high percentage of that.

I will finish with this. Victoria is broke. Life is going to get harder under Labor here in Victoria, and particularly regional Victorians are being punished for Labor's incompetence when it comes to managing money in this state. We have got cuts to road funding, cuts to regional development, cuts to agriculture and cuts to trade and global investment. That is because regional Victoria is being punished for Labor's incompetence. They cannot manage a budget and they cannot manage major projects, and I do not believe they should be entitled to manage Victorians' money.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (16:14): I am pleased to speak to the house today in relation to the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023. I would like to begin by thanking the Treasurer and his team for their hard work in delivering this state budget in what is a very challenging time. With this budget we are paying off our COVID emergency debt – the credit card we used to save lives and livelihoods, to pay for COVID testing sites, vaccines, face masks and PPE and to support the Victorian community to see it through an unprecedented pandemic. The government's COVID debt repayment plan is one part of the budget. The other part of this budget is getting on with delivering the election commitments that the Andrews Labor government made last year. We are investing in what matters for the people of the Lara electorate across Geelong's northern suburbs. There is some great news in the 2023–24 state budget about what will be funded as part of this bill.

As part of more than \$2 billion in investment in schools across Victoria, this year's budget includes \$7.55 million to deliver a new gym at Western Heights College in Hamlyn Heights, and this is a commitment I am so proud to be delivering. As a candidate I spent a lot of time doorknocking in Hamlyn Heights and heard from so many residents just how important this gym is to the community. The Western Heights College regeneration plan commenced under a Bracks-led state Labor government to rebuild the school. Stages 1 and 2 were completed in 2014, and the school has come along in leaps and bounds since then, with enrolments increasing.

The final stage is stage 3 – a new on-site gym facility. Currently the school is using an old gym in the previous Quamby campus of Western Heights College, and the school is spending thousands of dollars each year in additional costs to hire indoor gyms and for buses to transport students from the school to other gyms. This is neither sustainable nor equitable. Despite the lack of a gym, Western Heights College has established an incredible specialist sporting program. The specialist sporting program provides aspiring AFL, basketball, netball and soccer athletes the necessary skills to achieve their goals both academically and athletically. The program is highly sought after and has attracted students from across the Geelong region and even across Melbourne's western suburbs. The gym will be the final piece in the puzzle for the Western Heights community in bringing their school's master plan to fruition, and I congratulate the students, teachers and wider school community for their advocacy on this issue. In particular I would like to congratulate principal Fiona Taylor and school council president Tania Brieze for their leadership and commitment in seeing this project through.

In other exciting news, students and teachers of St Francis Xavier primary school in Corio are also set to benefit in this year's budget, with the Labor government delivering \$2 million towards an upgrade. This funding will support St Francis Xavier with their plans to build a new administrative building near the rear of the school, which will significantly increase the school's ability to provide a safe environment and in particular a safer entrance for their students. The administrative building is currently in the centre of the school grounds, which means visitors have to walk through the school to access the office. The redevelopment will place the administrative building closer to the school's perimeter. St Francis Xavier have identified this important need to establish a safer school for their students, and the funding is such a great opportunity to do that. The remainder of the current admin building will be converted into a library and digital technology space to create another dedicated learning space for students.

I had the great pleasure of welcoming grade 5 and 6 students from St Francis Xavier to Parliament House for a tour last Friday. I was so impressed with their questions about this place. There were lots of questions about all the gold that we see above us and just how much this building was worth. They are just starting to learn about government in their classroom, and they deserve great facilities to learn in. As a government, those on this side understand that every family and every student deserves a great local school. The best teachers cannot do the best job in ageing classrooms and out-of-date facilities, and the funding for these two schools and others right across the state will mean that students will continue to learn in modern classrooms and modern science labs and libraries and have better access to facilities like gyms and sports grounds.

Sport is such a big part of our community. We are helping families in Geelong's north to get active and get engaged. The North Shore Football and Netball Club has been always a pillar in the North Shore and Norlane communities. They are a proud club and one of the most successful, having won 17 premierships in the Geelong and District Football League and the Geelong Football League, including six premierships in a row from 1995 to 2000. But like so many community clubs, their facilities are lacking, and there are no change rooms for their female players to use. I met with North Shore several times before the state election, and I was so pleased to make an election commitment of \$2 million to build female-friendly facilities on site – another commitment that was funded in last week's budget. This funding will ensure North Shore remain a strong community club into the future, especially for their centenary celebrations in 2027. These new women's change rooms will give local women and girls more opportunities to participate in the sports that they love. A massive congratulations to the North Shore committee and leadership, who have been working tirelessly over the years to advocate for this project. The \$2 million investment is part of a larger \$6.5 million master plan to redevelop North Shore's pavilion and other amenities. The master plan was developed with the North Shore Sports Club with support from the City of Greater Geelong, and I call on the City of Greater Geelong to come to the table and commit funding to this project.

The Lara electorate is home to some significant regional parks, including the You Yangs Regional Park and Serendip Sanctuary, and between these two sites there are over 470,000 people visiting each year to get out in nature and to enjoy outdoor recreation activities such as bushwalking, hiking, mountain bike riding, horseback riding, rock climbing and abseiling. Last week's state budget committed \$11 million in funding over the next four years to bring to life the You Yangs Regional Park and Serendip Sanctuary master plan. This commitment will fund new facilities and infrastructure. Core infrastructure upgrades will include improvements to park entrances, picnic and barbecue areas, shelters, walking paths and bike riding tracks. Importantly, the funding commitment demonstrates the importance of the You Yangs and Serendip Sanctuary to the Andrews Labor government, places that should be enhanced and protected so that generations to come can enjoy these special places. And I am pleased to report to the house that work is already underway in seeing this project come to life. Last week Parks Victoria convened a stakeholder meeting, bringing together local stakeholders and interested parties to plan for the project. There has been so much community interest and a lot of community passion, and I am so pleased to see it coming to life.

The Andrews Labor government has a track record when it comes to supporting Victoria's multicultural and multifaith communities. Victorians come from more than 200 countries, speak 260 languages and follow 135 different faiths. Nearly half of all Victorians were born overseas or have a parent who was born overseas, and in Victoria we are so proud of our cultural diversity. For many Victorians from multicultural and multifaith backgrounds, community groups and centres offer important connections to their faith, culture and heritage. Prior to the election we promised to build, upgrade and renovate new community infrastructure for the Sikh community, and we are doing just that with \$500,000 in funding towards a new Sikh community centre in Geelong. We are also supporting our local Islamic community with \$50,000 for the Islamic Society of Geelong. I would like to take this opportunity to thank both the Sikh Community of Greater Geelong and the Islamic Society of Geelong for being so welcoming and inclusive. Earlier this year the Islamic Society threw open their doors to the community at the Geelong Mosque for the mosque open day, and I am looking

forward to visiting the Sikh community this weekend to celebrate their success along with my colleague the member for South Barwon. The Sikh community hosted their largest ever Diwali celebrations in Geelong last year, and I am sure this year's is going to be bigger than ever. The fireworks were spectacular, definitely the best we have ever seen in Lovely Banks.

These commitments are part of a raft of investments our government is making to build, upgrade and renovate new community infrastructure for multicultural and multifaith communities, and this government is also investing in multicultural community events. Geelong's Pako Festa is a much-loved multicultural festival held annually on Geelong's Pakington Street. It is in the heart of the Geelong electorate, and the member for Geelong has long been a supporter of Pako Festa. Pako Festa is all about community, and it is led by community. It draws in multicultural and multifaith communities from across the entire Geelong region. Pako Festa is Victoria's largest free multicultural party, a huge all-day street party like no other, and if you have not been before, I encourage you to get along next year. It celebrates and highlights the extraordinary contribution of multicultural communities in Geelong and across Victoria. In this budget the state government will provide \$200,000 per year over the next four years to ensure that this local institution is bigger and better than ever. As I said earlier, in Victoria we are proud of our diversity. We are proud of the achievements and contributions of our multicultural and multifaith communities, and this budget clearly demonstrates the Andrews Labor government's commitment to Victoria's diverse communities in honouring our election commitments.

I do wish to touch on some of the election commitments made in the Geelong region that will support the communities of Lara, Geelong, Bellarine and South Barwon. With huge demand for a skilled workforce, the state government is making sure Victorians can get the skills they need for the job that they want. A targeted investment of up to \$36 million for the Gordon TAFE disability service hub will make sure that people with a disability in Geelong get the best training possible, and this builds on our landmark free TAFE policy, which I know many residents in the Lara electorate have been able to access over the past few years. We are making free TAFE more widely available to Victorians, including people returning to study or who want to complete multiple TAFE courses. We are also supporting young apprentices with the cost of living, because we know it can be tough. We know many young apprentices scrimp and save as they start out in their careers. When you rely on your vehicle to do your job every day, costs can quickly add up, so we will make car rego free, saving eligible trade apprentices up to \$865 per year.

For too long women's health has not been a focus for investment and service delivery. Every Victorian, including women and girls, should be able to get the health care they need when they need it, close to home. A comprehensive women's health clinic at Barwon Health will change the way women's health issues are treated, providing care and support for conditions like endometriosis, pelvic pain, polycystic ovary syndrome, perimenopause and menopause. I have heard horror stories from friends who have suffered from endometriosis over many, many years. The pain can be unbearable, and the only treatment is major surgery. I have friends who have had to have multiple surgeries and other friends who have gone in for a surgery only to be told that their endo was much worse than their doctor thought it was. Funding and focus on women's health is essential, and that is exactly what this budget will deliver. The comprehensive women's health clinic at Barwon Health will be game changing for women in Geelong's north and across the whole region, and this joins other recent investments in health in Geelong, such as the new women's and children's hospital and the children's emergency department at University Hospital.

With this budget we will keep improving the V/Line services, with 23 new VLocity trains built right here in Victoria, meaning more trains more often for regional Victorians. Geelong commuters deserve a great public transport network that gets them where they need to go, and that is why we are delivering a 20-minute weekend service for Geelong. This builds on fairer fares, the Andrews Labor government's commitment to cap V/Line tickets at the metro rate, for the first time making rail travel equitable across the state. This is something that has been so well received across my community in Lara and across the broader Geelong region.

This is a budget that looks after people and looks after our future in Victoria. We are continuing to invest in jobs and the projects that will build our state, and we are delivering the commitments that we took to the election six months ago – every single one of them. I am so proud to be delivering on commitments in Lara for Western Heights College, for St Francis Xavier School in Corio, for North Shore Sports Club, for the Sikh Community of Greater Geelong and for the Islamic Society of Geelong.

We are building the hospitals, schools, roads and rail that Victorians need now and in 10, 20 and 30 years time. We are investing to keep Victoria's economy growing, and that is why I am so proud to be a member of this government, delivering what matters for all Victorians. I commend these bills to the house, and I wish them a speedy passage.

The SPEAKER: Order! Can I acknowledge the Honorary Consul of Ecuador in the gallery today.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (16:28): Thank you, Speaker. I was a bit worried you had me as 'honourable' then. I was going to say, 'Hold on a bit!'

First of all, Kathy and Mick own a small business. They have two children. They worked hard to send their children to an independent school. They have invested wisely. They give back to the community. They support other local businesses and they deliver jobs for local people. We should encourage them and not punish them. These are the people that will rebuild our community. They have worked hard for 60 to 80 hours each week. They have given up weekends. They did not attend family events and went without holidays. Why? Because they knew that working hard would give their children the best start in life. It is people like Kathy and Mick who can assist with the housing crisis. We should be encouraging them to invest, to have more rental properties. But no, this Labor government have put on a rent tax to encourage these small investors to look in other states. It is time for Labor to stop punishing these Victorians for their own waste and mismanagement. Victoria is broke.

The 2023–24 state budget is a typical Labor budget. It is about increasing taxes on those that can least afford it, increasing taxes on businesses, taxes that will cost jobs in our state. The worst part is they are targeting aspirational Victorians – not rich but aspirational Victorians – who are working hard to build their future. The people who are working hard to build their future are the people the government must encourage and not punish or restrict. Every parent who works two jobs to have their child attend an independent school means one less child placing pressure on the already stretched government school system. Every emergency services worker who has invested in a property to build their future means one less family on the public housing waiting list. We need more properties for rent, not less.

This budget is so brutal in so many different ways. It is sad that I only have 15 minutes to point out the concerns and place on record the ideas to build a better Victoria – not tax a state that is broke due to the mismanagement of this incompetent Labor government. It is not just us saying this, there are many out there that are saying it. The *Herald Sun* says:

State debt is set to skyrocket to \$171bn – almost \$70,000 for every household – even though Victorians face a decade of tax pain ...

Budget forecasts predict interest payments to service the staggering debt will hit \$22m a day by 2026–27 while tax revenue will climb to \$40bn – double what it was in 2015–16.

...

Ratings agencies said the budget did little to improve Victoria's credit score, which remains the lowest of any state. And employer groups warned Victoria was now the worst state in the country ... to do business.

UNSW economics professor Richard Holden said the government failed to make tough choices given debt would continue to grow. And he said the government was wrong to blame its debt predicament on Covid-19, saying cost blowouts on major projects and big spending had contributed.

"There was actually a lot of debt accumulation prior to Covid," ... "Framing it all as this is paying back Covid is maybe ... too clever by half."

As I said in that, our debt will go to \$171.4 billion by 2026–27. Let us put that in perspective. That is \$22 million per day. That is \$900,000 an hour. It is \$225,000 by the time I finish this speech. In a 15-

minute period we are going to be paying \$225,000. Imagine how many houses we could build in Victoria for social housing and actually get a return and give people a chance in life. Even with the new taxes and the cuts to jobs and projects, Victoria will increase its debt.

I am going to focus on the rent tax because there are over 800,000 people that rent here in Victoria, and this tax is going to do nothing more than place extra pressure on them. During a housing crisis this government is finding a way to make it more unaffordable. Every person that cannot live in their own house or rent a property is going to end up on the housing waiting list, and we already know the housing waiting list is out of control. It is the growth areas like mine that will be hit first and hardest. I have to ask the government why they hate investors so much – the investors that are putting properties into those areas that are giving people in my community the opportunity to have a roof over their head to give them a purpose and meaning. Instead this government want to stop investors investing here. Doing some very basic sums, on a \$400,000 loan for a \$650,000 property in Officer, one of our fastest growing areas, it would cost, including interest and taxes and insurance, around \$690 per week to run that household. The average rent is \$550. People are already losing money to keep housing affordable in our state. But what does the government want? As said in the *Herald Sun*:

Victorians with more than one property will pay a minimum \$5000 over the next decade, with a new \$500 ... tax for investment properties with ... land ... between \$50,000 and \$100,000 ...

and \$975 on land up to \$300,000. This is unfair on those renters who will end up paying that price. We need to make sure that we can keep prices down on rent, and the way to do that is to have less tax here in our state.

Businesses have also been hit with a 42 per cent hike in WorkCover premiums, making the scheme one of the most expensive in the country. That is a tax on jobs. That is a direct tax on small businesses, and the only thing that they can cut at the moment is staff. They cannot cut the cost of a bun, hamburger, lettuce or tomato. They cannot reduce the cost of electricity, which is skyrocketing, or gas, which is more pressure. The only way these businesses can save money now is to sack people, and that places more pressure on the economy. Those people will be coming back and will need more assistance.

What are other people saying about this current budget? It is not just what the Victorian Liberals are saying. S&P Global Ratings analyst Anthony Walker said the budget provided some headroom for the state's AA rating:

We consider fiscal recovery will be a slow and long process ... Despite some positive developments, Victoria's fiscal outlook remains weak compared with other Australian states.

CPA Australia senior tax policy manager Elinor Kasapidis said Victoria was now Australia's 'least attractive state to run a business or buy an investment property'. Why would you be proud of a budget that makes it the least attractive to run a business or the least attractive to buy an investment property?

"Victorians are being forced to pay for decisions made by their own government during Covid," she said. "This budget threatens to make a bad situation worse. Victoria used to be the place to be, now it's the place not to be."

Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry chief executive Paul Guerra said:

Today's state budget takes Victoria from the most locked-down state in Australia to one of the highest taxing, as the government continues to hit business with the bill for the debt incurred throughout the pandemic and cost blowouts in the WorkCover scheme.

Victorian Council of Social Service CEO Emma King is among those concerned that the tax increases could lead to higher rents. 3AW host Tom Elliott even went on to say that to blame the Reserve Bank and the pandemic for the state's debt was utter rubbish and said Victorians would be forced to pay for the mistakes the state government made during their management of COVID. He also slammed a lie being sold about the impact the levy would have on the rental market:

The government has said this will not impact rents – well of course it will.

These are the people that are going to get impacted. The government, each and every one of them, whether they are on the back bench, on the front bench or in between, are going to have to go back out to their communities as WorkCover increases by 42 per cent and explain to them, 'Guess what – you're going to have to sack staff now to recover those costs.' Or there is an alternative. I note some shaking their heads. There is an alternative here. Let us go to the alternative. They could increase the cost of everything in their premises. Everything in their store goes up, putting pressure on the cost of living.

A member interjected.

Brad BATTIN: I note the member says, 'Or we could let WorkCover collapse.' The government has been in charge of WorkCover for two decades. It is only failing because Labor have failed WorkCover so badly that they now have to increase the premiums by 42 per cent. How could you sit there – how could any member of Labor sit there – and go, 'Someone else is responsible for this other than the Victorian Labor Party, who have allowed WorkCover to get out of control.' I will go out to my community and explain to them, 'Labor are the reason that you are going to have to put staff off, Labor are the reason you will have to close your doors, Labor are the reason that you are putting your investment property on the market and Labor are the reason that rents are going up in your community.'

All the way through Casey and Cardinia the renters out there will feel every pinch of this every time rent goes up. Someone might say it is only \$50 a month. For someone who is already paying 50 to 60 per cent of their income in rent, \$50 a month is everything, and those on the other side just simply do not understand that when you implement these taxes, they end up at the bottom end there, not with the investors – or worse, people will take those properties off the market.

When it comes to the police here in Victoria – obviously this is one of my portfolios – the Andrews Labor government were very proud before the election to announce they would increase the police numbers in this term by 502. By 1 July 2024 we were going to have 502 extra police officers here in Victoria. Sadly, today as we speak there are 800 vacancies in Victoria Police, because they cannot even replace those that are leaving. They are 800 down on the numbers there were as of the election. To add to that, they still need an extra 500, so to get the 1302 extra police they need, they would need to double the size of the Victoria Police Academy. Obviously that is not going to happen. This government cannot deliver those police that they promised. There is no new money for infrastructure in Victoria Police. The only police station that will be getting renovated or updated will be Rochester. It was flooded. They deserve it; that community needs and deserves that money for that new station up there in Rochester. But not in Clyde North – that money has come out of the budget. Not in Narre Warren, where the station is no longer suitable for need – that money has come out of the budget. That is no longer there. The only thing we have seen in Clyde North since it was promised to be delivered and open by 2022 is a sign that went up in 2022 with a new date of 2025. I almost guarantee I will get to the next election and the only thing I will see change is that sticker, and it will no longer be 2025, it will be after the next election, because that money has been removed from the budget. And they are doing it because they have run out of money. We need to make sure that the police have got the support they need.

Here in Victoria our road toll has increased by 36 per cent. There are many reasons around the road toll increasing. Some will say it is due to the condition of the roads; some will say it is driver error, drink driving, drug driving. All of these play into what happens when people die on our roads, and we all know, more than ever after the last weekend, the impact of people dying on our roads in our state. That is why the government have a responsibility to deliver on the things that they have promised. What did they promise? They promised roadside drug testing targets would be up, yet they are down by 33 per cent. More people are dying on our roads from drug driving than at any time in history, and yet we have got 1 million less tests in Victoria – 1 million less roadside drug tests. There is no excuse for that, zero excuse at all. It can only be funding. The government have not given the funding to Victoria Police to deliver what they need to deliver.

When it comes to corrections and youth justice, we want to make sure that our young people have a genuine opportunity in life. We want to make sure that if they do get into the justice system, everything is put in place so we can get them work ready, return them to education or give them the support services they need. Yet this government, when they are running out of money and they are spending money on a prison that is currently not open – they are spending money in corrections, \$36 million to keep one prison closed, millions to keep a youth justice centre closed – are cutting \$5 million from community crime prevention, meaning there are fewer initiatives to tackle these crimes before they happen. There has been a \$10 million cut from community-based order supervision management. That means more young people will not get the support they need when they enter the justice system. They will have more chance of reoffending. That is a bad outcome for Victoria. That is a bad outcome for communities.

I have said, and I will say, that the previous minister I was quite happy to work with and talk to, and we actually shared a lot of similar ideas – and I am sure that Ben Carroll, now Minister for Public Transport, who was then Minister for Youth Justice and Minister for Corrections, would agree. He would be disappointed that there are now cuts to the programs that he once supported. And now there are cuts in this budget to the programs that he said on record were making changes to the young people in our community. You cannot come in here and say you are making changes and then cut \$25 million from those programs. It just simply does not work.

This is a bad budget for Victorians. It has got a rent tax, a schools tax, a job tax and services cuts. I think this bill, this legislation, will create less jobs here in our state.

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (16:43): Budgets, appropriation bills, tell the story of your community's priorities and your government's priorities. This budget delivers in spades for the community of Point Cook. I am going to start by talking about 10 of those key investments that this budget makes in Point Cook: Point Cook Road – \$79 million to upgrade the Central Avenue and Point Cook Road intersection; the Wyndham traffic management plan, \$5 million; Saltwater P-9 College, \$37.32 million; a new school in Point Cook for P-9s; a new school, planning money and early works money for a Point Cook South specialist school; \$10 million towards the western aquatic centre; \$1.4 million to the Point Cook Football Club for their clubroom redevelopment; \$1.3 million for the women's change rooms at Laverton Magpies Football Club; \$12,000 to the Point Cook Centrals Football Club to hire the field next door; and \$2.2 million towards the Werribee South boat ramp. Those are 10 things that will be delivered from this budget in the community that I represent. This is something that is so great for this community, and it means that we can meet the need for those things that the community has been calling for.

Before this election I spent a lot of time doorknocking in the community. I spoke to more than 8000 people and knocked on over 8000 doors in total. They told me that their number one, two and three priorities were Point Cook Road, and for those people who live in the Point Cook community, this is a real challenge. It is a real challenge because we are beholden to the history of poor planning around this area. A single road in and out of Point Cook was the only road for a very long time. It is a community that has gone from 50 people to just under 70,000 people just in the suburb of Point Cook alone, not including Seabrook and not including Altona Meadows – communities that rely on this as a main thoroughfare to get out of the community and to get to the jobs and the education that the community so richly wants to participate in and richly deserves. \$79 million to the Point Cook Road and Central Avenue intersection is part of the Big Build. It will make this intersection safe. It will improve congestion, but it will not solve congestion. It will make this area available for cyclists and pedestrians, a part of the community that cannot access this intersection safely today, and there have been serious accidents at this intersection and serious injuries caused.

I am so pleased that Jacinta Allan, the Deputy Premier, joined me the day after the budget to emphasise just how much she is committed to this project by personally being on site. I know how much the Big Build is committed to this project because they have already started the planning processes, consulting community, but I do not need to see that community consultation to know that this is desperately

needed so people can get out of their community and get home safely. That is why I am so pleased to see the Minister for Roads and Road Safety at the table today with the Wyndham traffic management study: \$5 million towards roads all across Wyndham, a growing area, an area that will be bigger than Bendigo and Ballarat combined in just a dozen years, with over half a million residents, over 60 per cent of whom today leave the community to take work and education. These studies now getting ahead of this planning for our community's future, meeting those challenges that already exist, is just so important and vital for the community.

What I love about the communities of Point Cook, Altona Meadows, Seabrook and Werribee South is their love and want of great education. We have great education facilities in our community, and Saltwater P-9 College is one such community. The Saltwater estates are growing. Not every house is built there, and that school is just growing and is going to keep growing. They have a great IB program, and principal Jackie Daniali there is a great educator and leader. There are so many great educators and leaders there that I and the Minister for Education met recently, and she was able to announce the \$37 million towards the expansion of that school. It is such a great school, and it is showing our government's commitment to their commitment for great education facilities.

Point Cook South P-9, which is the interim name, is a new school to open in 2026. It is part of the 100 schools of the big build of schools that we are doing across Victoria. I am proud to be part of a government which has prioritised education and is willing to put its money where its mouth is by opening so many schools. Saltwater P-9, which I just mentioned, was one of those schools that has opened, and it has already been expanded. Point Cook South P-9 will be another school which will be well sought after, and I cannot wait to see that start. Point Cook specialist school has got money for planning and early works, another one of these schools that are desperately needed across our communities.

The western aquatic centre is a council-led project, and rightly – councils are responsible for things like pools across our communities. They will run them and they will fund them over time. But we can always as a government give them a helping hand, and there is a good reason we are giving them a helping hand: because there are 100,000 people in the communities that I represent who do not have a public pool to go to. One hundred thousand people without a public pool – some of the most diverse communities. The most multicultural suburb in the country is in Point Cook, and those communities deserve a place where they can learn to swim and thrive in the waters around Victoria, because the electorate that I represent is surrounded on three sides by waterways: Laverton Creek, Port Phillip Bay and Werribee River. Swimming is extremely important in the communities that I represent, so I am so pleased that that site will be pushed along by this funding. It will give impetus to the council to run with this project, and I am so pleased to say that they have recently assigned several million dollars to get the planning underway. It is not just multicultural communities; it is those communities with disability, those communities who are older and those communities who just want to have fun during the summer, like so many of us did, creating those memories and building community.

The Point Cook Football Club redevelopment received \$1.4 million. Again, it is a council facility, but it is a different council on this occasion: Wyndham City Council. They are building so many facilities across the area because it is growing at such a high rate. This place is important, and it is special to Point Cook. It is a club which is high achieving; they are high-performance athletes. They have been in division 1 in the Western Region Football League for some time now and they need facilities that match their growth. There are more than 1000 members at the club. It is an amazing club in a growing area that is still going to keep growing. So I thank Ivo Havard, Samuel Fragapane, Dave Rouvray and Jason Ware – and Dave's son plays for Point Cook Bulldogs and did a great job in the local community cup recently. This is about a third of the money that they need, so I look to the federal government, I look to council and I look to the league to step up and make sure that we can have this great facility that is needed, because the clubrooms really just do not fit the number of people that they want to have attending to build community. This is one of those things about those communities that are growing:

it is really difficult to build community, but we have got the volunteers and we have got the people who want to build it. We are facilitating that, and that is what I love so much.

At the Laverton Magpies Football Netball Club – I do not think their clubrooms have seen much of a change in their many years at the ovals there – there is \$1.3 million for Steph, who is the president there, and the team who are redeveloping that great community that we have there, investing in women's football, investing in youth football and just growing the club. They are an amazing group of people, and I am so pleased that this government is able to support them, including with a new scoreboard and redevelopment of their clubrooms and women's change rooms. I look forward to seeing how the council can get involved as well in that space.

The Point Cook Centrals Football Club has Todd Van Blommestein, Gavin Young, Michael Blewitt and Kelly Van Blommestein, who is president of the netball side of things. The Sharks are a great community club, and they have actually had some really great successes lately. Both their teams won premierships, their men's and their women's, and they both went up a division. The reason this is important is because they have just been building and building. One of the design features that is sometimes lacking in communities that are newly designed, like Point Cook, is that they have not thought through for the big growth that is going on. It is a single-oval football club, so it is hard to build a big membership and it is hard to fundamentally support what runs a club, which is the canteen, off one match at any point in time. We are lucky: we have Featherbrook school next door. So this money will fund the hiring of the oval next door during their training and during their matches, making this club sustainable.

On the Werribee South boat ramp, in 2019 we presented free parking and launch fees – we got rid of those fees that inhibited so many people in Victoria from using these boat ramps as much as they would have liked to. What we have seen is a massive increase in the usage of the boat ramp. People park all the way along the street, either side of where the boat ramp is, because it is so well used. It is a very well used area of Victoria's boat ramps on Port Phillip Bay. The fishing is good, the barbecues are great and the playground is sensational. Werribee South beach is one of those places that if you have not been to – I have implored members here to get to Werribee South beach before – it is a really great idea to get down there, because it is beautiful. If you have got a boat, launch it from there. Soon it will be even better, with a \$2.2 million upgrade for more pontoons and more parking spaces, making it more accessible for people to recreate across our community.

I want to go into a couple of other things that are being delivered in our budget, or will be delivered should the budget pass of course – and I hope it will. For protecting our waterways and the Green Links fund, which Minister Shing from the other place launched most recently, there is \$10 million, with action plans with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Victoria, the Aboriginal communities, making sure traditional owners have more of a say over our wonderful waterways.

Werribee Mercy and Footscray Hospital women's health clinics – this budget delivers \$58 million to deliver 20 comprehensive women's health clinics across Victoria. We are in desperate need of those in Melbourne's south-west, and they will be well used by the communities that I represent.

There are great things that are delivered by budgets. They describe what is a priority for a government and what is not. I know that this budget delivers on the election commitments that we as a government made. If we had not been elected as a government, none of these would have been delivered, and so that is why it is so important for the communities that I represent. I look forward to working with our government for the remainder of the term in delivering further commitments.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (16:56): Well, we often talk about those that have come from very different countries to settle here in Australia, settle in Victoria, and work really hard. Many of those were living in accommodation, renting, and working really, really hard in many, many, jobs just to survive, just to put food on the table, and many of those, if you fast-forward, are the success stories

that for many, many years we have revered. We have so many from our Chinese community that have not had the opportunity of a great education but have come here, have worked so hard, have had kids and have said, 'We want to give those kids the opportunity that we didn't have and give them the very, very best of education.' The same could be said of many in my community, the Jewish community, that have come here, have worked so hard and have contributed. Many people in this Parliament have spoken about the successes of those that have worked very hard, like people from the Jewish community, that have invested so much in philanthropy, in science, in education, in health and in so many different areas and that have made this great state what it now is.

Well, what really, absolutely just kills me is that the aspiration that we have set for our state is now something that is no longer revered by the Andrews Labor government but is attacked. Those people that have worked hard are not celebrated but taxed, and those people that want to contribute for others have been told by this government, 'You know what – we're actually going to ensure that you can no longer be celebrated. We won't be providing the kinds of conditions that we've had for many, many different generations that have made Australia and Victoria the greatest place to live, but instead, what we're going to do is we're going to come after you, we're going to make it harder for you and we're actually going to disincentivise you to do anything at all.' And that is just appalling. This is the worst budget that I think we have ever, ever seen. It is a budget that attacks aspiration. It attacks anyone that has a go. It just says, 'You know what, you're not worth anything. You're better off just sitting at home and doing nothing.' And that is largely what this budget is all about.

We have record debt in this state – record debt. We have heard on numerous occasions – the media now reports on it – that it is higher than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined. Yet with record debt, we are seeing record taxation. You would think, you would hope, that we would try to wrestle the debt down, but we are seeing increased debt – debt that will go up to \$171 billion in the forward estimates. And the reason why is because this government has no idea – none whatsoever – when it comes to managing money.

They are a government that literally has no idea about managing projects. We have seen that on the Big Build with \$30 billion plus of budget blowouts. We hear this government talk about how we need to be able to pay for the COVID recovery and the money that had to be spent on COVID at around about \$30 billion. Well, if they managed their major projects we would not even be in this mess. Thirty billion dollars could build schools and hospitals and so many different things, but instead it is just being wasted. Now, we have heard just recently the situation with many of these major projects: the level crossings that this government celebrates, the Metro Tunnel this government celebrates. We have the Deputy Premier and the Premier going out and cutting ribbons, putting on hard hats and saying, 'How fantastic, we're removing level crossings.' It is great we are removing level crossings, but do it in an affordable way, not one in which we are literally having people, as has been reported, on ghost wages, on ghost hours, where they are doing multiple shifts at a time. Surprise, surprise, they have put themselves down on three or four projects at the same time on the same day, and we the taxpayers are paying for that. That is just appalling.

Victorians are going in for a hard day of work and getting paid for that hard day's work, and on the flip side we are hearing about people going in and being told, 20 or 30 at a time, 'You know what, work on weekends, double time. Do a 12-hour shift but leave after 8 hours and you'll get your 12 hours worth.' If you add that up across each of these major projects, no wonder we are in a financial mess. And what does the Deputy Premier say? 'Don't care. That's all right, that's a matter for someone else.' It is not a matter for someone else. The key responsibility for any government is to manage things properly, and this government has messed it up.

The taxes – Labor's school tax, Labor's rent tax, Labor's job tax and Labor's debt tax – are all new taxes. We are close to 50 new taxes under this government, a government that when they first came to power said, 'There will be no more new taxes under a government that we lead.' That was the promise, a promise that has been broken again and again and again. A tax on aspiration – those people that have worked so hard that I spoke about at the beginning, those people that want their kids to have an

education of choice. Those people and many of those schools are subsidising that education as we speak. In my electorate we have got schools at which some of those kids are subsidised for up to 85 per cent of the fee. Again, what happens is you will have large families, some with 10, 12 kids in a family. They will go to a school and the community will get around them and say, 'You know what, we will support them. We will do a whole range of things to ensure that those kids can get an education.' Well, they are on the hit list. That is potentially – with the additional money – another 5 per cent on the school fees at the very least.

Certainly between the last census data and this census data in an electorate like mine, in Caulfield, in our primary schools we are seeing a 5 per cent drop from the independent and private schools to the public sector. Interviewing a number of the parents and talking to a number of the parents, they have all said conclusively, 'We would love to be able to send our kid to one of the Jewish day schools or one of the Catholic schools, but at the end of the day we just can't afford it.' So what that does is it puts more pressure on the public sector, because now we have got a lot of kids in our zoned areas, but you cannot get into those schools anymore because they are full. Now we have got a situation where we have got schools in the public system that are full and you cannot get kids into them, yet the kids that were being sent to the private system and are already leaving are now going to be leaving more so because we are effectively taxing them more.

This is a government that makes no sense. It is not about fairness. They have a numberplate saying 'The Education State'. How do you become or continue to be the Education State when you just want to tax schools, something that has never, ever been done before. We have always had a tax exemption when it comes to schools for education and humanitarian reasons. Well, this government has ripped up the paper today when it comes to those kinds of precedents that have been long standing in this Parliament. It is no longer, because this government wants to attack people – anyone that wants to work hard and wants to have a go.

It is the same thing when it comes to the payroll tax. It is a really big issue, because what we want to do is we want to encourage people to come here. People often say, 'Well, do you know what? The government has introduced all these new taxes. They are taxing and taxing and taxing. What would you do differently? What would you do that would actually change the game and pay down debt?' What you would do is you would restore confidence into what once was the most livable city in the world and get people that want to come here to invest here, that want to actually set up businesses here. That is what you would do.

And why would you do it when it is the highest taxing state in the nation? Why would anyone want to come here when that is happening? You have got other states that are rolling out the red carpet to businesses and saying, 'Come and set up here.' I will tell you what New South Wales will be doing at the moment: they will be absolutely throwing a party and they will be saying, 'How good is this? Victoria doesn't want business to set up. We're just going to roll out the red carpet and welcome them here.' States like New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania are doing their utmost to actually encourage investment, because it creates jobs and it creates wealth for the state, and the more that that happens, the more opportunity that then provides. That is what this government should be doing. If there is one thing that they could do, they could restore confidence, they could encourage investment and they could get people to say, 'You know what, we're going to come here.' In an article from 4 hours ago, the chief executive of Wesfarmers, one of the largest employers in this state – big brands like Bunnings and Kmart, many of those stores that we would all visit – turned around and said, 'You know what, investment is shot here in this state because this government has done something that is very, very dangerous. We want to provide jobs, we want to grow jobs and we want to grow wages, but how can you do that when you have a payroll tax that hits up the very workers that we want to support?'

So it is not encouraging jobs, it is not encouraging investment and it is not encouraging wage growth. The only thing it is doing is growing funds into Daniel Andrews's pocket – that is what it is doing – to be misspent and to be wasted on more projects that nobody even has any idea about, because this

government clearly does not. Thirty-two major projects have been put on ice – 32 of them. We still do not have an airport rail. We have one of the largest, most active cities in the world – the world's most livable city time and time again. Every government, past and present, has been talking about, 'How do we get Melbourne back to where it once was as the most livable city? When do we get an airport rail?' We all got very excited about it. In fact at the last election the government tried to repackage their Suburban Rail Loop and call it 'SRL Airport', because they knew the airport rail was really attractive and people would say, 'Isn't this great? The government is actually going to invest in an airport rail.' What was the first thing that went in this budget? The airport rail. The thing that they tried to sell got scrapped. Now we still have no idea when we are going to get an airport rail. Geelong fast rail – gone, finished; that is forgotten. All of these projects – they start them, they get workforce onto them and they do some work. It is like building a house – they lay the foundations, they lay out the contract, they put the frame up and then they say, 'You know what, this is all too hard. We're just going to walk off and do something else.' And when we come back to it, the one thing that we absolutely know is it costs more. You cannot keep stopping and starting time and time again and expect to save money; it costs money. Anyone that has built anything – anyone that has done anything when it comes to business – knows that if you do not finish what you start, you end up paying more. That is the price of this government – 32 major projects all on ice, with no idea when they are going to start again.

We have got \$70 billion in contingency funds – no idea what that is for. One would suggest it is to help the Deputy Premier advance to the premiership and take over from Daniel Andrews when he has had enough. Who knows what it is for. But ultimately what we need to do is have some certainty. There is no certainty here. We have got the Commonwealth Games, which are meant to create legacy projects in regional Victoria. That was the reason why we were doing this, to create legacy projects. There is no legacy here. The only legacy the Andrews Labor government is leaving is a bankrupt state, a state that will be broke thanks to this government and their mismanagement.

This is not a good budget; this is a dud budget. I think nobody has seen a budget so poor before in what this budget does not provide. You look at the very, very basics of Labor's rent tax. We hear time and time again about the housing crisis and affordability. Again, people cannot afford a home to buy, let alone a house or an apartment to rent. You have got waiting lists. You have a house that is open for rent, and there are queues around the block trying to get in. And what does this government do – they say, 'No worries at all. We've got a solution here. We're going to provide another tax on any kind of investment properties to get people into the market to build more stock. We don't want to do any of that; we want to stop more homes being built and more apartments being built and reduce supply to make it even harder for people to get into a home – or better still, if they do get in, they're going to be paying more.'

This does not do anything in terms of creating housing affordability – absolutely not. It does the opposite. Renters are already doing it really tough. The last thing they need is more tax. The last thing they need is more price hikes on anything that they might want to get into. It is so tough in terms of cost of living already. There are so many hits when it comes to what each and every Victorian is facing: when it comes to our energy bills, when it comes to groceries, when it comes to anything – building costs – the whole lot is absolutely next-level bad here in Victoria.

So you would hope, and you would have hoped, that the government would have actually taken this budget as an opportunity – not an opportunity to tax people more but an opportunity to provide confidence to grow an economy. This does none of that. It does none of that for any hardworking Victorian that wants to do better for themselves, for their family. We do not put those people on a pedestal anymore. We do not turn around and say, 'Isn't that great? I want to work like that.' Any one of those university students that are going out there to get themselves a degree, to get themselves a job, to do better – we do not want any of that under an Andrews Labor government. Instead we want to tax them. We want to actually hurt them and we want to say to them, 'Bad luck, Charlie, there's nothing in it for you.' At the end of the day, everyone is going to pay more taxes, everyone is going to

have to bear the burden. At the end of the day, it would be okay if we were reducing debt; we are increasing debt, and who pays? Our kids, our grandkids and further generations. It is a terrible budget – a budget that hurts all Victorians.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (17:11): It is a pleasure to rise to contribute to this debate and to follow the last but one speaker, my colleague and friend the member for Point Cook, who I think gave a beautiful exposition about what this budget is and what a budget represents in terms of a government's priorities and its commitments to the people of this state. He talked compellingly about what this budget means for his community in Point Cook. I intend to do likewise in terms of this budget's impact and contribution to development in my community in Greenvale, which shares some similarities with that of the member for Point Cook in being a rapidly growing part of Melbourne with a real need for government support for infrastructure like roads, like new schools, like the amenity that communities in growing areas need and want and deserve.

Before I get to that, I want to talk about just some of the measures on the revenue side of the ledger. Before I do that, I will just acknowledge that some of the revenue measures related to the budget are contained within the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023, but one cannot consider the appropriation bills and the investment decisions of this government without reference to how Victorian taxpayers, who I respect deeply and who this government respects deeply, are supporting the investment decisions contained within the budget.

A cornerstone of the budget on the revenue side of the ledger, as the Treasurer alluded to in his ministerial statement earlier, is a landmark reform to abolish stamp duty for commercial and industrial properties, boosting business growth and expansion across our state. This is effective, efficient, productivity-enhancing tax reform that will deliver for Victorians. Indeed the cumulative increase in the size of the Victorian economy as a result of this reform is up to \$50 billion in net present value terms. As a result of these changes, the lump sum stamp duty system for commercial industrial properties will transition to a much more efficient annual property tax from 1 July 2024 to help businesses expand and create new jobs.

It has been interesting to note some of the more fevered commentary from our friends in the fourth estate over the weekend and indeed from the contributions from some of those opposite today about this government's relationship with business, especially when one contrasts it with the facts. I will just quote that noted socialist and opponent of business the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry CEO Paul Guerra:

The Victorian Chamber has been working with the State Government on this landmark and generational productivity reform which businesses across Victoria will welcome.

This is exactly the type of progressive tax reform that is required to free up stamp duty charges which will accelerate building upgrades, stimulate investment in commercial property and free up more capital.

What he means when he says 'free up more capital' is free up more capital for investment in those productivity-enhancing things that Victorians depend upon. And it will – it is a reform that will remove barriers to larger investments, accelerate business growth and help our economy grow stronger by enabling businesses to move or start up closer to where their customers are or their suppliers are based, cutting costs, making supply chains more efficient and increasing the value of economic activity in our state: the thing that ultimately job creation, business investment and the revenues of this government depend upon. That is the type of economic activity which supports this budget's investment in the future, and nothing is more significant for the future of Victorians than education and training.

This is a budget, as the member for Point Cook mentioned in terms of his electorate, that invests in schools and school infrastructure. The reason it does that is because it is building the Education State. The previous speaker, the member for Caulfield, questioned what the Education State looks like. I do not question it. I do not think any member on our side of the house questions that, because we know what it looks like. I know what it looks like, having been a teacher in our schools under the previous

Liberal government, an era where school investment atrophied, where quality declined, where there was a lack of focus on education and its enabling role in the success of Victorians in the future. This government is not about that. We are about investing in the future via education, because that is what is going to equip Victorians now and into the future for the jobs of a growing, globalising and technology-integrated economy.

I want to talk about a couple of the incredibly positive announcements in this budget that my community is incredibly excited about. Greenvale Secondary College, which I was privileged to be at the opening of just last year, is already catering to several hundred students in my community. It is a school that has been talked about for decades, but those opposite when they had their chance in government did not get on and build it. This Andrews Labor government has built the Greenvale Secondary College. It is a beautiful building. It has a great culture led by principal Mark Natoli, and I salute him and I salute the teachers of that school for the culture they have built with the first generation of students coming through, and the school council presidents past and present who have advocated to me and to this government so strongly to secure the next stage of funding – \$22.38 million that is going to transform education locally, making sure that students from year 7 to year 12 in Greenvale have outstanding, world-class facilities in which to learn, to thrive and to grow. I contrast that with the kinds of facilities that I taught in, and I know there are teachers around this house who can possibly attest to this as well, which were decrepit by comparison. That is what the Education State looks like: quality educational infrastructure that enables students to have an outstanding education regardless of where they are in this state.

Indeed another investment in that vein is \$10.5 million to upgrade Bethal Primary School in Meadow Heights. I salute principal Dave Warren and his team at Bethal Primary. They do an outstanding job educating children who have some high needs in many instances, some real need for educational support and the opportunities that education can provide. This government takes that seriously, and I have been really overwhelmed by the commitment that teachers at that school have towards their students – their investment in students – because of their recognition of what their work and what a good education can mean for the life opportunities of students at that school.

But it does not stop there. No, there is more: \$5 million for the next stage of the Mary Queen of Heaven campus development in Greenvale, a fantastic school led by principal Renae and a wonderful, dedicated team of caring teachers. I was deeply privileged to represent the Minister for Education at the opening of Mary Queen of Heaven just last month, and it is extraordinary to think that there will be another phase of that campus being developed very soon because of the investment by this government, making sure that wherever parents choose to educate their children they are supported in that choice – we recognise the value of faith schools like Mary Queen of Heaven to provide an outstanding education in the tradition that their parents seek for them.

It does not stop with school education, though. TAFE and training are essential ingredients in the future prosperity of Victoria and the opportunities that individual Victorians enjoy. We have put more than 70 courses on the free TAFE list, helping more Victorians get the skills that they need for the jobs that they want and the new jobs that are being created in our dynamic economy. It used to be very hard for Victorians with higher qualifications to access a subsidised TAFE course. That is the sort of barrier to training that stymies productivity, restrains growth and means that people are not able to access the jobs that fit their needs, their interests and their talents and skills best. We got rid of that, and it is really important for improving the flexibility and the productivity of our labour force. We are addressing skill shortages and giving Victorians the first chance to get new jobs in emerging areas of our economy.

In this budget in particular we will invest \$186 million to expand the eligibility criteria for subsidised training courses, \$90 million to meet the expected demand for training while providing additional literacy, numeracy and digital skills for free TAFE students – isn't that fantastic – and \$90 million for TAFEs to continue to provide the priority skills and job placement support, to improve wellbeing and to maintain high-quality workforces. All of these investments contained within the appropriation bills we are currently debating build on previous investments that are having a massive impact in the

training sector in my community, like the \$60 million Health and Community Centre of Excellence at Kangan Institute in Broadmeadows, which I acknowledge to the member for Broadmeadows is technically located just outside my electorate, in hers, but serves an awful lot of people from the Greenvale electorate who really rely on that kind of facility. It is a new facility which will feature flexible learning spaces, laboratories and outdoor recreation spaces and house students in those really essential areas of our economy which are growing and where we have severe skills shortages, like aged care, mental health, disability, nursing, pathology, allied health and healthcare education services.

Training, skills, upskilling and ensuring that governments are working to equip Victorians to respond to economic change matter. My community remembers the recession of the 1990s, which was like an economic explosion for those in Melbourne's north. I do note that those opposite were then occupying the Treasury benches, and the difference in the experience between what followed the 1990–91 recession and what followed the collapse of the automotive manufacturing industry in the north is instructive. In the early 1990s and through the 90s there were record levels of youth unemployment as firms cut back on training and apprenticeships, and the Kennett government was missing in action. Unemployment soared, and that resulted in permanent scarring – a generation, particularly of men, who were never able to find work again. That is why training and upskilling matters. It provides flexibility. It provides local people in my electorate with the tools and the skills they need to access those newer areas of the economy which are adding jobs so that those who are subject to the vagaries of economic change and technological transition are not thrown on the scrap heap. That is not good enough. That is not acceptable to a Labor government, it is not acceptable to me and I do not think it is acceptable to Victorians, which is why we were returned at the last election to deliver this budget, which has such a profound and acute focus on skills and training. I thank the Minister for Training and Skills in the other place for her continued support for training and investment in my electorate.

It does not stop there, though. Health is a cornerstone of this budget in the appropriation bills we are discussing, which include \$320 million to support the construction of new emergency departments at the Northern Hospital and the Austin Hospital. The Northern has the busiest ED in Victoria and the Austin the fourth biggest. There are 109,000 ED presentations at the Northern every year, and given population growth in my part of Melbourne – and I can see other members who are based in the north; the member for Sunbury knows it very well – it is a growing area with a real need for world-class health services which cater to that growth. That is why we are investing in those quality ED facilities. These upgrades matter to my community. It is all part of our \$1 billion hospital plan for the north, which is about securing great care closer to home for residents in Greenvale. We have invested more than \$12 billion in health infrastructure since we came to office in building the health facilities Victorians need, and we are doing more of that now.

I do note that this is also a budget that places the health care of women at its centre, with \$58 million to help deliver a women's health clinic at the Northern Hospital, part of an overall budget appropriation of \$153.9 million, which will change the way that women's health issues are treated, providing care and support for conditions like endometriosis, pelvic pain, polycystic ovary syndrome, perimenopause and menopause. As someone who is very privileged to live with a female clinician who works in our public hospital system looking after some pretty sick people with cancer and other blood conditions at the Royal Children's and Peter Mac, I am incredibly proud of this government's continued investment in health and that bounce back from COVID, ensuring that Victorians, wherever they live, are able to access those quality healthcare services that a civilised society depends upon and that Victorians rightfully expect.

I also just want to note in the time that is remaining to me that the bills we are discussing today also include an appropriation for the Parliament. As the chair of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee I want to acknowledge that the funding in these appropriations supports the work of our parliamentary staff and to thank them for the work that they do to uphold the capacity of every parliamentarian to serve their constituents and to uphold Victorian democracy. That is particularly the case through a body like SARC, which is charged with scrutinising bills, scrutinising ministerial

regulations and holding government to account in a bipartisan and independent manner. That is impossible without the professional, diligent, dedicated and expert support that the secretariat, led by Helen Mason, provide, so I take this opportunity to thank them and note that the appropriation today will support that work into the future.

In closing, I also note that the budget bill we are discussing today includes \$400,000 as part of a \$13.2 million commitment to support dog parks across Victoria. I was privileged to be at the Broadmeadows Valley dog park in Meadow Heights with the Minister for Environment just last Friday, and the rather put-upon 11-month-old labrador that occupies my house came with us to announce this \$400,000 funding. This is the sort of thing that makes a difference to a growing community – \$400,000 does support, as the member for Point Cook said before, the kind of amenity that councils often roll out, but it is the sort of thing where state government, with a relatively small amount of money, can really make a difference with the kind of amenity that a growing community wants and deserves. With that I thank the house for its time and commend these bills to the house.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (17:26): It is one thing for the Andrews Labor government to send Victoria woke, but it is another thing when they send us broke. And that is what this budget is doing: this budget is sending Victoria broke. This budget will make the lives of so many Victorians harder in a time when the cost of living is already pushing many families to the brink, and what is so desperately unfair is that it is ordinary Victorian households that will have to pay the price for this government's economic incompetence. Parents and students will be smashed by a new schools tax. Renters will be punished with a new renters tax. Small business, the engine room of our economy, our jobs engine room, will be smashed by a 42 per cent hike in WorkCover premiums, and a generation of young Victorians will be punished with the dead weight of Labor government debt that they are going to have to carry throughout their lives. This generation are going to miss out on opportunities that should be theirs, because this government has conscripted them to pay for Labor's reckless spending and Labor's reckless waste.

George Orwell's famous dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was written as a warning, but I wonder if this Labor government has not regarded it as a manual. Apart from the ugly, authoritarian manner in which this government treats individual rights, the misuse of language in this budget is straight out of newspeak. This is a budget that Labor says will tackle debt but sees debt increase, a budget Labor says will grow the economy but which sees unemployment rise, a budget Labor says will trim the public service but which sees the state wages bill blow out. This is all against a backdrop where on 25 May the Essential Services Commission under this government announced a 25 per cent hike in power bills for the forthcoming year from 1 July. More taxes, more charges, more debt, more pain – that is the message from this budget.

Let us have a look at some of the metrics. I flag now I am not going to be discussing my own electorate a lot in this contribution; I will do that at another opportunity. But to be honest, it will not take me long to discuss the impact of this budget on my electorate, because none of my schools get a cracker – not one. None of my infrastructure funding bids get looked after – no level crossing removals in my electorate, no sporting grounds supported in my electorate. It will not take very long at all.

Let us look at debt, and the starting point is when this government was elected, which was 2014–15, and I was the outgoing Treasurer. I bequeathed to this government a set of books that had net state debt at \$21.8 billion. The budget now says that next year it is going to be \$135.4 billion, and by the end of the budget cycle, at the end of the forward estimates, 2026–27, it will be \$171.4 billion. So from the time this government was elected to the end of this budget period the government will have increased Victoria's debt by \$150 billion – 'billion' with a B.

No wonder we have got worse debt than Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania combined. And you cannot just wish that away. You cannot say, 'We've had our fun; we've had our party. We've spent all our money. We've had our cost blowouts. Someone else will clean up the mess.' No, young Victorians are going to be left to clean up this government's mess, and it is going to take generations

to pay it back. I think one of the more interesting newspaper headlines I saw a little while ago had a picture of the Premier on it, and the headline was 'Forever in his debt'. That pretty much sums it up, because this state and younger generations of this state will be forever in the debt caused by Daniel Andrews – by the Premier – and his government and MPs.

The debt is in a horrific position, and it is not as though we have any assets that could be sold off to pay it down. This government has tried. They sold off the Port of Melbourne – they spent all that. They sold off Victoria's share of Snowy Hydro – they have spent all that. They sold off the land titles office – they spent all that. Now they have sold off the registration and licensing functions of VicRoads. It is great that the great socialist comrades on the other side have been the biggest privatisers since Kennett and Stockdale. They love a good sale. Apparently when they do it, it is okay, but when any other government did it, it was really bad. The sale of VicRoads's registration and licensing functions we will be debating later on, so I will not foreshadow that, but we will be debating the creation of a future fund. Can I just say that when Peter Costello and the federal coalition government created the national future fund it was because they had paid off the Australian government's entire net debt. Every single dollar of net debt had been paid off. This government has put this state in a position of indebtedness that we have never seen before. Treasurer Pallas is making Joan Kirner look like Scrooge McDuck – absolutely unbelievable. Actually it is probably the other way round – it is probably Scrooge rather than Scrooge McDuck. You get the point.

A member: There's no duck about it.

Michael O'BRIEN: There is no duck, no ducking way. The debt is in a horrific position, and this has of course led to our credit rating being shot down. When I handed over the books to Mr Pallas we had a stable AAA credit rating from both ratings agencies. We have now been downgraded not once but twice. We have now gone from AAA stable to AA. What does that mean? It means we have to pay higher interest rates. It means we are not as safe a government to buy a bond from, so accordingly you have to charge higher interest rates to attract those people to buy your bonds. So we are paying higher interest rates because this government has blown the AAA credit rating, and the Premier and the Treasurer have just as much admitted we are not going to get it back anytime soon.

This government talks about jobs – great Labor government. 'We love talking about jobs,' they say. In that case, why is this budget forecasting unemployment to rise? If this is such a good budget for jobs, why is unemployment going from 4.25 per cent next year, which is an increase, to 4.75 per cent at the end of the forward estimates in 2026–27?

Michaela Settle: It's still lower than when you were in.

Michael O'BRIEN: Victoria created more jobs than any state in the country under the last coalition government, member for Eureka – more jobs than any state in the country – and unlike Labor's budget papers, the ABS does not lie. So debt is going up, unemployment is going up – what is happening to wages? This is a government that believes in good wage increases. Actually the wage price index for 2023–24 is 3.5 per cent. By the end of the forward estimates, in 2026–27, it is down to 3.25 per cent, so in fact your increase in wages is actually falling. So we have got more debt, more unemployment and wage growth is falling. That is sounding pretty good so far, isn't it, Shadow Treasurer? What is business saying about that? I refer to an article in the *Herald Sun* online under the heading 'Daniel Andrews' \$1billion Victorian payroll tax hike "will hit wage rises"', which says:

Nearly \$1bn a year in new Victorian payroll taxes will make it harder to put up workers' pay across the state, with the funds instead set to go propping up the Andrews government budget, Wesfarmers chief executive Rob Scott has warned.

...

Wesfarmers has more than 30,000 employees in the state across retail brands Bunnings, Kmart, Target and Officeworks and Priceline.

The article goes on to say:

What's happened as a result of increasing payroll tax is that it's just made it harder for Victorian businesses to pull wages up, because Victorian businesses are now having to allocate a billion dollars extra to the Victorian government.

So this government is taking wage rises out of the pockets of workers to fill its own coffers, because it cannot manage the budget. What is happening to our interest bill on all that debt? Well, money does not come free. It might come as a surprise to some of those members opposite, but you cannot just print money. You have actually got to start paying it back, and you have to pay interest until you do pay it back. When Labor inherited the best set of financial books in the country of any state in 2014–15, the interest bill was \$2.1 billion. What is it going to be next year? \$5.6 billion, rising to \$8 billion in 2026–27. That is \$22 million a day every single day. Go to any member here and ask them what \$22 million could do for their community – what it could do for their local schools, what it could do for their local community groups, what it could do for their neighbourhood house, what it could do for their SES or their Fire Rescue Victoria or their CFA and what it could do for sporting facilities and local sporting clubs. Just one single day of Labor government interest on debt could transform so many communities. But no, it is going down the drain to pay the interest bill on the outrageous debt of a profligate Labor government. So that is where we are: debt is up.

Michaela Settle interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: This is a point, member for Eureka: read your own budget papers. Your debt is going up, not down. Taxes are up, debt is up, credit ratings down, unemployment up, wage increases are falling and interest bills are up. On taxation, if we go from when they inherited the books, \$17.9 billion was state taxation, rising to \$34.9 billion next year and then \$40.4 billion. They will have gone from inheriting a situation where the state tax burden was \$17.9 billion – let us just call it \$18 billion; we will be generous and round it up – so \$18 billion when I handed them over. It is going to be \$40 billion in 2026–27.

Roma Britnell: Double.

Michael O'BRIEN: More than double. And what does that mean? They might say, 'Look, we've grown the economy, so maybe the tax burden has actually fallen as a proportion of the economy.' That would not be the case, Shadow Treasurer, because in 2014–15 at the election the tax to gross state product ratio was 4.8 per cent. It is now 5.8 per cent. It has gone from 4.8 per cent to 5.8 per cent – the worst in the country. It is the worst debt of any state in the country, the worst tax burden of any state in the country, with rising unemployment and rising interest payments, but the government says, 'No, we've been very responsible in this budget. We're going to trim the public service. We're going to cut 4000 public service jobs.'

A member interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: Well, you would think there would be a big reduction in public sector wages to reflect this big trimming that the government seems to be so proud of. In fact the public sector wages bill is going up by \$3 billion across the forward estimates. So only a Labor government could manage to actually sack 4000 public servants but wind up paying the rest of them \$3 billion more. That is an extraordinary outcome. Again, just as a point of comparison, the public sector wages bill in 2014–15 was \$18.5 billion. By 2026–27 it will be \$38.3 billion. So they will have more than doubled it – \$20 billion extra. But look, all those spin doctors and all those new agencies and authorities and putting all those former political staffers into public service roles does not come cheap, member for South-West Coast. They have got to do it. So you have got a situation where you have got more debt, more taxes, higher unemployment, higher interest payments and a blowout of the public sector wages bill. And what is the message for young people? The Premier gave an interview to the *Guardian* newspaper a little while back, and he was asked about young people and their interest in owning a home. This is what he said:

... ownership is not such a big thing. They are happy to rent ...

So I challenge members of the government who are in the chamber today to go back to their own electorates on Thursday and go and speak to young people. You go and ask them: are you happy to rent all your life? Do you really want to give up on the great Australian dream of home ownership? Because the trouble is this Labor government wants citizens to be clients. They do not want people to actually be able to own a home or have a small business. They want them to be constantly clients and dependent on government. That is why they believe that they are entitled to more of their taxes, because 'We will look after them'. Well, they do not look after them – they do not look after them at all. They are taking more, they are getting less, they are going slower and they are deeper in debt. This is a budget where this government's chickens have come home to roost. Nine years of appalling economic management, of waste, is now being accounted for. The saddest thing is it is not the members sitting here who will be paying the bills, it is going to be the kids who will not get the chance to go to an independent school that reflects their family's values – they will not be able to do it. It will be the small businesses closed down because of the extra taxes and charges. It will be the renters paying higher rents. They are the real victims of this budget, and those opposite are responsible for every one of them.

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (17:41): I rise to speak in support of Labor's state budget, a budget that looks after people, looks after our future and does what we said we would do. Outlined in these appropriation bills is our plan to grow jobs, to strengthen our economy and to deliver the services, supports and projects that matter to Victorians. It is a plan that we took to the Victorian people last year: a plan for better hospitals, world-class schools, the road and rail our growing state needs and a bright, sustainable state now and into the future. We have not wasted a moment getting cracking on all of this. Our budget funds every election commitment we made. It continues to address the challenges that Victorians across our communities are facing, and it puts in place the responsible targeted measures we need to stabilise our budget following the pandemic.

Speaking to residents in my own community of Northcote, many with small businesses, many in insecure work and housing, many working on the front lines of our health system, the overwhelming sentiment has been that our government acted decisively to save businesses, save jobs and save lives – actions which did not come without cost but which were necessary. I have heard those opposite continually take digs at these measures, and we all witnessed and saw their tactics during the very depths of the pandemic. How did that work out for them?

A member: Very badly.

Kat THEOPHANOUS: Thank you. I mean, seriously, God help us if they are the ones left to make the decisions, those difficult decisions that need to be made to protect Victorians in our time of need. The truth is that the Victorian economy has recovered following the pandemic and jobs growth has been strong. But we are now facing the pressure of high inflation and rising interest rates. That is why addressing cost of living forms a critical component of our budget, exemplified perhaps most dramatically through our investment in the State Electricity Commission. Many Victorians remember with fondness the SEC. It meant a fair deal on your power prices and good, stable jobs for workers. That is why Labor is bringing it back – to drive down power bills and create thousands of jobs in renewable government-owned energy. An initial \$1 billion investment in the SEC will deliver 4.5 gigawatts of power – the equivalent replacement capacity of Loy Yang A – through renewable energy projects. But bringing back the SEC will not just mean more renewable energy, lower bills and reduced carbon emissions, it will also create 59,000 jobs – jobs that are secure and meaningful, jobs that mean being able to support a family. I cannot overstate the amount of enthusiasm and excitement for the SEC there is in my community and how many conversations I have had with constituents about the possibilities that this opens up for Victoria, and now with this budget we are delivering the funding to make it a reality.

From our very youngest Victorians, who have just been born, to those now in retirement, this is a budget that is carefully designed for Victorians at all stages of life. In my electorate I am incredibly proud that we are investing \$15 million to deliver a new Northcote early parenting centre, where local parents – and their children – will be able to access the crucial support they need in those first years of becoming a parent. Because parenting can be tough – really tough. At Northcote’s future early parenting centre, families will be able to come and stay in their own private rooms and get the care they need for free. Over several days and nights highly skilled practitioners will work with them on strategies to support them and their child, tailored to their unique needs. Whether it is sleep and settling, feeding, bonding, mental health or positive parenting, the multidisciplinary team will be there to support them and build skills and confidence. It is an extraordinarily successful model – one that I have seen up close at Footscray’s Tweddle and one that as the member for Northcote I have fought to be made available to families in the inner north. We know that the first thousand days are critical to the development and wellbeing of babies and toddlers and to the bond and connection they have with their families. To all the local parents and organisations who have been passionate partners on that journey with me, thank you.

This is just one aspect of how our budget supports families and children. Our budget also funds landmark reforms like free kinder and 50 new government-owned childcare centres – reforms that not only give kinder kids the best start in life but give parents and especially mums the choice to go back to work or study without facing the prohibitive cost of care. Whether it is kinder, primary school, secondary school or TAFE, our government believes deeply and fundamentally in the value and opportunity of a great education. In my first term here in Parliament I made it my mission to ensure that local schools in my community saw the investment they needed. I am so proud to say that since 2018 we have seen over \$100 million invested across schools and kinders in the inner north and that we are continuing this momentum with funding in this budget to kickstart planning on a major modernisation of Thornbury Primary. It is an exciting time for this unique little school in the heart of our suburbs as they have also just completed their inclusive playground and finalised designs for a major bathroom refurb. I cannot wait to see the heights that they get to with this new investment.

As students grow I believe the most important thing we can provide them with is genuine pathways. It gives me great heart to know that the students of Northcote High, Thornbury High and other schools in the inner north will have access to new clean energy VET pathways, clean energy worker training centres and an SEC centre of training excellence to develop the skills and secure jobs our workforce needs as we become a renewable energy powerhouse. And to grow the workforce of the future for essential sectors such as health care, we are expanding free TAFE and incentivising priority courses like nursing and midwifery. Indeed through this budget we will be able to provide free university and specialist training for over 17,000 nurses and midwives. We do all this for two key reasons: (1) because we said we would and (2) because our government knows that calling ourselves the Education State is a commitment that never stops. We know that investing in education builds a better future for all Victorians.

As Victoria’s first Parliamentary Secretary for Women’s Health, I am honoured to be working with our fantastic Minister for Health on the critical reforms in women’s health that are coming, and I want to touch on them for a moment. Women and girls make up more than half of our population, yet for too long our health has been under-researched, under-diagnosed and left untreated. Whether it is debilitating period pain, endometriosis, PCOS, rheumatoid arthritis or the symptoms of menopause, not being understood, not being taken seriously or not being believed is trauma in itself. No woman should have to go through that kind of trauma simply for seeking care.

This week we took a major step forward in our work to transform the way we treat women’s health in Victoria with our Labor budget committing \$154 million to dramatically expand and improve services. This builds on the important investments we have already made, including funding Victoria’s first clinic focused on women’s heart health and our state’s first ever sexual and reproductive health phone line. I am thrilled to share that this budget includes funding to establish 20 comprehensive women’s

health clinics across our state. They will provide free, comprehensive care to support Victorians experiencing conditions like endometriosis, pelvic pain, PCOS, perimenopause and menopause.

These clinics will give women access to specialists, including gynaecologists and urologists, alongside specialist nursing and allied health support all in one spot, making it easier and faster to access the world-class care that women deserve. Just last weekend I joined the Premier and the Minister for Health at the Royal Women's Hospital, where their women's clinic will increase from one day a week to five days a week. We heard from Endo Warriors' Kat Stanley and Northcote local Fi Macrae, who shared their long and difficult journeys towards diagnosis and treatment and how much these reforms will mean to generations of Victorian women and girls.

The budget not only invests in these 20 women's health clinics but includes an Aboriginal-led clinic and a mobile clinic for remote communities. There will be an expansion of our sexual and reproductive health hubs from 11 to 20. We are supporting the creation of a women's health research institute to bridge the knowledge gap on women's health and an inquiry into women's pain management to hear directly from Victorian women about improving patient care. There will be over 10,000 additional laparoscopies to treat debilitating endometriosis, more support for women to access public fertility care and free pads and tampons in public places. This is a budget for women.

These are just some of the enormous reforms that will make a real difference to Victorian lives, yet they do not happen without our hardworking health workforce. That is why our budget also invests another \$150 million to increase support for nurses and midwives, a female-dominated workforce heavily affected by stress, fatigue and burnout. It is just one part of our \$4.9 billion investment into our health system more broadly, including upgrades at the Northern and Austin hospitals as part of our hospital plan for the north.

I want to speak about mental health for a moment. Since the royal commission we have been getting on with the job of building a modern, accessible mental health system for every Victorian. Now I can say that Northcote will be a key part of that story, with a commitment for a Northcote mental health and wellbeing local service as part of this budget. This will be a front door to public mental health services. It will mean free, easy-to-access care and support without necessarily needing a referral from a GP, which can be difficult at the best of times. I am so proud to have fought for this for the inner north consistently over the last four years, and to see it now funded and becoming a reality is a little bit surreal. I know how much this will mean to people living in my community who are struggling or to families trying to support their loved ones. We all know someone who has dealt with mental health issues. This is something that pervades our community, and now Northcote locals will have a service that they can rely on. There is nothing more important than getting the care you need when you need it.

There are so many wonderful things in the budget for the inner north, and perhaps I cannot get to them all, but there is funding in the budget for sports infrastructure, for clubs like Northcote City Football Club, for their facilities at John Cain Memorial Park. The Premier came down to John Cain Memorial Park during the election campaign and spoke with the club and made a commitment that we would fund their club for \$500,000 for female-friendly facilities that they desperately need. They are a growing and popular club in the inner north. We have delivered in full through this budget on that commitment. I am very proud of that one, and I know how much it will mean to that community there. It was great to celebrate with them recently, actually last week, joining their women's clinic, and I had a kick of the ball. I cannot say that my soccer skills are up there with Sam Kerr's, but I had a crack, and it felt really good to be out there with other women having a go and getting involved, and this funding will absolutely make a difference to other women making that choice to get involved in this club.

We are also boosting our hardworking neighbourhood houses. We all know how much our neighbourhood houses do. They run on the smell of an oily rag, and yet they make it stretch and they pull in volunteers. We have got several in the inner north who are receiving funding through this budget to expand on their service offering to make sure they are reaching the most vulnerable people in our communities. Those things make a real difference, and while it might not be millions of dollars, it is

funding that these community organisations are using for the betterment of the people that need it right there in our suburbs. I want to thank Jika Jika Community Centre, Bridge Darebin and the Alphington Community Centre. I also want to acknowledge that we have got funding in the budget for people experiencing family violence. We have got funding for our multicultural and multifaith communities.

We have got funding for open spaces like the Merri Common, which is a piece of land next to Merri station. This piece of land needs an uplift, and we have funded a \$1.5 million uplift to this piece of land next to Merri station so that the community can use it better. We will be consulting very closely with our neighbours around that patch to get the very best outcome for that one.

We are also funding more protections for our beautiful, precious waterways, the Darebin Creek and the Merri Creek, through a \$10 million fund. That will be important funding to ensure that they thrive, that we can regenerate them and that we can ensure that the friendship groups that support those creeks have the resources they need to continue doing the job that they do. We have got funding for a neighbourhood battery in Darebin, which I am very excited about, and we will have more to say on that very soon.

These investments into our state and into our future are critically important. They are the things that matter. They are the things that we promised to Victorians. They mean we can continue the momentum, delivering a brighter future for the inner north not with words but with real action. I commend these bills to the house.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (17:56): It is a pleasure to rise and make my contribution on the budget bills. I want to get straight into the biggest issue in my electorate, and that is the closure of the timber industry by the end of this year and the devastating impact that that will have on a large number of communities in my electorate. It is a decision that this government must reverse. Having had a quick *Hansard* search, over the last four years I have spoken around 20 times in support of the timber industry and lodged more than 60 questions on behalf of workers and the sector. Many of these have been the result of a lack of support for this sector. The reality is that this government has been making life very, very hard for this industry for quite some time – for its workers, for its families. Pretty much ever since this government came to office it has declared war on the timber industry. Now it has made the decision that it wants to kill it, and regional Victorians are punished yet again by this government.

But the worst part of this decision is that it was made on budget morning. There was no forewarning; there was no heads-up to these timber workers, no heads-up to these families. In fact what they were led to believe pre budget and pre election was that this industry would be supported by this government until 2030, and then with a snap of the fingers, ‘You’re out of work in six months’. The previous speaker, the member for Northcote, just got up and spoke about the importance of mental health. How do you look after the mental health of timber workers when you tell them they are going to be out of a job in six months? It is an absolute disgrace. It was a heartless ambush of these timber families and these timber communities – no forewarning, no detail, just a simple whack. With a distinct lack of information or any detail even followed up in the days since, this has left timber workers and their families in disarray. They are very angry. It is not just my electorate of Gippsland East. The member for Gippsland South here, the member for Morwell, the member for Narracan – they are all going to be deeply impacted by this, the families in all of those electorates.

But looking beyond the jobs just for a moment and looking beyond the impact on our timber communities, there is an issue here about responsibility. There is a reality that the government and the Greens will not want to hear, and I want to put it down in two points. The first one is just on 95 per cent of our current imported hardwood timber comes from countries with less oversight and less safeguards than our Victorian industry; 95 per cent of our hardwood imports now come from countries with less oversight. The second point I want to make is that consumer demand for hardwood is going through the roof. It is going through the roof because it is the building product that is recommended by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. It is the building product that is recommended by Planet Ark, who are telling us to ‘Do the world some good, build it with wood’. Consumers listen to

that message. Those agencies that are telling us what we have got to do to combat climate change tell us to build with wood. So our consumers go out and they purchase their hardwood flooring. They purchase furniture made out of hardwood. They have their doors, they get their stairwells – they choose hardwood timber because the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and Planet Ark tell them it is the right thing to do. In relation to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, not only do they say to use hardwood, but they actually specifically recommend using plantation timber and they recommend sustainable harvesting of our forests. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says we should sustainably harvest our forests – no ifs, no buts. That is it, that is there. It is mentioned multiple times.

So I pose this question to the government members: with community demand for hardwood increasing because we are told to use it and 95 per cent of our hardwood imports coming from countries that have less oversights, where are we going to get our hardwood from when we close our Victorian native hardwood timber industry? Where is the environmental responsibility from a global perspective that we are therefore doing the right thing? Where is the common sense? As consumers we are going to keep buying these hardwood products because we are told to buy hardwood products – ‘it is the right thing to do’ – but it will be sourced from countries with less oversight. So in fact what we have done here in Victoria is this government has made a decision that goes against the IPCC, and it goes against all rational thinking about doing the right thing. A number of times not only myself but fellow members in this chamber have asked this government, ‘Where is our hardwood going to come from? Is it going to come from Malaysia? Is it going to come from Papua New Guinea? How is that a better outcome when they have less oversights in those countries?’ It is absolutely nonsensical.

We know it is not going to come from plantation, and I will tell you why. The smoke and mirrors that this government put forward when it was negotiating with the timber industry was that we would transition to hardwood plantation by 2030. But when we asked the minister repeatedly to show us where these plantations are, because if we going to transition by 2030 those plantations should be 15- to 20-years-old now, do you know what the answer was? They could not tell us where they were. The minister finally conceded that those plantations of hardwood did not exist. It was all smoke and mirrors. There was no intention to transition to hardwood because it simply was not there.

But even so and taking that into account, last week’s announcement and the way it was done was cruel and it was heartless. And how did the government try and sell it? Well, we had Ms Shing in the other place coming out and saying, ‘We’re doing this because we care about timber workers and we want to give you certainty.’ That was what she said. I mean, is she absolutely serious? The first thing that Ms Shing could do if she cared about the mental health of timber workers is not spring this on unsuspecting families with absolutely no notice. That would be the first thing you might like to try and do. Do not spring this on people and then say you care, like Ms Shing did. It is an oxymoron. It is a complete contradiction.

If she is genuinely concerned about the welfare of these timber workers, I would hope that she would organise meetings in each of the timber towns – start at Orbost, Swifts Creek, Yarram, Heyfield, Morwell and even the mills in Bairnsdale. But I tell you what, she will not do it. She went down and made the announcement that the timber industry was closing with the minister behind the shelter at a TAFE college. She will not front up and talk to these communities that she is meant to represent in her own electorate. She will just issue fluffy media statements saying she cares when her actions do not back it up. It is a disgrace. Her actions from here on in will determine how much she cares about these families, and I can tell you at the moment they see through her spin and her claptrap. Their immediate future is very, very concerning. These workers need answers. The government some time ago – I think it was about two years ago – made funds available through the forestry transition fund to employ project managers to manage the transition and the phase-out of the timber industry. They were to look at the real opportunities. They were to look at the new industries we were to transition to, the new jobs and what was going to drive the economies in these communities when the timber industry left.

Danny O’Brien: What are they?

Tim BULL: Well, the time has now come to show us. I saw a lot of information about workshops, and I saw some information about forums. Now is the time to show us where these replacement industries and jobs are going to come from. No more fluff – tell us how you are going to employ the more than 2000 timber industry workers with real jobs. Let us not have a repeat of what we had with the Hazelwood closure. We got promised an electric vehicle factory down there. That was duck eggs.

Danny O'Brien: 500 jobs.

Tim BULL: 500 jobs. That ended up in duck eggs. Then we were promised in Nowa Nowa, when the mill closed, a nursery, and Harriet was down there again patting herself on the back about how great she was that this nursery was being opened – all turned to dust. It is not happening. They have pulled the pin on that.

I want to take Orbost as one example of how a community is impacted. These are not our figures in the opposition. This is the Orbost chamber of commerce and industry that did some work a few years ago. Orbost has got 4000 people, and 40 per cent of that town's employment was dependent on the timber industry. Forty per cent in a community of 4000 is dependent on the timber industry, and this government go down – when they have been promising 'We'll keep it going till 2030' – and close it overnight. We have had calls from timber workers saying, 'If my life insurance covered my mortgage, my wife and my family, I wouldn't be here,' because of the callousness of this government's action. It is an absolute disgrace. It is a decision that needs to be reversed.

We also have a mental health crisis in this state. Time and time again I come into this chamber and I hear government members talking about mental health, and it is a critical issue. Absolutely it is a critical issue. Decisions like this, with no forewarning to those communities and those families, are not the actions of a government that is seriously keen on addressing that issue. That is going to create so many more mental health problems right across that sector. We talk about the mental health supports going in. People in Orbost are struggling to get mental health supports now in Swifts Creek and Heyfield. They have to travel. They are remote. They are not in the towns, and we get this line out in a press release. Where are people now in Orbost dealing with the mental health of those workers that they have just told that they are going by the wayside? It is not there, and these people are facing this incredible level of stress and hardship not knowing what their future holds. I have been talking to contractors that have borrowed \$2 million for machinery, based on the commitment that their industry was going to be going till 2030, because you guys promised them it would, and then budget morning you tell them the rug is gone in six months, with a pathetic package that is not going to get them out of financial stress and hardship. It is a disgrace, and you need to have a look at this, you need to revisit this and you need to sort it out if you are serious about people's mental health and you are serious about rural communities.

In my remaining little bit of time I just want to talk very briefly about the challenges we have got in our roads system, and we have got the Shadow Minister for Roads and Road Safety here. The crisis on our roads is getting worse and worse. Politics aside, our roads have never been worse. I had an RACV worker of 35 years experience write me a letter the other day saying the condition of our roads is going to start costing lives. He has never seen them so bad. So we pick up the budget papers, and we have a 25 per cent cut to the roads maintenance funding budget at a time when it needed a massive boost. This 25 per cent cut means we now have a \$380 million reduction in roads maintenance funding since 2020. In a percentage figure that is 45 per cent of our roads maintenance funding cut, and our roads are absolutely appalling. When we have a government going into this level of debt that it is going into, we expect to see some outcomes for going into debt.

We would expect to see our roads improving, our health system solid and our mental health system solid, but we are incurring this debt without seeing any benefits for it. Not only that, but when the federal government announced its budget a short time ago, there was a \$1.3 billion funding cut from the federal government to the state for roads. Not a word, not a peep – silence from the other side. If it had been a coalition federal government that had done that, you would have heard the bleating in

Mallacoota. But no, not a word. This government goes to great lengths to make all of our cars roadworthy, but the reality of it is our roads are not car worthy at the present time.

From a local aspect, very briefly, there is nothing for the electorate – no Bairnsdale hospital, no Orbost or Maffra police station, no fire stations at Lakes Entrance and Metung, where they badly need them. We hope we get them soon, but there is just nothing there. We did not expect to get them all, but we would have liked to knock one or two off the list. But there is absolutely nothing. On the whole, headlined by the disgraceful decision on the timber industry, this has been an absolutely disastrous and hopeless budget for my electorate and regional Victoria.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (18:11): I am proud to stand and talk about the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 and Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023, and I would like to acknowledge the Treasurer, the Assistant Treasurer and their teams for their tireless work on yet another excellent Labor budget. Of course this is our first post-COVID era budget, and it is a budget for education, for transport and for health – and we are making jobs for Victorians along the way. We are providing what Victorians need now, and we are planning for the future. The Andrews Labor government is delivering for Victoria, and this budget is a fine demonstration of that. I am very proud to remind the house that we are funding every election commitment that we made leading up to the ‘Danslide’ last year. As I say, and I remind you again, that is every single election commitment, and I think it is an amazing effort to be able to do that in such circumstances as where things are with the economy.

This budget recognises that my electorate of Melton is one of the fastest growing electorates in the state, and through this budget we are supporting our future generations. Of course there are initiatives like free kinder, which is something I have always been passionate about – every child deserves the best start, no matter what and where they live or their family circumstances. Our government, the Andrews Labor government, is dedicated to the move to pre-prep, providing 30 hours of play-based learning by 2032. I was at Aspire early learning centre only about two weeks ago to participate in their reconciliation action plan day. It was fantastic. I commend and thank Stephanie, the person that runs Aspire there, and all of her committed staff for the work that they do with regard to that early learning centre and also for their commitment to the reconciliation action plan.

Looking towards our schools in Melton, Melton South Primary School, Toolern Vale and District Primary School and Kurunjang Secondary College are all receiving funding towards their planned upgrades. We made commitments prior to the election to upgrade all three of those schools, and I should say that they desperately need it. The planning will commence as soon as possible to start that process. Of course I am delighted to tell you about the big school of Melton, Melton Secondary College – and an excellent local school it is, with vastly growing enrolments. They deserve, like all of our schools, world-class facilities, and that is why we are providing \$8.87 million to rebuild their block T and to provide them with a rugby pitch. I will come back to the importance of that rugby pitch later in regard to what it delivers for the students that have taken up rugby through the rugby academy at Melton Secondary College and what it has meant to them. It has changed their lives just in the last 18 months to two years since that has been going.

Our senior secondary education is about developing and realising every student’s potential. Not all pathways to VCE completion are the same. Education is complex, and in a lot of cases it needs to be tailored to the student, which is why we can be very proud that Melton Secondary College and their students are taking different pathways, and the reforms to that allow them to do so. That has all come about out of the Firth review in 2020. I commend the Minister for Education and indeed the Department of Education and Training for the incredible work they have done, and in such a short time, and for their oversight. It represents some of the biggest changes seen in this area in over 30 years since the inception of the VCE system.

I will come back to that rugby academy which I briefly touched on before. Through the partnership with the Melbourne Rebels, Tim Condon, who is one of the teachers there, and his team at Melton Secondary College have developed a rugby academy. I think previously it was developed out at

Fountain Gate Secondary College. This has been an amazing concept to engage with Pacific Islander kids – and not just Pacific Islander kids, but about 80 per cent of them are from the Pacific Islands, or their parents are – to strengthen their engagement with academia through the sport of rugby. It has been an amazing outcome for those students, and the results, their academic achievements, have just gone through the roof. It is incredible, their engagement through rugby and their competitiveness, and some of them have gone on to the Melbourne Rebels – boys and girls, not just the boys – so it is a great achievement. I know that the Melbourne Rebels were in here a couple of weeks ago talking about the rugby academy and trying to expand it to other schools, and if any other members are interested in that program I encourage them to get involved, because it has been fantastic for those kids and those families and for the schools.

A member: It has changed lives.

Steve McGHIE: It has changed lives, that is right.

Melton Secondary College is a school that we can be very proud of, and the previous principal Mr David Reynolds had a lot to do with the growth of the school – and I should say I commend him; he retired at the end of the last school year. David was there for many, many years, and he was a fantastic principal. Now the new principal Kathryn Sobey has also noted a higher percentage of year 12 completions because of the rugby academy. These are wonderful outcomes that benefit all of the school, the kids and Victoria in the longer term, and it is fantastic for us. As I said, it allows for boys and girls to participate, and again – he was here a couple of weeks ago – I want to thank Jimmy Orange for setting up this program and for the hard work that he has done through the Melbourne Rebels. It is a great initiative. It is transformative for our community and many other communities that will take this on, and I just say, ‘Game on, Rebels’ and congratulations to them.

Of course in the budget there are many other things about additional schools. The Andrews Labor government is funding \$169 million to help cover the cost of school excursions, camps and sporting activities for students in need, and we know how important it is for a school year to have these events. There is \$105 million to continue school breakfast programs, affordable school uniforms and glasses for kids. Again, they are essential items, and if feeding a child is not important before they start a day’s schoolwork, then I do not know what is. We are ensuring that no child misses out. We are making sure that kids can go on camps and excursions, that they do not need to miss out on important educational pieces because of difficult financial situations at home.

Continuing to talk about schools, we can talk about independent and Catholic schools, and we have some in Melton. In the budget we have set aside \$450 million towards building and upgrading low-fee independent and Catholic schools, and this budget will see \$5 million go towards the delivery of another part of the campus at St Lawrence of Brindisi primary school in Weir Views. It is a fantastic Catholic school. I was down there last year prior to the election. It is a beautiful school, and this will add another part of the campus down there. Of course Al Iman College is one of our Islamic schools in Melton – another great school. I think it has about 1200 students. I have been to the last two VCE award presentations – amazing. As I said, they have about 1200 students, a big future in Melton and a big growing community. What the government has done is allocated \$400,000 for the necessary work on their school crossing to be funded by the Department of Transport and Planning.

I thank the Minister for Public Transport, who is at the table, for his assistance in this. The community down there organised a petition. We went down and visited the site. Clearly there is a requirement for a school crossing. It is a really busy road, Rees Road. There is definitely a requirement for a school crossing of some form, and obviously the department of transport will have a look at that with the view of planning to install a crossing at a later date. The community are so excited about that, because at school times it is almost kamikaze to try and get people across the road. It has probably been a bit astounding that there have not been some pedestrians hit prior to this. Let us keep our fingers crossed that that does not happen.

TAFE is another thing that I am passionate about. In my earlier days in education, I went on to year 12 at a TAFE college, which I never thought I would do. After spending five years at a tech school thinking I was going to end up being a plumber, I got talked into going on to do, in those days, the equivalent of year 12 at Footscray TAFE. It was probably one of the greatest years I ever had at school. We had a bit of fun on the way through, let me tell you – it was not just about education. But I have got to say, the budget has allocated \$55 million to work on our new TAFE campus in Melton and support around 600 students. Initially those students will be for the construction industry, which is clearly what we need with what is going on around this state with all the construction. It gives students an opportunity to learn skills that can be utilised within the construction industry – and hopefully around the Melton area. There is massive construction going on. As you know, we have the new hospital coming and, as I said, the TAFE college, some schools that are being built and level crossing removals. So there is plenty of construction happening in Melton outside of residential construction.

We are supporting our trade apprentices by providing free motor vehicle registration and allowing them this essential means of transporting themselves and their gear to their jobs. We know how important that is for young tradies in their utes, because I do not think a tradie has anything but a ute to carry their tools and things like that. This is going to save the tradies that are apprentices about \$865 a year, and that is massive to a young apprentice, saving that much. I am sure they will put the \$865 to good use. They will probably put wider tyres or wider wheels on the ute or whatever. Anyway, it is their money to spend.

The other thing in regard to schools is that we are really excited about establishing three beacon schools across the state to teach Punjabi and Hindi VCE language programs. According to the 2021 census, Melton has over 5000 Punjabi speakers and almost 1200 Hindi speakers throughout our electorate. I am sure there are probably more than that now obviously since 2021 because of the growth in the area. I know my local Indian communities have requested the teaching of their languages at school levels. One of our kindergartens in Melton is teaching Punjabi to kindergarten students, which is amazing. They are picking it up at the youngest age – at three and four years of age. It is just incredible. It is really important that the kids learn the language of their culture and they continue to pass it on.

As we grow so rapidly in my area, and I am sure in other areas of the west with all the multicultural communities, it is really important to have your kids learn their language. I think it is important that us Anglo-Saxons should start to learn some of that language. I know in a few years time in Melton we are going to be the minority. If we do not learn and understand other languages, in particular Indian languages in my community, we are going to be left behind. We are not going to know what they are talking about or what they are doing. Yes, we will get to know their culture, but we certainly will not understand some of the things that they are talking about. In a way it is nice, that reversal. They have come into our country and not understood us a lot, so it is fantastic that the shoe is on the other foot now. It is about time we had to pick up our game, I think.

I have been on my feet a number of times in regard to the multicultural events and community groups that we have in my electorate. I am so proud to have such a broad, diverse multicultural community in Melton. As a boy growing up in Braybrook 55 years ago, if you ever dreamed that Melton was going to be such a multicultural community, you would be absolutely kidding yourself. It is so diverse. As I say, where I was born and bred it was all Anglo-Saxon back in the 1950s, 60s, 70s and even into the 80s. The Vietnamese started to come in in the 70s and things like that, and then we had the other ethnic groups coming through. No doubt there were Italians and Greeks and things like that previously, but not so much in the western suburbs. Melton was an outlying country town back in those days, and it was all Anglo-Saxon. We are supporting South Sudanese, Somali and Afghan young people and their families by continuing to have community support groups to tackle disengagement not just in my electorate but in the inner west. And we have all encountered those problems. So these appropriation bills are very important. It is great delivery for items in Melton, and I commend the bills to the house.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (18:26): Well, this is a brutal budget that leaves the Victorian community in a position where life will be harder. Life is certainly getting harder under

Labor. Victorians, particularly regional Victorians, are being punished by Labor's fiscal incompetence. So let us recall the words of the Premier just before the 2014 election: 'There will be no new taxes in a government I lead.' Well, it is almost 50 new taxes later. And if we look at what happened before the 2022 election five or six months ago, we heard the Treasurer saying, 'We will deliver on our election commitments with no new or increased taxes.'

Now, before you say, 'Well, you know, we have had a pandemic,' this 'COVID credit card' comment is nothing more than a misnomer because if you look at the budget before the COVID pandemic, you will see that the debt was blowing out under Labor significantly. We know, and we have known every time we have seen them in government, that Labor cannot manage money. We have got a Premier who cannot recall and a Treasurer who cannot budget. There is no expert saying that this is a good financial position that we find ourselves in as a state. Victoria is broke. Unbelievably, our debt is \$165 billion, increasing as demonstrated in this budget to \$171 billion and going further to reach \$200 billion. Despite the increase in taxes that you would think would then reduce the debt, there is no debt reduction. By the forecasts in this budget, debt increases – despite taxes on jobs, taxes on schools, taxes on renters and tax on debt.

What you will see here in Victoria is that the debt interest repayment will go from \$10 million to \$22 million per day that this state has to find just to pay the interest – not to reduce debt, to pay the interest. Let me say that one more time: increased debt, increased taxes, so that means increased revenue, but no debt reduction. What could that \$22 million per day buy in South-West Coast? It could fix roads. It could put infrastructure that desperately needs to be fixed up, refurbished and developed on the agenda. It could buy so much. You would think with those alarming figures Labor would be reining in their spending. But no, this is a government who will not recognise the truth about how they have wasted \$31 billion in cost blowouts on the projects they call the Big Build – all of those projects in Melbourne that have cost way more, and I am talking billions, than they were supposed to. The costings that they have done for projects have not worked. They have not done their due diligence, and the evidence is clear for all to see. So what are we getting for those blowouts that we see? What did we get for those Big Build projects in the regions? We are not getting anything in the regions. They are all in Melbourne.

Even in the budget this government are saying they are cutting 3000 to 4000 public servants. When we were in government in 2014 there was \$18 billion paid in wages. That is now \$35 billion. So even though they are going to cut 3000 to 4000 public servants, they are going to take the wages bill up from that \$35 billion to \$38 billion, so cutting jobs but spending more on the wages of those who are left.

So what is it that we get in South-West Coast? What did we expect to see in this budget? Well, the state of our roads has been in crisis since Labor first came into government and started cutting the maintenance budget. You would have expected – anyone would have been reasonably expecting – to see a very big investment into the roads in regional Victoria, because it is clear if you drive on them, as we all do daily, that they are failing. Whether it is broken rims, potholes or crumbling shoulders, our roads are in a mess, and Victorians – regional Victorians, South-West Coast residents – are suffering due to Labor's financial incompetence. What would \$22 million a day in interest do for our roads? Under Labor, Victoria is broke, and our roads are going backwards as a result. Our debt is more than that of Queensland, Tasmania and New South Wales put together, but we are not seeing what New South Wales sees with their roads, for example – or Queensland's roads. I have recently just taken a drive to have a look because I hear from so many that ours are so much worse, and they are.

Here we have a government sending us backwards. Labor is punishing Victorians, punishing south-west Victorians, with a \$380 million reduction in annual spending on road maintenance since 2020 – a massive 45 per cent cut. That is just unbelievable, given the state of the roads. But we would not expect that a very city-centric government even understands. They are not coming out to have a look, although we did see the minister come out recently. The Minister for Roads and Road Safety came and had a look and said she stands ready. Well, the budget came out a week later, and she is not ready, because she has cut the budget by a massive 45 per cent since 2020. This year alone, in budget paper 3,

page 310 – so you can look it up – the roads maintenance budget is cut by a further 25 per cent to just \$441 million. This is actually less than the last budget of the former coalition government in 2014. That is a decade ago. Think about that: this government is spending less on maintenance than the coalition government did a decade ago. Look how much money has changed, what it bought you a decade ago compared to what it buys you today, and yet we are seeing our road toll climb, tragically. The road toll is 35 per cent more today than it was this time last year. Yet at the same time Labor is ripping \$3 billion from the TAC to prop up its budget. Under Labor, Victoria is broke and road safety is paying the consequences. We should have seen a massive injection. What we saw was a cut.

The increase in taxes does not help the housing crisis we have in South-West Coast. We have a government who have wasted money here too. Despite the billions they say they spend on building houses across Victoria, there have been only 75 new homes added to the number of homes in the pool of social housing that this government has been overseeing. I met recently with the CEO of the Women's Housing association. It is not a government department. They are building 31 houses in Portland alone. They are getting on with building houses. They are actually only building eight in Warrnambool. Why? They want to build a lot more and they can build a lot more; it is the red tape and the land unavailability. This government are making sure it is too hard. We had as an election promise sending flying squads into councils so we could free up land and get roofs over people's heads.

The windfall gains tax, one of the 50 that this government have implemented, starts on 1 July. I will tell you now, the farmers who have got the land available to subdivide will not be selling that land whilst this windfall gains tax is in place. Giving 50 to 60 per cent of their farm that they have farmed all their lives – and that is their superannuation – to the government is just not something they will do. They will keep their beefers on it and there will not be that subdivision available, and we will not have roofs over people's heads. This government's actions will stifle the ability to build and put roofs over people's heads – and homelessness is what we see as a result of that. I have seen it incredibly over the last 10 years, from when I worked in Aboriginal health, when we saw a lot of people couch surfing but not homeless. Now what do I see? People homeless, on the streets, in doorways, down at the Surfside area.

What I have is I have women coming into my office, women with children saying, 'We've listened to the government say if we're in a domestic violence situation we will be looked after. I have now left, I have finally got the empowerment within me to do that, and I'm sleeping in my car with my children.' That is what I hear, and we go to the government time and time again and say where are your solutions. There are houses sitting idle. St Vincent de Paul come to me from Warrnambool saying, 'There are houses sitting idle.' It is so disappointing that this government are delivering nothing on the promises that they made in South-West Coast.

The Lookout drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre was something we all expected to see – that hardworking community, the committee who have for seven years worked very closely with this government and tried their hardest to meet every criterion that they could and have done so. Every other part of Victoria has a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre. What would you expect to see? Such a normal service is required in every area, and we are the only ones without one. It is the COVID debt, they say. Ha! We have the least funding per capita of any state for health in this nation, and that is why we are not getting the drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre. Victoria is broke, because you should have – and any reasonable government would have – funded this. The only reason they are not doing it is they cannot. They know they need to do it.

The mental health services that do so much work in our region, the Let'sTalk program, the Standing Tall program, Big Life – another one, I could list a lot – organically grown services which take pressure off the CAMHS, the child and adolescent mental health team and the psych services team, have been left with nothing, and yet they would help this situation, not make it worse. Victoria is clearly broke.

Health and education have also not avoided the axe. Health is in crisis, and I am so concerned about South West Healthcare missing out on being one of the health services that gets pushed forward. In the

budget it has been identified it will be another year later than was originally decided. There are 10 health services that were funded in the 2018 budget. South West Healthcare was announced in 2020. As a community, South-West Coast, we need to be alert to and alarmed by this government's false promises and do what we can to support our hardworking nurses and doctors and the admin team who are working to get that hospital built, but we need to watch closely and keep the pressure on. We are a long way from Melbourne, and that is why our health services are so important and do such a good job – the accident and emergency team, the theatre teams working in extraordinarily cramped conditions.

The rail line – no announcement. Again, in 2017 we were promised new carriages and new train sets; the government will not identify any for Warrnambool. They just keep stringing us along, and our train services do not improve. Labor has run out of money, and our surf lifesaving club, the basketball stadium in Portland, the hockey facilities in Warrnambool and the breakwater that is so iconic need an injection of funds. Warrnambool College have nowhere for the whole school to meet under shelter. Port Fairy Football Netball Club and South Warrnambool Football Netball Club need an injection of funds. But under this government, this tired, disinterested, disorganised and now chaotic government, they are not going to see those projects this year. It is incredibly disappointing, but we would expect that from a government who have told us one thing and then done another.

It is a corrupt government who mismanage money – and when they run out of money, they come after yours. We are seeing that in this budget with a tax on jobs, a tax on renters, a tax on schools and a tax on debt. We have a bigger debt than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania put together, but we are not seeing the services that they see. We are seeing debt that is going to continue to grow and interest rates that will cost us \$22 million a day.

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (18:41): I rise to speak on the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 and the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 and in support of this government's budget. Last Tuesday we received the details of the state budget, and I am proud to speak in this chamber to outline some of the wins that we had for my electorate of Glen Waverley. Firstly, I would like to thank the Treasurer and the Assistant Treasurer and their teams for all their hard work on this budget. They have managed to strike a balance between managing the debt we acquired from the pandemic and making sure that we fulfil our election commitments and promises, making sure our communities still receive the funding they deserve to keep Victorian running.

Last November I was fortunate to get a promise from the Andrews Labor government, and that promise was to deliver \$10.9 million to upgrade Forest Hill College – and now we are doing just that. Forest Hill College is one of our many excellent public schools in my electorate, with over 600 students. Forest Hill provides quality education in all areas of the curriculum, including sport. They have got excellent academies in football, basketball and tennis, and they run wonderful programs there. I have been fortunate to be down at the school many times over the last year, including when I was invited down as a candidate, to see the great work of principal David Rogers and his assistant principal Nicola Buckingham, and I also was able to go down and visit the parents and teachers council, which is run by Robert Nash. I was also fortunate to get down there with the Minister for Education last year to deliver that promise, and I thank the minister and all her team for the work in upgrading schools across the state, including those in my electorate.

The \$10.9 million we are contributing to the Forest Hill College will go to upgrading three buildings in the school, blocks A, D and M, and I must say that is very much needed. I was down there earlier this year when they had a few issues with some skylights. That is all being sorted as we speak, but I am looking forward to those buildings being replaced so there will not be any issues in the future. These upgrades will provide much-needed quality learning spaces for the students. On Tuesday last week I called principal Rogers and the school council president and informed them that our election commitment will be fulfilled in this budget and the next. I can assure the house that David and Robert and the leadership team of teachers at Forest Hill College are very excited about the outcome of this budget and are looking forward to works at the school beginning. I was also invited down last

Thursday for an assembly for National Reconciliation Week. They ran a wonderful assembly recognising what we need to do in our state for reconciliation.

I know that the parents and students at Forest Hill College welcome this budget allocation. Last November my volunteer team and I doorknocked and letterboxed the areas around Forest Hill College to inform the residents of the funding we would be providing if an Andrews Labor government was re-elected. My team and I spoke to hundreds of people, and we noticed that this announcement was well received. I remember speaking to several voters at pre-poll actually, down at Mahoneys Road, where we spent 12 days speaking to every elector that was coming through that booth. Many of them walked up to me thanking the Andrews Labor government for the promise that we made, and now we are going to deliver that with this budget. We know how important education is to all of us, especially our future generations. I welcome this budget commitment and look forward to working with the minister and the college community to deliver these upgrades.

While I am on education, the continuation of our early childhood and pre-prep policies and agenda is astounding. My daughter was born in 2018, and we were fortunate to get three-year-old kinder rolled out through our area. She turned up to three-year-old kinder – the education outcomes that she has received from that. And then that has been backed up this year with free four-year-old kinder, which is just helpful to all of us. We talk about cost-of-living pressures at the moment, and the free kinder policy is something that will just make a massive difference to the community.

The other commitment that I was fortunate to get in this budget was \$50,000 for the Waverley Woodworkers. This is a great organisation. I got to know them over the last five years working for the previous member for Mount Waverley. They just do some wonderful work. It is set up as a men's shed, but there is a sense of community that you get around there. Men get to go down there, share experiences, share skills and also just support each other. It is very good for their mental health and so on. I called the president Ray French last Tuesday to let him know the good news, and all those involved in the organisation welcome the announcement. I was also lucky to visit the Waverley Woodworkers last year with the member for Ashwood to see the space. I should say I have been down there quite a few times. It is a wonderful space. They moved recently from an old, very small workshop to Central Reserve, underneath the footy stadium there, into a nice modern location, and this \$50,000 is going to go towards helping them create some more storage space so that they can have timber stored properly. I am proud to be part of a government that values and invests in our local community groups. It is these kinds of organisations that keep our communities strong and healthy.

I am also proud to announce another important budget allocation for my electorate. Under this budget we are delivering \$750,000 to fund Vermont Reserve. Vermont Reserve is home to the Vermont Cricket Club, the Vermont Football Club – it is the Vermont footy and netball club – and the Vermont Sports Club, all of which are excellent community sporting clubs. Early last year, around August, I met with local councillor Prue Cutts, who is now the deputy mayor, and all the presidents of those three organisations as well as some of the directors from Whitehorse council. It was good to see that we are all on the same page for what we want as outcomes for the Vermont Reserve. The toilets and showers are in a very bad state. We have got so much more female participation at all of these clubs, but females do not want to use these rooms – there is no privacy, and there is only one toilet in each of the rooms and two urinals. It is infrastructure that was built in the 1970s for the captive audience of mostly male participants then. We need to make sure that we are delivering for our sports clubs so that the higher uptake of female participation can be catered for.

It was great to speak to Danny Ross, the president of the Vermont Football Club; Trent Touhy, the president of the Vermont Cricket Club; and also Don Parsons, the president of the Vermont Sports Club. They are all excited about this announcement. It will go towards the change rooms, but also there will be an upgrade to the light system there. Because of the extra participation that we have there, we need to have the lights upgraded so that the oval can be used more regularly. It was excellent: I spoke to all of them; they are all very happy. We popped down there on Friday afternoon to catch up with them and make an announcement that it has been delivered in this budget. There was a lot of

excitement in the room. The weather was not that great, but we were able to do that inside. I am glad that such discussions are happening around gender equality in sport, and I look forward to working with the local clubs to achieve gender equity in this space. Thank you to the Minister for Community Sport and her team for their work in ensuring our local sports facilities are maintained and those in my electorate regardless of age or gender can participate in community sport, and I look forward to working with the minister and her team to deliver this outcome.

This budget is investing in our healthcare system to make sure Victorians are getting the healthcare services that they deserve and need. The Andrews Labor government is investing \$320 million into the Hospital Infrastructure Delivery Fund, and this fund will go towards planning, developing and the early works at the Monash Medical Centre and the Maroondah Hospital, two hospitals that are outside my electorate but that service my community in every facet of their health care. Additionally, we are investing in the women's health clinics, because we know that we need specialist health clinics so women can attend and receive treatment or advice on areas from contraception to those struggling with conditions such as endometriosis and PCOS.

The Andrews Labor government is also funding to plan a new mental health and wellbeing local service in Glen Waverley, something that we will be very excited about. This service will be available for people aged 26 and over who are struggling with their mental health, including those experiencing physiological distress and addiction. The local service will be a welcome space for those in my community who are struggling. We do have a Headspace in the Glen Waverley area. Actually it is just on the outside of my district, but it services our community. This local service will be something that will be very useful for people over the age of 26. I see this local service as something sort of similar to the Orange Door program but specifically for mental health. It will be staffed by qualified mental health professionals, including carers. During the cost-of-living crisis I am sure there are many of my constituents who will be glad to hear that this service will be free of charge. Additionally, patients will not have to go to their doctor for a referral or reach mental health eligibility criteria.

We know that from a federal point of view people are wanting more mental health services, and this delivers on that. I believe that in removing these hurdles those in our community will be able to access the services when they need them, and therefore it will help remove the stigma around mental health. The Glen Waverley service will be one of 50 local mental health services that the Andrews Labor government will be establishing, and I am proud to stand with a government that takes mental health seriously and one that invests in the mental health services.

We are investing a lot in the healthcare sector in this budget because we know that we cannot live without health care. We are investing \$46 million to train our future paramedics. We will also be training up specialist paramedic practitioners so Victorians can get the help they need before they arrive at the hospital. These are potentially life-saving measures that we are implementing. It feeds back into the priority primary care centres that we are currently running, trying to take the burden off some of the emergency rooms in our hospitals so people can get the health care that they need quicker and faster at these PPCCs. Additionally, we are investing \$167 million to support our nurses and midwives. We are striving to strengthen the nurse-to-patient ratios so that we can make sure Victorians, including those in my electorate, get the best quality health care and medical attention. I would like to thank the Minister for Health and her team for all the hard work.

One of our major election commitments was to bring back the State Electricity Commission. This policy was very popular through the campaign, and we have not wasted a day in doing so. This budget commits \$1 billion to bringing back the SEC so we can bring back government-owned energy and bring it back in the form of renewable energy. This budget is investing \$12 million to establish the SEC centre for training and excellence so we can train a new generation of SEC workers, providing jobs for thousands of Victorians. This \$5 million includes establishing clean energy courses so we can transition to safe, clean jobs. The centre will be hosting career nights at high schools and government schools so we can inspire the next generation to embark on a career in renewable energy.

In this budget we will also be investing \$16 million to establish two new worker training centres for renewable energy, one in hydrogen and one in wind, and I am proud to see that this year's budget is investing in renewable energy jobs and training for Victorians. This will be excellent down at the Holmesglen TAFE in the Glen Waverley district. I am hoping that we can get some courses down there. I would also like to thank the Minister for the State Electricity Commission and the department for all the work that has been done so far in helping to bring back the SEC. I and many in my electorate are looking forward to seeing the SEC up and running.

I have got \$186 million to expand eligibility for VET subsidies and \$170 million for the Building Better TAFE Fund, providing TAFE projects for the clean energy fund. The other – and I am running out of time; too many things – is the investment we are making in our multicultural communities across the east with regard to money being invested in the Whitehorse Lunar New Year festival and also money for our multicultural traders associations. The Tamil Festival Australia has been given another \$400,000 over the four years, which will be excellent for my local Tamil community. I was just with the Bharathi Tamil language school on Sunday. They were also using the facilities at Forest Hill College; they train their students there at Forest Hill College. So it is not only a public school that we have in my area that gets to use the facilities but also the other community groups around that do use those facilities on the weekends and after hours.

The other thing I would like to touch on is the Suburban Rail Loop. I only have 20 seconds, but the ongoing works on this project will be important. We have currently got works underway in the Glen Waverley area. We are currently moving the services around to where the train station box will be, and the people in my area are excited about that. With that, I commend the bills to the house.

Sam HIBBINS (Pahran) (18:56): Given the hour I suspect I will have to make some more substantive remarks when the take-note motion comes around, but in the time I do have I will say that this is a budget that was handed down at an incredibly difficult time for so many Victorians struggling with the skyrocketing cost of living, struggling with paying the rent and affording their own home, struggling to access affordable health care – so many people being pushed to the margins of homelessness and into poverty, and this was a budget that needed to go to the heart of those issues to address the massive social challenges that are affecting so many Victorians, particularly young Victorians. But the reality is with this budget everyday Victorians who are struggling are going to be worse off. This is a budget that needed to go to the heart of those issues, but instead people are going to be worse off under this budget. Instead of helping, workers and people in need are going to be hurt.

People cannot wait more years until this is addressed. I mean, let us just look at renters facing another year of massive rent increases, but as usual – as typical – there is stuff-all for renters in this year's budget. You have got people who are just one rent rise away from homelessness. You have got 30,000 people experiencing homelessness every single night, but you have got four times as much money going into the racing industry as is going into people experiencing homelessness. You have got people waiting years to access public housing – 120,000 people on the public housing waiting list and growing, but no new money for public or affordable housing. These things will only continue to get worse with this budget. People cannot afford for things to get worse before there is any prospect of them getting better. Without significant government interventions more people are going to be pushed into poverty, pushed into crisis, seeking help at already stretched homelessness services, food relief and emergency wards – more people on the margins, more into poverty, more suffering housing stress, more people experiencing homelessness.

The reality is we can have the sort of society that we want to live in. We can put an end to poverty. We can put an end to homelessness. We can make sure everyone has got a safe, secure place – and I should say affordable place – to call home; make sure that people can get access to the health care that they need, affordable health care; and make sure that people have well paid, secure jobs. This is a budget that cuts thousands of public sector workers, just after we spent so long saying thank you to our essential workers. This budget is now sacking them at a time of low wage growth, and they are still persisting with the wage cap at a time when we have got workers suffering one of the biggest real

wage cuts in history. And we can ensure that there is a planet for everyone to live on in the future. That is what the Greens are fighting for, and I will have more to say on the take-note motion.

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

Motions agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motions agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Public housing

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (19:00): (201) My adjournment debate this evening is for the Minister for Housing, and the action I seek from the minister is to fully fund public housing services in not only the Polwarth electorate but right across the state of Victoria. As shadow minister, it is heartbreaking to continually have to field phone calls, emails, personal meetings and others with absolutely desperate Victorians who just want some assistance – they want advice.

Currently, Minister, the system requires people to go online to book a meeting. They often have to wait 2 and 3 hours on hold in order to make appointments. For those people in public housing in my own electorate of Polwarth, the office is staffed for one day a week, and it can take up to six or seven weeks to actually get an appointment if you have been lucky enough to wait the 2 or 3 hours required to make the booking.

Some choose to go online, but of course many people who are homeless, seeking refuge, living in their car, sleeping in a tent, couch surfing – or whatever predicament they find themselves in – do not necessarily have access to the internet and computers and other things to do online booking. So they find themselves having to go to the public library – if there is one in a country town. They may have to go to the local neighbourhood house or other place in order to get someone to access it. The humiliation, the degradation, the sheer contempt this government holds for people in that situation is quite remarkable.

I also point to another family that I have been working with over recent months, where a mother and two children have been homeless now for two years. The government provided them a house with no hot water, no heating and no blinds on the windows. It was in a desperate state. It was so bad in fact that even with the two weeks rent that they were forced to pay up-front for public housing, they had to leave the house because they simply were not safe and certainly were unable to inhabit it. It is now four weeks after that family was forced to abandon their public housing, and they are still waiting for their rental refund while they stay living in their car. Why? The system has put them back at the bottom of the list again. So the kids are trying to go to school. Mum is trying to find a home. For the \$350 refund they are waiting for they have to provide bank statements, they have to provide proof of evidence – everything. As the mother said to me, ‘They actually dealt with me to take the money to put me in a house that was uninhabitable, and now they’re putting me through a four- or five-week

process to give me the refund.' The system needs more resources, Minister, and I ask for your immediate support.

Reservoir High School

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (19:04): (202) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit Reservoir High School to attend the opening of the soon-to-be-completed manual arts building. The refurbished and upgraded building will provide students with new state-of-the-art food technology kitchens and three purpose-built studios for textiles, media and product design.

We know it is very important for students as they enter those secondary years to have those options of different subjects they might want to pursue, and this particular refurbishment will deliver exactly that. It is part of Labor's \$14.9 billion investment in school buildings right across the state, which does include over \$170 million that this government has invested in the Preston and Reservoir area. Of course it will also support the government's VCE vocation major reforms, which enhance the pathways for students into a range of important and in-demand vocations.

I do not want to put too much pressure on the students, but I do understand they have been recently learning to make some slices and tasty treats, and I am hoping, if we get the timing right, we might be able to sample some of their work and see the new kitchens in action. While she is there, the minister will no doubt also take the chance to check out the rest of the campus. It is a very beautifully situated campus. It sort of cascades down along Plenty Road to the Darebin Creek – a very leafy, very green, very nice part of the world. The minister will enjoy walking round chatting to the staff and students and hearing about all the great work that they do there, and I am sure she will particularly appreciate that there is a series of flags in the foyer of Reservoir High, 65 different flags, representing the diversity of countries of birth of their very diverse student body.

In testament to the hard work of the school staff and indeed its students, the *Age* newspaper recognised Reservoir High in 2021 as the winner of the Schools that Excel award amongst government schools in the north. I do not think we necessarily want to turn education into a competition, but I do think that that award was recognition of a very good decade of delivering educational outcomes by that school. And when the minister visits – if she visits – she will have the chance to meet the new principal Katie Watmough, who will no doubt continue to take the school from strength to strength ably assisted by her great team, including assistant principal Lea Volpe, who did a wonderful job of standing in as acting principal earlier this year. The school has a really strong, positive and concrete vision for its future. I am sure the leadership of the school would love the chance to explain it in further detail to the minister if and when she can get down, and we thank her for her consideration.

Charlton childcare services

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (19:06): (203) My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for the Premier to deliver on his promise made to the community of Charlton on 8 November 2019 and provide long day care in their brand new centre. Premier, on 8 November 2019 you appeared on Nine News Central Victoria announcing that Charlton would have child care the following year. It is now 2023 and Charlton has a kinder but no child care to allow the workforce that already exists in the town to return to work as teachers, nurses and accountants. Abby Mulquiny was four months pregnant when construction began on the new kinder in Charlton and thought she would be able to go back to work when the baby came. She thought the outlook for her family and new baby was a positive one. Abby is a teacher in the town who is struggling to get her 20 days of teaching and 20 hours of professional development to keep her registration this year because of the lack of available child care. She pays a private nanny – only one day a week because that is all that is available – but that means gorgeous little Dulcie, who is now 18 months old, is missing out on early childhood education and socialisation – incredibly important for any child's development.

Abby and at least five others like her are qualified to fill the FTE positions at local schools, which are in desperate need of permanent teachers. Instead Charlton's young people are being taught by inconsistent CRTs who drive from Melbourne for \$700 a day because all local avenues have been exhausted so far. Abby is a qualified English and humanities teacher and would love to apply for the FTE positions available. In fact there are other local mums who would love to apply for this position, which has been advertised now for 273 days. It could be filled tomorrow if there was the ability for parents to return to work with adequate child care. We have qualified early childhood educators ready to get to work, we have several operators expressing interest in management, we have the option of in-venue family day care, and yet – nothing. We have families, including teachers, leaving the wonderful community of Charlton for other towns where they can walk into long day care and both parents can work – both parents need to work because the cost of living dictates they have no choice.

Given the Andrews Labor government positions itself to be the Education State, why is Charlton still waiting for access to early childhood education almost two years after the centre was completed and almost four years since the Premier appeared on television making this promise? There is an entire workforce – it does not come down to an issue of housing, it comes down to child care.

Monbulk community food relief

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (19:09): (204) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services and Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me on a visit to community service groups in my electorate to meet some of our local heroes and thank them for the essential services they offer in our community.

Food banks and community meals providers serve as a lifeline for individuals and families facing economic hardships or extreme loneliness or experiencing unforeseen crises. The Philanthropic Collective is one such provider, and it acts as a vital hub collecting and distributing donated food to those in need. They serve as a critical link between surplus food which would otherwise go to waste and those struggling to put meals on the table. Similarly, Foothills Community Care offers a welcoming space where individuals can access nutritious hot meals prepared with love and served by wonderful volunteers. They also receive a box of food for their family, which they can select or 'shop for' for free and with dignity. Their every endeavour, every initiative undertaken and every dedicated volunteer foster unity and compassion within our local community.

During the election campaign I made a commitment that if the Andrews Labor government was re-elected, we would provide grants to these extraordinary groups, and that is exactly what we have done in this budget. The Philanthropic Collective and Foothills Community Care perform a vital role to ensure that no-one is left behind. I am incredibly proud to see their funding secured. I wanted to place on record my deep appreciation for the work that they do. To Stephen, Andrew and your respective teams, I look forward to joining you with the minister for family services to hear about your programs and future initiatives. We appreciate all of the work which they do. Thank you.

Portland–Maroona rail line

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (19:11): (205) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, and the action I seek is for the minister to release the details of the lease of the Portland–Maroona rail line between the Australian Rail Track Corporation and the state of Victoria. The Maroona to Portland rail line is 172 kilometres long and connects the western half of Victoria with the national grid and the Port of Portland. It is a timber sleeper line and carries grain, mineral sands and other freight destined for the Port of Portland – the best deep-sea port in regional Victoria. Since 2008 the people of South-West Coast have witnessed a deterioration of the line, to the extent that it is hardly fit for purpose and the trains frequently derail. On 10 July 2008 the Australian Rail Track Corporation, ARTC, and the Victorian government announced a long-term lease of the Portland–Maroona rail line. In a media release of the same date, the ARTC stated:

ARTC will invest in Portland–Maroona line to manage, upgrade and maintain it, with the overall aim of ensuring the line capacity is able to meet demand and be more attractive for future growth.

The clearest example of this is that by upgrading the line, trains will be able to travel consistently at 80 kilometres an hour.

One specific obligation of the lease was that the Portland–Maroona rail line was to be maintained to be able to handle a minimum of 19 tonnes axle load, or TAL. It appears that the terms of the lease have not been observed. The Portland–Maroona rail line is not able to carry 19 TAL, and the speed is now reduced to 40- to 60 kilometres an hour, and still we see derailments. Neither the speed, nor the TAL is consistent with the wider rail network, which is currently 23 TAL at 80 kilometres an hour.

Due to the Portland–Maroona line no longer being fit for purpose, producers and exporters are largely forced to use the dilapidated, dangerous and underperforming road networks to get their goods to port. It is yet another example of this government’s mismanagement of contracts. Add to these the east–west link, the West Gate Tunnel and really any project involving this government.

The minister must release the lease so that the people can view for themselves what shoddy agreement former Premier Brumby agreed to. Will ARTC face penalties for failing to maintain and upgrade the rail line as required? If not, why not? The people of Victoria deserve answers. The people of Victoria deserve so much better.

1st Deer Park Scouts

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (19:14): (206) The adjournment I wish to raise is a matter for the Minister for Youth. Many in this house might have seen last week that \$140,000 was allocated to the Deer Park Scouts – a hall that is seriously in need of repair. The action I seek is for the Minister for Youth to join me and members of the 1st Deer Park Scouts in my electorate of Kororoit and outline how the Andrews Labor government is delivering on its election commitment to upgrade the 1st Deer Park Scouts hall. I am pleased to say that I have had the pleasure of visiting the 1st Deer Park Scouts hall on Station Road in Deer Park on a number of occasions and meeting with the families of this group.

I was able to see firsthand that the facilities need upgrading. The 1st Deer Park Scouts do wonderful work in providing the youngest members of the community with the skills and values that they will take forward into the future by exploring the outdoors and embedding them into a warm network of mentorship and peer support. In partnership with Scouts Victoria, the Andrews Labor government is delivering \$140,000 towards upgrades for accessibility and new toilets for the 1st Deer Park Scouts hall. The facilities upgrades will include new flooring, accessible toilets, ceiling upgrades and better drainage. This funding is part of the Andrews Labor government’s commitment to investing in the wellbeing and connection of young Victorians and ensuring that more young people across the electorate of Kororoit can use upgraded accessible spaces that meet their needs and strengthen community participation.

I want to thank Michael Thomas, Scouts Victoria’s strategic growth manager, who helped show me around the hall many months ago and all of the incredible volunteers and families at the Deer Park Scouts hall who are leading a network of young community leaders. I am very proud of the dedication and commitment that you all show our local young people. I would like to thank the Labor government for supporting our Scouts. I cannot wait to see the finished works at the Deer Park Scouts hall and see more young people enjoying this upgraded building. I invite the minister to come and see firsthand the investments that this government is making in our young people and the Scouts and to thank them for all of the incredible work that they do.

Schools payroll tax

Jess WILSON (Kew) (19:16): (207) My adjournment tonight is for the Treasurer, and the action I am seeking is an immediate reversal of the government’s plans to tax independent schools. Last week’s budget made clear that the state of Victoria has severe fiscal challenges, but it is not right for the government to target independent schools to shoulder the burden of budget repair. It is incredible this

tired Labor government has resorted to taxing schools – taxing education – to pay for its wastefulness and economic mismanagement.

This tax disproportionately affects families in the electorate of Kew, families that work hard every day to send their kids to a school of their choice. If you are a family with kids at an independent school or hoping to send your children to an independent school, it could cost your family an extra \$1000 per child every single year. This tax will disproportionately affect the independent girls schools in my electorate. It will cost each of the 110 schools on the government's hit list more than \$1 million a year on the government's own numbers. While schools have received scant detail from the government directly about this new tax, schools are telling me it is either cut teachers or pass it through to parents in higher school fees.

It will also make programs such as scholarships designed to support access, diversity and inclusion harder to fund. This tax demonstrates that the Labor government does not value the wonderful contribution that independent schools make to our state, nor the importance of school choice for families across Victoria. It demonstrates that Labor does not understand that independent schools help take the burden off our government schools. The notion of a hit list of independent schools required to pay millions of dollars in extra taxes is one which is designed to divide people, make education more expensive and make it harder for parents to send their children to a school that reflects their faith and their values.

The very idea that it would be at the sole discretion of the minister to draw up a list of which schools will be targeted and which ones will be exempted, with little to no parliamentary oversight, is sadly par for the course for this government, which for years now has shown flagrant disregard for transparency. As we have seen from the legislation tabled today, the government is claiming only 110 schools will be affected. The legislation makes it clear, however, that any independent school can be put on the school's tax hit list at the stroke of a pen by the minister. With rising debt, this is no doubt just the beginning. Which schools are next? Your local Catholic primary school?

The hardworking families of more than 370,000 Victorian students are at risk of paying the price of Labor's incompetence. I am acutely aware that the budget repair task we face in this state is enormous, but taxing independent schools and families that choose to send their children to them is not the way to mend the deficit. Under a Liberal government taxes will always be lower, they will always be fairer and we will always do a better job of managing the state's finances. We will repeal this new schools tax, and I call on the Treasurer to reverse his decision to implement it.

Climate change

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (19:19): (208) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Climate Action, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit the Glen Waverley district to see the wonderful activity currently being undertaken by my community to alleviate climate change. My electorate has embraced clean energy, most notably through the installing of solar panels on their homes and businesses through the Solar Victoria program. Around 3600 residents in the Glen Waverley district have claimed rebates through the program. It is great to see my constituents taking the initiative to install solar panels on their homes. We know that Victorians want to do their bit to reduce the impacts of climate change and to save money for their household budgets. Our Solar Homes program has helped save households an average of \$1073 per year. From Vermont to Wheelers Hill, constituents in my district are embracing action on climate change. We all know that climate change is real and a serious threat and that we must all do our part to alleviate the effects, especially for our future generations. I would like to thank the minister and her team for all the hard work they do in making sure our government addresses climate change. Thanks to their work, Victoria is leading the nation in taking action on climate change. I hope the minister will visit our electorate to see how we are implementing climate-friendly initiatives, and I look forward to the minister's response.

Avenel childcare services

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (19:21): (209) My adjournment today is for the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, and the action I seek is for Avenel to be included in the state government's 50 new early learning centres commitment. Avenel has a catchment population of nearly 2000 people, and in recent years this has included many young families, with many more set to join the community in the coming year with the completion of a local housing development. But unfortunately, it is one of many towns across the Euroa electorate suffering from insufficient childcare facilities. With neighbouring towns like Nagambie also struggling with extreme waitlists, it is imperative Avenel has the facilities needed to provide child care locally to parents who need it.

Speaking with a local provider, I heard that an investment to expand the current kindergarten site would allow for existing staff to be utilised in both the kindergarten and the childcare facilities, with only a few extra educators required to provide the new service. Not having facilities will have a massive impact on the town's future, with families choosing to relocate most of their lives to bigger centres like Shepparton. We have extreme cost-of-living pressures as well as a labour crisis, making more accessible child care critical to ensuring parents can work and alleviate financial burdens.

Just today Avenel mum Prue Hateley shared the impact the lack of local child care has had on her family and our community. Prue told me she was forced to give up her skilled aviation work of 12 years because she could no longer maintain the role with no access to local child care. Prue is part of the Avenel kindergarten parent advisory group, and her story is like that of so many other parents in Avenel. She said too many local families are driving their children to other towns for care, and in many cases have children in two different towns due to their ages. She said, 'This is time, money and stress, with parents running a marathon before they can even start their working day, to do it all again in the evening.'

In our own family, my husband David has had to reduce his workdays as we are unable to get sufficient care for our daughter Quinn. Quinn is two years old and has spent most of her life on a waitlist for child care. Data from the Mitchell Institute for Education and Health Policy shows the stark geographical divides in access to child care, with regional Victorian families paying the ultimate price for a Melbourne-centric government. Child care is critical to women's employment. This in turn drives economic growth, boosts financial security and improves social and health outcomes for women and families. We know the societal benefits from greater access to childcare education mean a lower risk of families struggling financially and even living in poverty, so I ask the minister to commit to a childcare centre in Avenel.

State Coal Mine

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (19:23): (210) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the progress of the Wonthaggi State Coal Mine cafe lease and underground tours. Back in March over 250 people attended a public meeting organised by the Friends of the State Coal Mine to garner support, the priority being to lease the cafe and restart the underground tours. I want to acknowledge that they are passionate and committed and totally and positively invested in keeping this history alive. Many have direct links of working in the mine and many have family connections as well, all wanting to see the site be at its best. It was also an opportunity to envision the site and call for ideas on activation and bringing in the new. In the mix of suggestions were music festivals, an open-air cinema, outdoor theatre, wetlands, links to the rescue station and other points of interest in the town and beyond, even overnight camping for aurora viewing, stargazers and more. The parks team on site are equally dedicated, have special connections to the area and maintain the grounds to such a high standard they are to be commended. They inspect the mines daily as part of their WorkSafe requirements, and the volunteer group meets every Tuesday with locals, going underground to do any repair work.

This historic coalmine experience is the only one in the Southern Hemisphere. The site also has solar and is backdropped by a local wind farm – it is a story of old energy, new energy. Operating from

1909 to 1968, the mine produced almost 17 million tonnes of coal for Victoria's industries and railways, and its union history is actually worth a 15-minute contribution – for another time. It has a visitors centre, a museum, a theatre, a souvenir shop laden with unique memorabilia and a variety of items celebrating Wonthaggi's history, expansive gardens, a heritage trail, historic buildings, an old steam locomotive, a pit pony, and we love the barbecue facilities at the picnic area. The site is also home to the Wonthaggi Theatrical Group and the Wonthaggi Seed Bank and Nursery. Thank you, Minister. We look forward to the update and would welcome you visiting this historic site and meeting with the parks team and friends group representatives as well.

Responses

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Suburban Development) (19:26): The member for Polwarth raised a matter for the Minister for Housing, and the action being sought was that the minister fully fund public housing services across Victoria. I am very disappointed that the member has not been able to stay in the house to hear that. The member for Preston raised a matter for the Minister for Education, and the action being sought was for the minister to join the member to visit Reservoir High and attend the opening of the soon-to-be completely refurbished manual arts building and hopefully enjoy some tasty treats made by the students, proudly representing 65 countries of birth.

The member for Mildura raised a matter for the Premier, and the action being sought was that the Premier deliver on the promise to deliver a long day care childcare centre in the Charlton community. The member for Monbulk raised a matter for the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services and Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers in her family services capacity, and the action being sought was that the minister meet with local services and thank them for their really invaluable services to that community and outline some of the really terrific work that those volunteers are doing in that community. We all thank them for that great work.

The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, and the action being sought was that the minister release the details of the lease of the Portland to Maroona rail line between the Australian Rail Track Corporation and the state of Victoria. The member for Kororoit raised a matter for the Minister for Youth. The action being sought was that the minister join the member and visit Deer Park Scouts to discuss the commitment to upgrade the hall and thank the Scouts for all that they do in that community.

The member for Kew raised a matter for the Treasurer seeking a reversal of the plans to tax independent schools. The member for Glen Waverley raised a matter for the Minister for Climate Action, and the action being sought was for the minister to join the member and visit his electorate to see the activity being undertaken by his community to alleviate climate change, including through the Solar Homes program.

The member for Euroa raised a matter for the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, and the action being sought was that Avenel be included in the state government's 50 new early learning centres commitment. The member for Bass raised a matter for the Minister for Environment. The action being sought was that the minister provide an update on the progress of the Wonthaggi State Coal Mine coal lease and the underground tours. I will refer all of those matters to the appropriate ministers for action.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. The house stands adjourned until tomorrow.

House adjourned 7:29 pm.